

# 10 Staff & Faculty Mental Health & Well-Being *Workshops*



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## Topics Included

1. Contending with Chronic Stress
2. Handling Burnout and Compassion Fatigue
3. Coping with the Reality of Increased Emotional Labor/Care Work
4. Engaging in Transformative Rest and Recovery
5. Supporting Colleagues Facing Pandemic Stress and Systemic Racism/Bias
6. Practicing Emotional Self-Management
7. Addressing Languishing and Finding Flow
8. Engaging in Healthy, Enduring Behaviors Rather Than Soothing Behaviors
9. Refocusing and Practicing Attention Management
10. Re-engaging with Your Purpose



# Engaging in Rest and Recovery Efforts





## Engaging in Rest and Recovery Efforts

# Workshop Overview

How do we go beyond self-care to engage in true rest and recovery efforts?

Experiencing all the competing demands of the pandemic – and beyond – likely has you needing to restore your balance. Emotional exhaustion takes a great toll and intentional rest and recovery is necessary in order to hit the reset button.

## Taking Rest Days

In the fitness world, the term “rest and recovery” is used to describe the rest breaks in between days of exercise that allow your body to recover and repair. This practice is equally important when it comes to mental and emotional health. We can’t keep going and going without any breaks.

The advantages of taking regular rest days from exercise, as outlined by Healthline.com, also apply to what you’re currently experiencing. For instance, rest days...

**Allow Time for Recovery.** Rest gives your body time to replenish its energy stores before digging into the next commitment.

**Prevent Muscle Fatigue.** If you’re depleted, you need to refill your reserves to prevent fatigue.

**Reduce the Risk of Injury.** When you’re overworked, this can lead to repetitive stress and strain that wears away at well-being.

**Improves Performance.** While overdoing it reduces your endurance, reaction time and motivation, rest increases energy and prevents fatigue.

“This goes beyond just getting enough sleep. It’s about carving out space and time to be with our thoughts, and connect with a deeper part of ourselves. In fact, giving ourselves permission to slow down and get quiet, to hear our own wisdom, and tap into our own inner knowledge is important for showing up for ourselves and the world. From this place of stillness, we can get clarity on what actions we can take to feel better about our contributions to the world.”

– Jen Fisher, Thrive Global

## Making Rest a Priority

We show up as our best selves when we prioritize rest and recovery. Thrive Global suggest doing this by...

- Recognizing the warning signs of exhaustion
- Claiming your right to rest
- Truly disconnecting
- Focusing your time



## Engaging in Rest and Recovery Efforts

### Workshop Overview *(continued)*

“When you’re rested, you are more creative, productive, and able to solve complex problems,” Jen Fisher wrote for Thrive Global. “You show up energized and at your best, giving your full attention and engagement to whatever you’re doing. This is especially important when you’re engaging in something that brings out high or difficult emotions. You need that extra energy so that you can give of yourself in a way that is meaningful.”

**Sources:** Healthline.com, reviewed 8/7/19;  
Thrive Global, 7/13/20

#### **Campus Rest and Recovery Days**

Multiple campuses, from Concordia University Ann Arbor (MI) to San Diego State University (CA) implemented Rest and Recovery Days during the 2021 spring term. These took the place of a long spring break, providing campus community members with several long weekends instead.

While this practice was met with mixed results, a version of this could be instructive as you’re designing your own rest and recovery efforts. Would a few long weekends feel more rejuvenating than one longer break? Consider the possibilities as you honestly explore what you need.



## Engaging in Rest and Recovery Efforts

### HANDOUT

## Challenging Negative Thoughts and Cognitive Distortion

Many of us tend to react more intensely to negative events than positive ones. It's how our brains are wired. And, during difficult times, these negative thoughts may spiral out of control, becoming worse in our mind than they truly are. Mental Health America (MHA) calls this cognitive distortion.

