

10 Student Mental Health & Well-Being *Workshops*



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Topics Covered

- **Building Resilience**
- **Facing Emotional Exhaustion and Depletion**
- **Setting Boundaries**
- **Remembering Your “Why”**
- **Managing Social Anxiety**
- **Practicing Emotional Self-Management**
- **Refocusing in Times of Change**
- **Making and Maintaining Social Connections**
- **Getting Unstuck**
- **Dealing with Intense Emotions**

SAMPLE



Getting Unstuck





Getting Unstuck

Workshop Overview

After a few years of stress and serious life disruptions, many college students are in a rut. They're uncertain about everything from careers to majors, relationships, their future and more. They may find it harder to take pleasure in once enjoyable activities and may not feel very good about their lives. Perhaps they feel disconnected because they have lost their sense of belonging, or they just feel empty and stagnant. This workshop aims to help students climb out of those ruts and make intentional strides to improve their well-being.

Why Do We Get Stuck?

PsychCentral.com identified some common reasons why folks get stuck:

- “Cognitive overload, overwhelm and burnout
- Self-limitation, self-sabotage, fear of uncertainty
- Limited vision and lack of a deeper sense of meaning or purpose
- Lack of adequate support or resources
- Perfectionism
- Conflict between the desires of self and others
- Resistance to change”

Languishing

Sociologist Dr. Cory M. Keyes articulated why some people have a sense of well-being and satisfaction with life while others don't (jstor.org). In Keyes' view, mental health and a sense of well-being are two distinct things. Keyes outlined a continuum for well-being between flourishing and languishing, with most folks falling somewhere in between. When you are languishing, you might feel stuck.

He explained, “Adults with complete mental health are flourishing in life with high levels of well-being. To be flourishing, then, is to be filled with positive emotion and to be functioning well psychologically and socially. Adults with incomplete mental health are languishing in life with low well-being. Thus, languishing may be conceived of as emptiness and stagnation, constituting a life of quiet despair that parallels accounts of individuals who describe themselves and life as ‘hollow,’ ‘empty,’ ‘a shell,’ and a ‘void.’”

Signs of languishing might include (nytimes.com):

- Not functioning like usual
- Motivation seems to be missing
- Finding it hard to focus
- Cutting back on work or other activities
- Finding it hard to enjoy what you previously enjoyed

Resiliency for Recovery

Dr. Angela Stowe, director of Student Counseling Services at the University of Alabama Birmingham, encouraged anyone who is feeling stuck to practice the four Rs of resiliency. She advised that resiliency is like a muscle; the more you exercise it, the stronger it will become.

- Recognize
- Reframe
- Reflect
- Reach out

Source: uab.edu



Getting Unstuck

Workshop Overview *continued*

Pulling Yourself Out of the Rut

Thankfully, languishing and feeling stuck do not have to be permanent conditions. Researchers Lahnna Catalino and Barbara Frederickson (nih.gov) compiled a long list of researched-based techniques that increase positive emotions, including:

- Do something nice for someone else on a regular basis.
- Find time to interact with others every day, especially getting to know someone on a deeper level.
- Lean into your curiosity and learn something new.
- Engage in spiritual activities.
- Exercise on a regular basis.

Mindfulness could be particularly helpful to anyone feeling stuck because it helps you sort out what you are feeling in the moment (Harvard.edu). Why is it that you are feeling the way you are feeling? Although those emotions might be difficult ones, it's important to process them so you can know how to deal with them. You can practice mindfulness in many ways, including meditation, breathing exercises and journaling. Benefits include (Harvard.edu):

- Reducing stress and anxiety
- Increasing attention and memory
- Regulating emotions

Gratitude is another research-proven way that folks can boost their positive thoughts to shake off a funk (npr.org). Those who develop a regular practice of gratitude reap benefits like:

- Improved sleep
- Lower stress levels
- Better interpersonal relationships
- Increased generosity
- Stronger connection to your purpose or goals

Taking small steps to encourage positive thinking on a daily basis can help you get out of your rut and start finding pleasure in your life again. Acknowledge that you are feeling stuck, try to determine why, then make a plan to start improving your well-being. It will take time to climb out of this phase of life, but you can certainly do it, one positive thought at a time.

