SMART WAYS TO COPE WITH FINANCIAL STRESS

The current financial climate is one fraught with fear, stress, and uncertainty, and JWU students are not immune from its effects. Students are having greater difficulty finding employment, families back home are under financial stress, and finances are an increasing source of concern for the majority of students. This is on par with the American Psychological Association’s 2007 Stress in America survey, which highlighted that money and work have been two of the top sources of stress for 75% of people in the U.S.

Stress, to a point, can be a healthy motivator for positive change. It is what motivates us to study for a test or prepare for a presentation. Yet when it is allowed to escalate, stress can take a physical and psychological toll that detracts from our ability to make good choices and function effectively. Fortunately, students do have some control over the amount of stress they experience and there are several strategies for managing it during challenging times. You can be smart about your financial stress!

**Simplify:** Students are often juggling many different challenges and obligations, and many people feel that their self-worth is tied to their activity level. It’s hard to take care of yourself. Try to simplify. Evaluate where you are spending your time and identify places to cut back. You have less to offer when you do not take care of yourself.

**Make an Inventory:** Pay close attention to how, what, when, where, and with whom you spend your money so you know exactly where your money is going. This may be eye-opening. This may be uncomfortable. But only after you have identified the problem can you take meaningful steps to correct it. Financial worries don’t go away with neglect.

**Attend to the News but don’t get absorbed with it:** While it is good to stay abreast of current events, don’t get caught up in the doom and negative hype that pervades the news these days. Just because the news is available 24 hours a day doesn’t mean it is good to watch it!

**Relax:** Choose from a wide array of techniques available for relaxation. These include meditation, diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and positive imagery. You can check out guided relaxation MP3s through links on the SCC website: www.jwu.edu/prov/counseling

**Talk about it:** Share your worries with someone you can trust—a friend, a family member, a counselor, a religious mentor. Talking about problems may help you see them more clearly and may help you arrive at alternate solutions. Strive to spend time with people who convey an optimistic attitude.
**Say “another time”**: Tobacco, alcohol, and other such things can add up quickly and siphon off a large portion of student income. Not only can abuse of alcohol or drugs cost you money, but it takes a toll on you psychologically. It can compound your financial stress, undermine your decision-making, and deter from your ability to cope.

**Take time to be Thankful**: Notice what is good in your life. Pay attention to the things in your life that are going well. A gratitude journal will help you maintain a healthier perspective and improve your mood. Every day, write down 2 things you are thankful for and give yourself time to reflect on each one.

**Rest**: Get your sleep! Insufficient sleep undermines mood, memory, alertness, and physical health. Your body goes into a state of stress when deprived of sleep. This causes an increase in blood pressure and an increase in production of stress hormones, which in turn make it more difficult to fall asleep. This then makes good decisions more difficult and leaves you vulnerable to more stress. Rest will help you become resilient! It is often helpful to keep a “worry journal” by your bedside so you can write your worries down before you try to sleep.

**Exercise**: The health benefits of exercise are numerous! These include better mood, better cardiovascular conditioning, prevention of chronic disease, and better sex, to name a few. Exercise can also contribute to better sleep. Start small, with something you know you can do and build from there.

**See the Possibilities**: Be creative. Look for the opportunities buried beneath the challenges. Be willing to take a job for fewer hours than you would like. Take a job that on first glance does not appeal to you and use it as an opportunity to make connections or showcase a skill.

**Seek out your campus Resources**: JWU has many resources available to help inform and guide you through the array of financial concerns that may trouble you at present. Contact the Student Counseling Center at 598-1016 and arrange to talk to a counselor. You may benefit from talking with someone who can help you explore and gain insight into the emotions exacerbated by or underlying your financial worries. SCC counselors can help you develop tools for coping with your stress and help you change unhealthy behaviors.

The Student Counseling Center
598-1016
www.jwu.edu/prov/counseling