It's difficult to find truly restorative rest and recovery when we're worried about when the other shoe might drop or that we're letting people down. During the pandemic, these types of emotions were common – and completely justified. Now that we're learning to transition to our new normal, cognitive distortions can still get in the way, unless we address them.

### Common Cognitive Distortions

Chances are that you may recognize these behaviors, as described by MHA...

**“Overgeneralization:** Making a broad statement based on one situation or piece of evidence.

**Personalization:** Blaming yourself for events beyond your control; taking things personally when they aren't actually connected to you.

**Filtering:** Focusing on the negative details of a situation while ignoring the positive.

**All-or-Nothing Thinking:** Only seeing the extremes of a situation.

**Catastrophizing:** Blowing things out of proportion; dwelling on the worst possible outcomes.

**Jumping to Conclusions:** Judging or deciding something without all the facts.

**Emotional Reasoning:** Thinking that however you feel is fully and unarguably true.

**Discounting the Positive:** Explaining all positives away as luck or coincidence.

**‘Should’ Statements:** Making yourself feel guilty by pointing out what you should or shouldn't be doing, feeling, or thinking.”



## Engaging in Rest and Recovery Efforts

### HANDOUT

# Challenging Negative Thoughts and Cognitive Distortion

(continued)

## How to Address Them

MHA suggests various coping mechanisms to counteract negative thoughts, including...

**Reframe.** Take a different view of a situation, looking at it from the perspective of what you'd tell friends if they were saying negative things about themselves. This might involve reframing from "I can't do anything right" to the kinder "I messed up, but now I know to prepare more for next time."

**Prove Yourself Wrong.** Offer yourself evidence that your negative thoughts aren't fully true. Counterbalance a thought like "I'll never catch on fully to this learning system" with a reminder of something you *are* good at. Or if you're feeling disconnected socially, like no one cares, call a friend. After all, what you do impacts how you feel.

**Counter Negative Thoughts with Positive Ones.** It may feel corny, yet try naming things you love, like or don't hate about yourself as a way to counteract a negative inner dialogue. To get beyond any initial awkwardness, keep at it to balance out the not-so-nice things you're feeling.

**Remember: Thoughts Aren't Facts.** We can often be our own worst enemies, thinking awful things about ourselves when others see us in a much more favorable light. As MHA reminds us, "Your thoughts and feelings are valid, but they aren't always reality."

**Source:** "Getting Out of Thinking Traps," Mental Health America, [mhanational.org](http://mhanational.org)



## Engaging in Rest and Recovery Efforts

### HANDOUT

## How the Brain Benefits from Downtime

In the best of times, our brains need idle time to facilitate creativity and problem-solving. And in the stressful times we've been through? Letting our minds wander sometimes may be just what we need.

“Our research has found that mind-wandering may foster a particular kind of productivity,” Jonathan Schooler, a professor of psychological and brain sciences at the University of California, Santa Barbara who has studied mind-wandering extensively, told Medium.com.

When our minds are free to roam, “I think it’s very possible that some unconscious processes are going on during mind-wandering,” Schooler said, “and the insights these processes produce then bubble up to the surface.” The brain’s internal train of thought can be of value in itself, he stated. “In the same way we can experience a sleep deficit, I think we can experience a mind-wandering deficit.”

So, how can we foster this type of “productive” mind-wandering? Schooler suggested non-demanding tasks that don’t require a good deal of mental engagement, such as:

- Walking in a quiet place
- Doing the dishes
- Folding laundry

The balance is finding activities that occupy your hands or body yet don’t require a ton of brain power.

Sources: Medium.com, 2/14/19 and 6/16/21

### Soft Fascination

Part of the reason our brains so desperately need downtime, recent research said, is that certain types of attention can tire them out, contributing to stress, a lack of willpower and more. This “directed attention” requires effort, compounded by any distractions in the mix.