Sources: <https://bit.ly/31P9Yhr>; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3090197>; <https://nyti.ms/3EIpbWj>; <https://bit.ly/31LTjLw>; <https://bit.ly/3DApTx3>; <https://positivepsychology.com/flourishing/>

“Flourishing is the product of the pursuit and engagement of an authentic life that brings inner joy and happiness through meeting goals, being connected with life passions, and relishing in accomplishments through the peaks and valleys of life.”

– Dr. Lynn Soots

Source: PositivePsychology.com

Emotional Agility Quiz

Psychologist and Harvard Medical School Professor Dr. Susan David has an “emotional agility” quiz on her website. Complete it and receive an assessment on where you can “be more effective with your thoughts and emotions.” If you enter an email address, David provides a free individualized report that could be useful for processing. Find the quiz here: <https://bit.ly/3pGS099>.



Getting Unstuck

HANDOUT

What Is Languishing?

Are you feeling a bit stuck? Maybe it's harder to get through your daily tasks each day; you get it done, but you're not finding enjoyment where you used to. You do not necessarily feel depressed (a deep sadness mixed with feelings of hopelessness that persists for at least two weeks), but you do not feel quite right either. You're a bit numb and disconnected.

Sociologist Dr. Cory M. Keyes described emotional well-being as a continuum that moves from languishing to flourishing (jstor.org). If you are languishing, it does not necessarily mean that you have a mental illness. But you are having more negative emotions than positive ones. Dr. Keyes told wbur.org that languishing is "the absence of feeling good about your life." His research has found that those who are languishing are more at risk of:

- Developing depression and anxiety
- Attempting suicide
- Dying prematurely

In an article for the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, Dr. Keyes explained, "Adults with complete mental health are flourishing in life with high levels of well-being. To be flourishing, then, is to be filled with positive emotion and to be functioning well psychologically and socially. Adults with incomplete mental health are languishing in life with low well-being. Thus, languishing may be conceived of as emptiness and stagnation, constituting a life of quiet despair that parallels accounts of individuals who describe themselves and life as 'hollow,' 'empty,' 'a shell,' and a 'void.'"

"Emotional well-being is a cluster of symptoms reflecting the presence or absence of positive feelings about life. Symptoms of emotional well-being are ascertained from individuals' responses to [questions] measuring the presence of positive affect (e.g. ...good spirits), the absence of negative affect (the person is not hopeless), and perceived satisfaction with life."

- Dr. Cory M. Keyes, professor of sociology, Emory University

Source: jstor.org

When you are languishing, "you put yourself on hold and you're waiting for something good to happen... Or you're even trying to distract yourself by jumpstarting a good old battery [of]... emotion, which is to feel something."

- Dr. Cory M. Keyes, professor of sociology, Emory University

Source: wbur.org

← Languishing (wbur.org)	Flourishing (PositivePsychology.com) →
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of feeling • Lack of interest in life, but still going through the motions • Absence of purpose • Disconnection/emptiness • Feeling isolated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling connected to a purpose • Feeling satisfied with life • Being engaged with and interested in what you're doing • Contributing to others' well-being • Feeling a sense of belonging



Getting Unstuck

HANDOUT

What Is Languishing? *continued*

Jumpstarting Your Battery

For many, the stress of the pandemic has negatively impacted their sense of well-being. In a piece for NYTimes.com, psychologist Adam Grant wrote, “In the early, uncertain days of the pandemic, it’s likely that your brain’s threat detection system... was on high alert for fight-or-flight... As the pandemic has dragged on... the acute state of anguish has given way to a chronic condition of languish.” Grant wrote that it can sometimes be tough to figure out that you are languishing because your emotions are dulled. You’re indifferent to them and most everything else. “When you can’t see your own suffering,” Grant explained, “you don’t seek help or even do much to help yourself.”

How can you give your emotional engine a jumpstart? First, be patient with yourself. It takes time to get into a state of languishing and it will take time to get back out. You can start by dedicating some time each day to helping yourself feel good.

