

Occupational Therapy Clinical Education Program (OTCEP)

Student Tip Sheet

Self Care Tips for Clinical Placement

Being on clinical placement takes you away from your usual environment and supports and it can be a challenging and stressful time. This handout aims to provide students with resources and tips for looking after your emotional wellbeing whilst on placement.

What do we mean by “self care”?

Self care is a set of tools or strategies we use to look after our emotional wellbeing. Self care is important because if we are not mentally well we cannot fulfil our role as practitioners, and it may put us at risk of fatigue and burnout in the healthcare setting. If we are not functioning at our best we may not be able to properly care for our patients / consumers. It is important to develop good self care strategies as they will assist you to manage stress and work challenges throughout your career and personal life.

Stress Management

Whilst on placement you will be expected to manage stressors such as juggling your University studies and professional life, or attending a difficult therapy session. Managing stress is an essential part of professional behaviour you are expected to develop over time. You are rated on this skill within Domain 2 of the SPEF-R (Self-Management).

Below are some strategies that you may find useful.

- Make sure you de-brief with your clinical educator (CE) or another staff member after an upsetting incident or session, don't go home without talking to someone.
- Learn how to identify when you are feeling stressed, do you get tired, feel sad, or get irritable? Make a plan about how you might manage stress both during your fieldwork and out of hours, and start from Day 1 to minimise the possibility of becoming overwhelmed
- Attend regular supervision with your CE
- Participate in peer supervision or informal discussion with a friend who provides you with emotional support
- Use good time management techniques: http://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_HTE.htm
- Leave work on time and make sure you take regular breaks
- Use mindfulness techniques (A useful booklet “Mindfulness-in-10-easy-steps” can be downloaded here: <http://www.happyandwell.com.au/mindfulness-in-10-easy-steps>) and relaxation strategies to calm your mind and ground yourself
- QLD Health has a great webpage full of strategies to stress less: <http://qheps.health.qld.gov.au/staffwellness/html/stress.htm>
- Minimise your responsibilities outside of placement as much as practically possible – you need time to process information as well as rest and relax. Many students do not recognise how physically, mentally and emotionally tiring fieldwork can be and believe they can continue all of their usual activities and responsibilities.
- Remember that it is not what happens but how you RESPOND to what happens that is important. Get to know your automatic thoughts and use some self-talk to develop a healthy approach to daily pressures. https://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_TCS.htm

Looking after your emotional wellbeing whilst on placement

- Eat well and keep up your water intake
- Socialise: get to know the other students on placement, join an interest group (ask your Clinical Education Support Officer (CESO) or CE what social groups are available and search the internet)
- Establish methods to keep in touch with your University friends and family e.g. skype, Blackboard, face book, email, telephone
- Get in touch with your University Fieldwork coordinator or chat to the Student Services department for more formal support (e.g. your University may offer free counselling)
- Exercise: join the gym or attend local groups (e.g. yoga)
- Meditation or relaxation; listen to calming music after work or before you go to bed
- Establish good Sleep Hygiene: <http://paweb.sth.health.qld.gov.au/qhot/documents/sensmod-tips-good-sleep.pdf>

Further resources

For students on placements in Regional, Rural and Remote locations:

- OTCEP resource: Preparing for Placements in Rural and Remote Locations: <http://paweb.sth.health.qld.gov.au/qhot/documents/prep-placements-rural-loc-st-tip.pdf>
- The National Rural Health Students Network (NRHSN) has information, strategies and links for rural placements: <http://www.nrhsn.org.au/site/index.cfm>
- Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH) student support section: <http://sarrah.org.au/content/students>

For all:

- NRHSN has a great resource called “When the Cowpat hits the Windmill”. It is a guide to staying mentally fit written by students for students on placement in rural areas, however much of the information is applicable across a range of settings: <http://www.nrhsn.org.au/home/news/when-the-cowpat-hits-the-windmill-check-out-our-mental-health-guide-for-when-you-go-rural/>
- Clinical Education Australia website has tips for students on looking after your emotional wellbeing: <http://www.clinedaus.org.au/topics-category/maintaining-emotional-wellbeing-58>

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