Our ability to intently focus our attention is finite, researchers at the University of Exeter Medical School found. When our attention is overworked, it gets fatigued. Then, our concentration dips, as do our abilities to make decisions and engage our willpower.

A study in *Occupational Health Science* found that attention fatigue can lead to stress and burnout as well. Sound familiar?

Luckily, there seem to be ways we can reinvigorate our brains. One that experts point to is “soft fascination,” where natural environments “are just stimulating enough to gently engage the brain’s attention without unhelpfully concentrating it,” according to Medium.com.

This is different from hard fascination – where certain activities like screen time, social interactions, books and more – take hold of our attention too forcefully. It all adds up to enforce that our brains need idle time in order to rest and reboot.





## Engaging in Rest and Recovery Efforts

### WORKSHEET

## Recovering from a Rest Deficit

The lack of energy you may be feeling likely can't be fixed with sleep alone, according to a TEDxAtlanta Talk by Dr. Sandra Dalton-Smith, a physician and author of *Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity*. "Sleep and rest are not the same thing," she explained.

"Sleep is only one part of the big picture. It's only one of the seven types of rest."

- Dr. Sandra Dalton-Smith

Instead, overcoming your rest deficit involves focusing on the different types of rest you need to restore your personal balance, she said during her talk. Consider how you might go about improving your sense of rest, in all its shapes and forms:

1. **Passive Physical Rest.** This is the sleeping and napping our bodies all need.

*What is one way that you can engage in more passive physical rest?*

2. **Active Physical Rest.** These are restorative activities like massage therapy, yoga and stretching to help improve your flexibility and circulation.

*What is one way that you can engage in more active physical rest?*

3. **Mental Rest.** When you can't turn your brain off, you develop a mental rest deficit. Keep paper by your bed to write down those thoughts that are swirling in your mind and schedule breaks every two hours during the day to remind yourself to slow down, Dalton-Smith suggested.

*What is one way that you can engage in more mental rest?*

4. **Sensory Rest.** Your senses can get overwhelmed and overstimulated by everyday computer screens, bright lights, noise and more. Closing your eyes mid-day for a moment and unplugging at the end of the day can give you some needed moments of sensory deprivation.

*What is one way that you can engage in more sensory rest?*



## Engaging in Rest and Recovery Efforts

### WORKSHEET

## Recovering from a Rest Deficit *(continued)*

5. **Creative Rest.** As you're in constant problem-solving and creating mode, creative rest is key. Dalton-Smith recommended making your workspace inspirational with images you love, appreciating nature and reawakening your natural wonder.

*What is one way that you can engage in more creative rest?*

6. **Emotional Rest.** Develop the courage to be authentic by cutting back on people pleasing, expressing your feelings and being honest about how you're truly feeling.

*What is one way that you can engage in more emotional rest?*

7. **Social Rest.** Focus on the relationships that rejuvenate you by surrounding yourself with positive, supportive people to balance out those relationships that can be draining.

*What is one way that you can engage in more social rest?*

8. **Spiritual Rest.** "Engage in something greater than yourself," Dalton-Smith recommended through meditation, prayer or community involvement that allows you to feel a deep sense of belonging, love, acceptance and purpose.

*What is one way that you can engage in more spiritual rest?*

**Source:** "The Real Reason We Are So Tired," TEDxAtlanta Talk, 2019, [www.tedxatlanta.com/saundra-daltonsmith](http://www.tedxatlanta.com/saundra-daltonsmith)



## Engaging in Rest and Recovery Efforts

### HANDOUT

## Toxic Positivity Can Lead to Stronger Negative Emotions

Being positive can prove helpful in many situations. Yet, toxic positivity or “only focusing on positive things while ignoring, suppressing, or avoiding anything that may trigger negative emotions,” according to *Fast Company*, can actually lead to *stronger* negative emotions.

This mode of operation may feel well-intentioned. However, it often suppresses emotions and erodes trust. When we don’t feel comfortable expressing what we’re really feeling, it can then lead to anxiety, depression and physical illness. We need to be able to talk about our real fears, anxieties and sadness, particularly in the face of COVID-19’s multiple impacts.