Researchers Lahnna Catalino and Barbara Frederickson (nih.gov) compiled a long list of researched-based techniques that increase positive emotions/well-being, including:

- Do something nice for someone else on a regular basis. *Try five acts of kindness per day for six weeks.*
- Find time to interact with others every day, especially getting to know someone on a deeper level. *Ask someone you’re partnered with for a group project to grab some coffee after a work session.*
- Lean into your curiosity and learn something new. *Once a month, try to attend a program or a workshop that has nothing to do with your major, but everything to do with something about which you are curious.*
- Engage in spiritual activities. *Find time on a daily basis for meditation, prayer or worship.*
- Exercise on a regular basis. *Even if you don’t have time to hit the gym, you can probably find the time between classes to take a fifteen-minute walk around campus.*

Sources: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3090197>; <https://nyti.ms/3EIpBWj>; <https://wbur.fm/3pESxIB>

Signs That You Might Be Languishing

- Not quite functioning like usual
- Motivation seems to be missing
- Finding it hard to focus
- Cutting back on work or other activities
- Finding it hard to enjoy what you previously enjoyed

If you would rather approach things from the opposite angle and figure out whether you are flourishing, the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University developed a flourishing measure. You can find it here: <https://bit.ly/3Iz0qYE>. NYTimes.com created a more interactive interface here: <https://nyti.ms/3DJTDHP>.

Sources: nytimes.com; harvard.edu



Getting Unstuck

SELF-WORK

Practicing Gratitude

Taking a few minutes to think about what you are thankful for can do a lot to boost your positive emotions and help pull you out of your funk. There are many ways to do this, from keeping a gratitude journal to writing gratitude letters to simply making a point of mentally thanking someone or something before you wake. Psychologist Dr. Tchiki Davis recommended thinking about the following categories to get into a grateful mindset (BerkeleyWellBeing.com):

- People
- Things
- Places
- Experiences
- Feelings

Below, you will find some prompts that can help you explore your feelings of gratitude.

People

_____ made a difference to me when...

Things

If I didn't have _____, I would not be able to function.
I'm grateful for it because...

Benefits of Gratitude

It might feel a little cheesy or awkward when you first get started, but there is a lot of research that suggests that taking stock of what you're grateful for on a regular basis is good for overall well-being. Researchers have found the following benefits:

- Improved sleep
- Lower stress levels
- Better interpersonal relationships
- Increased generosity
- Stronger connection to your purpose or goals

Source: npr.org



Getting Unstuck

SELF-WORK

Practicing Gratitude *continued*

Places

_____ is one of my favorite places on campus.

I am thankful for it because...

Experiences

This week, I was really glad to be able to do _____.

It made me feel...

Feelings

I felt really calm when I _____.

I am thankful for that feeling because...

Processing Questions

- Do you regularly think about what you are thankful for? Why or why not?
- How can you incorporate a regular practice of gratitude into your weekly routine?
- Sometime gratitude can bring up some tricky feelings, like embarrassment or indebtedness. How can you work through these feelings?
- When was the last time you told an important person you were thankful for them? How did it feel? If you can't recall, who is a person you would like to thank and why?

Sources: <https://n.pr/3lQAGxi>; <https://bit.ly/3GEy9yg>



Getting Unstuck

WORKSHEET

Get Into the Flow

When you're feeling stuck, everything seems to be harder. You get dragged down by your distractions, indecision or malaise. While it might feel like you'll never get moving again, there are ways to help yourself along. One of those ways is to pursue "flow," where you get so fully immersed in a task that you essentially become one with the task and all other thoughts fade away.

In 1990, psychologist Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi developed the concept of "flow" to explain when a person is so focused on one challenging activity that all of the mind's other chatter disappears. For this to happen, the activity must be matched between a person's skill and a particular challenge. If it's too easy (like bingeing TV shows), your mind will wander and you'll get bored. If it's too challenging (like sinking a three-pointer when you can barely make a layup), you'll sink into your own anxiety and frustration.

Dr. Csikszentmihalyi explained, "There's this focus that, once it becomes intense, leads to a sense of ecstasy, a sense of clarity: you know exactly what you want to do from one moment to the other; you get immediate feedback" (ted.com). Flow is not about relaxation, but rather matching your abilities to a difficult, yet not impossible, task.

Preparing to Flow

Though flow states happen spontaneously and will not occur if you are forcing things, you can set yourself up for success. Use these questions to make a practice of trying to find your flow.

Have you ever experienced flow? If so, describe what it felt like.

What is an activity that you enjoy and also keeps your brain occupied?

What Happens in a State of Flow?

According to Harvard University researchers, flow experiences can make you:

- "Lose awareness of time
- [Stop] thinking about yourself... [except] in relation to the activity itself
- [Turn off] extraneous thoughts
- Active
- Work effortlessly
- [Want] to repeat the experience"

Source: Harvard.edu



Getting Unstuck

WORKSHEET

Get Into the Flow *continued*

How can you turn up the difficulty for that activity so that it is a bit more challenging?