Sometimes, toxic positivity occurs when there’s concern that talking about real feelings might trigger negative energy throughout your department. People may then withhold their true thoughts and feelings, the publication reported, which can lead to an erosion of trust.

A lack of compassion is a hallmark of toxic positivity because, when people are told to be more upbeat and positive, they’re really being told they’re wrong to feel and share their emotions. This minimizes and invalidates what they’re feeling.

### Ways to Counteract Toxic Positivity

“Positivity and real human connection emerge by honoring someone’s experience of the world and really hearing what is true and real for them,” according to *Fast Company*.

So, you can work to counteract toxic positivity when you...

- Ask people who are struggling to help you understand where they’re coming from by telling you more
- Paraphrase what someone is saying to show you’re hearing them and tuning into their emotions
- Avoid minimizing or dismissing negative emotions
- Act with transparency and truthfulness
- Ask what benefits or gains they feel are possible in certain situations
- Talk about solutions and how you can help

#### Phrases That May Signal Toxic Positivity

- “It could be worse.”
- “Look on the bright side...”
- “Well, at least...”
- “Let’s try to be more positive.”

Being positive can help in many situations. Yet, engaging in toxic positivity can typically do more harm than good. Explore the differences as you continue facing these strange times.

Source: *Fast Company*, 1/14/21



## Engaging in Rest and Recovery Efforts

### WORKSHEET

## Speak the Truth of Things

As we try to make the best of these challenging times, we sometimes squelch the truth. We don't admit how we're really feeling ("Working all the time is draining me dry."). We put on a brave face. We try to lead with optimism and hopefulness.

Yet, sometimes, we just need to allow "the truth of things to hit the air," as the quote says. We need a friend to let us get it out. We need a family member to listen without giving sympathy or advice. By letting the truth out, it doesn't hold as much power. It doesn't swirl around inside us, wreaking havoc. Instead, it's out there, ready to address.

As you engage in personal rest and recovery efforts, what are three truths that could be good to get out there, rather than letting them swirl around internally?

**Truth #1:**

**Truth #2:**

**Truth #3:**

Now that you've identified these three truths, you'll likely be able to address them more effectively. Part of that process involves determining *who* to share these truths with, so jot a person's name near each one. You'll be more inclined to follow through as a result, letting "the truth of things to hit the air," thus releasing the tight hold they have on your well-being.

"Sometimes you just need to talk about something – not to get sympathy or help, but just to kill its power by allowing the truth of things to hit the air."

– Karen Salmahsohn



## Engaging in Rest and Recovery Efforts

### FOR DISCUSSION

## The Virtues of JOMO (the Joy Of Missing Out)

FOMO – or the Fear Of Missing Out – runs strong and mighty among campus community members these days. It’s why social media use is at such a high. And when a crisis like the coronavirus has disrupted life as we know it, FOMO can rise to unhealthy stakes.

So, what can you do about that, to ease the FOMO angst and turn it around? Consider touting the virtues of JOMO – or the Joy Of Missing Out. According to author Kristen Fuller, M.D., in *Psychology Today*...

*“JOMO (the joy of missing out) is the emotionally intelligent antidote to FOMO and is essentially about being present and being content with where you are at in life. You do not need to compare your life to others but instead, practice tuning out the background noise of the ‘shoulds’ and ‘wants’ and learn to let go of worrying whether you are doing something wrong. JOMO allows us to live life in the slow lane, to appreciate human connections, to be intentional with our time, to practice saying ‘no,’ to give ourselves ‘tech-free breaks,’ and to give us permission to acknowledge where we are and to feel emotions, whether they are positive or negative. Instead of constantly trying to keep up with the Jones’, JOMO allows us to be who we are in the present moment, which is the secret to finding happiness. When you free up that competitive and anxious space in your brain, you have so much more time, energy and emotion to conquer your true priorities.”*