How much time can you devote to this activity per day?

How can you eliminate distractions during that time?

How will you keep yourself from stopping if you make a mistake or are feeling nervous?

Sources: <https://bit.ly/3rUIuBY>; <https://bit.ly/3rUX4ey>; <https://bit.ly/3ydQHT1>; <https://swoo.sh/3dMpxJi>

Benefits

Finding your flow comes with a number of benefits including:

- Feeling aware and accomplished during the activity
- Feeling calmer and happier afterward
- Boosting your self-esteem and confidence

Source: nike.com



Getting Unstuck

SELF WORK Mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness does not require you to empty out your brain of all thoughts and ignore unpleasant feelings. Rather, explained Dr. Suzanne Westbrook, “Mindfulness is not about being positive all the time or a bubblegum sort of happiness — la, la, la... It’s about noticing what happens moment to moment, the easy and the difficult, and the painful and the joyful. It’s about building a muscle to be present and awake in your life” (Harvard.edu).

Mindfulness can be particularly helpful to anyone who is stuck because it helps you sort out what you are feeling in the moment. Why is it that you are feeling the way you are feeling? Although those emotions might be difficult ones, it’s important to process them so you can know how to deal with them. (If you are feeling overwhelmed, it might be time to make an appointment at the counseling center.)

“Self-judgment is one of the greatest reasons that people get stuck. When you judge yourself as unworthy, many possibilities are closed off. Instead of living in the flow of love, grace, abundance, and joy, you keep your expectations low. You may resist the positive changes that lead to lasting fulfillment. Even though you have many skills and talents, you may stay stuck in an unchallenging position because it feels too risky to go for what you really want.”

– Dr. Deepak Chopra

Source: Chopra.com

Questions to Consider

Though you can practice mindfulness in many ways, including meditation and breathing exercises, journaling is an effective and easy way to call yourself to the present. Below, you’ll find some prompts adapted from PsychCentral.com that can help you process why you might be stuck and how you can unstuck yourself.

What emotions arise when you feel stuck?

What is a healthy coping strategy that helps you get through tough emotional times?

How could you use that strategy to help you deal with being stuck?



Getting Unstuck

SELF WORK

Mindfulness *continued*

What are three self-defeating thoughts that come up for you throughout the course of the day?

How will you flip those negative thoughts and instead encourage yourself?

Think of one area you can make an improvement in to help yourself get unstuck. What are three specific actions you can take to make this happen?

How will you show yourself compassion and kindness each day?

Sources: <https://bit.ly/3rSoLTe>; <https://bit.ly/3lQCIXS>;
<https://bit.ly/3lKEGIP>

Benefits

Researchers have found that mindfulness offers benefits like:

- Reducing stress and anxiety
- Increasing attention and memory
- Regulating emotions

Source: Harvard.edu



Getting Unstuck

WORKSHEET

Identify Your Obstacles

You recognize that you are in a rut, yet you're not quite sure how to pull yourself out. Although it might feel insurmountable, there are ways to free yourself:

1. Determine why you are in the rut
2. Chart a course out
3. Stay on your course

STEP 1: DETERMINE WHY

Although we all have our own unique baggage, PsychCentral.com identified some common reasons for why we can't get out of the station. Take a look through the list below to determine the reason why you're stuck in the same spot. If you think the cause is one of your triggers, put a check in the box.

- “Cognitive overload, overwhelm and burnout”**
Is there anyone who isn't feeling this way after all this time in a pandemic? It's been too much stress, all the time, for years.
- “Self-limitation, self-sabotage, fear of uncertainty”**
You've got some self-doubt, so you put yourself in a box of self-protection. That box also keeps you from trying new things or putting yourself out there. It feels scary not knowing what might happen if you change course.
- “Limited vision and lack of a deeper sense of meaning or purpose”**
You have not taken the time to figure out what you really want or why you might want it. You're going day-to-day without a master plan or a connection to the things that make you feel fulfilled or happy.
- “Lack of adequate support or resources”**
You don't have someone to really confide in; you're feeling disconnected. Lack of resources like time or money might hold you back.
- “Perfectionism”**
Wanting to do everything exactly right is slowing you down, especially when you are not feeling as motivated as usual. Also, nothing can ever be perfect, so you often end up feeling frustrated.
- “Conflict between the desires of self and others”**
You might put too much emphasis on what others will think of you instead of focusing on what you actually want. Perhaps you are traveling on a course that others have mapped for you instead of going your own way.
- “Resistance to change”**
It's no wonder that you are tired by the drastic changes we have been going through the past few years. But, resistance to change has left you standing in the same place, while other folks are moving on and adapting.