“Oh the joy of missing out.  
When the world begins to shout  
And rush towards that shining thing;  
The latest bit of mental bling–  
Trying to have it, see it, do it,  
You simply know you won’t go through it;  
The anxious clamoring and need  
This restless hungry thing to feed.  
Instead, you feel the loveliness;  
The pleasure of your emptiness.  
You spurn the treasure on the shelf  
In favor of your peaceful self;  
Without regret, without a doubt.  
Oh the joy of missing out”

—Michael Leunig



*Engaging in Rest and Recovery Efforts*

**FOR DISCUSSION**

**The Virtues of JOMO (the Joy Of Missing Out)** *(continued)*

**Discussion Questions:**

- When it comes to FOMO, what, if anything, do you fear missing out on?
- Why is that?
- Switching from FOMO to JOMO can help free up space to address your true priorities. What are 4 or 5 that you can readily identify?
- The quote says that JOMO “allows us to be who we are in the present moment.” How satisfied are you with who you are in this current moment?
- What are some of the “shoulds” that tend to infiltrate your life? How do you handle them?
- What does living life in the slow lane mean to you?
- What are some of the ways that you’ve become intentional with your time? What more would you like to do?
- How do you appreciate the human connections in your life? Who models this well?
- What is your reaction to the poem boxed on the previous page?

**Source:** *Psychology Today*, 7/26/18



## Engaging in Rest and Recovery Efforts

### Workshop Talking Points

Some key points to emphasize when it comes to rest and recovery efforts include...

- Engaging in true rest and recovery efforts can help restore your balance as you hit the reset button
- Just as “rest and recovery” is a term describing the rest breaks between days of exercise, it also applies to mental and emotional health
- Making rest a priority helps us show up as our best selves
- Cognitive distortion is where our negative thoughts may spiral out of control, becoming worse in our mind than they truly are
- To address this we can reframe, prove ourselves wrong, counter negative thoughts with positive ones and remember that thoughts aren’t facts
- “Sleep and rest are not the same thing,” as Dr. Sandra Dalton-Smith said during her TEDxAtlanta Talk
- Overcoming a rest deficit involves focusing on the various types of rest you need to restore personal balance: physical, mental, sensory, creative, emotional, social and spiritual rest
- Toxic positivity is when we only focus on positives, ignoring, suppressing or avoiding negative triggers — and the practice can lead to *stronger* negative emotions

#### Sample Workshop Agenda

- Provide an overview of the topic, using the *Workshop Overview*
- Share the *Challenging Negative Thoughts and Cognitive Distortion* handout to discuss how to address them
- Talk about the *How the Brain Benefits from Downtime* handout and the “productive” mind-wandering that can be good for us
- Use the *Recovering from a Rest Deficit* worksheet to help participants recognize the various types of rest and how they might engage in more of each
- Discuss the *Toxic Positivity Can Lead to Stronger Negative Emotions* handout to stress that rest and recovery aren’t just about putting a positive shine on everything and ignoring the negatives
- Then, go on to the *Speak the Truth of Things* worksheet to allow participants to get out some of their own difficult truths
- Discuss *The Virtues of JOMO (the Joy Of Missing Out)* using the discussion questions to explore how to be more present, content and connected



*Engaging in Rest and Recovery Efforts*

## Workshop Talking Points *(continued)*

- “Positivity and real human connection emerge by honoring someone’s experience of the world and really hearing what is true and real for them,” according to *Fast Company*
- Sometimes we just need to let “the truth of things hit the air” to take away some of its power and make it ready to address
- Our brains need downtime in order to facilitate creativity and problem-solving, so sometimes letting our minds wander can lead to productivity
- The Joy Of Missing Out (JOMO) is “essentially about being present and being content with where you are at in life,” according to author Kristen Fuller, M.D.

SAMPLE