*Getting Unstuck***WORKSHEET****Identify Your Obstacles** *continued*

Looking through the boxes you have checked above, what would you say is the primary reason you are feeling stuck?

Give some specifics for how this reason impacts your life.

STEP 2: CHART YOUR COURSE**Choose Resiliency**

Dr. Angela Stowe, director of Student Counseling Services at the University of Alabama Birmingham, encouraged anyone who is feeling stuck to practice the four Rs of resiliency. She advised that resiliency is like a muscle; the more you exercise it, the stronger it will become.

- **Recognize:** “Name it, acknowledge it and accept how you feel about it,” Dr. Stowe emphasized.
- **Reframe:** Dr. Stowe explained, “A growth mindset realizes that failure is not permanent... Failure is an opportunity to do something different. And now you know something you don’t want to do.”
- **Reflect:** “Stop and ask yourself, ‘Is what I’m doing what I want to be doing and what I need to be doing?’... Take a careful look, and make decisions about what you might need to let go or take on to get you where you need to go,” Dr. Stowe recommended.
- **Reach out:** “Make connections and seek the resources and people you need to support you,” Dr. Stowe counseled.

Source: uab.edu

How will you recognize when one of your triggers is holding you back?



Getting Unstuck

WORKSHEET

Identify Your Obstacles *continued*

What is your plan for moving past it?

What are two small steps you can take this week to climb out of the rut?

What is a bigger step that you can take this month to climb out of the rut?

STEP 3: FOLLOW THE COURSE

What will you do if you get off track?

How will you celebrate your successes?

With whom can you check in about your progress?

Sources: <https://bit.ly/31P9Yhr>; <https://bit.ly/3DApTx3>



Getting Unstuck

CASE STUDY

Back to “Normal” and Feeling Stuck

After a year of virtual school, Ben was relieved to be back on campus for his junior year. It was great to see his friends in person and take part in the co-curricular activities he had enjoyed so much during his first year of college. At the same time, Ben felt a bit anxious about being around people who didn't seem to be taking the pandemic as seriously as he was. He stepped back from one of the organizations where people seemed to be acting like COVID was no longer a thing.

Ben expected that he would be glad to be busy after a year of sitting around his parents' house without much to do. But, when he started to add up the time he was spending on his studies, internship, part-time job and co-curriculars, he realized he had virtually no time for himself. He had not been able to exercise in weeks, barely had time to occasionally text his friends and his parents, and normally fell asleep shortly after getting home each night. To remember all of his commitments, Ben set a ton of alarms on his phone.

In terms of his academics, Ben was keeping up with his workload, but he wasn't finding the enjoyment in it that he used to. He didn't want to switch his major because he still liked it, but wished he could get back to his former enthusiasm.

Right now, it just felt like he was going through the motions with everything, including school. If someone asked him how he was doing, he would shrug and say, “Meh.” One of Ben's alarms dinged on his phone, telling him he had to be at work in twenty minutes. Ben trudged out of the door.

Processing Questions

1. Ben has found that getting back to “normal” isn't what he thought it would be. How do you cope when your expectations and the reality of the situation don't match up?
2. What do you think is an underlying cause for Ben feeling stuck?
3. Ben went from having too much time to himself to virtually no time for himself. How can he find a better balance between those two extremes?
4. If you were Ben, what would you do to un-stick yourself?



Getting Unstuck

Workshop Talking Points

Some key points to emphasize when it comes to getting unstuck include:

- Many people are feeling listless and stuck because of the stress and chaos involved with the pandemic
- Some common reasons for why folks get stuck in a rut include:
 - Overload, overwhelm and burnout
 - Self-limitation, self-sabotage, fear of uncertainty
 - Limited vision and lack of a deeper sense of meaning or purpose
 - Lack of adequate support or resources
 - Perfectionism
 - Conflict between the desires of self and others
 - Resistance to change

Sample Workshop Agenda

- Have students take Dr. Susan David's "emotional agility" quiz for baseline information: <https://bit.ly/3pGS099>. Have students choose one of the recommendations to focus on in their work today.
- Provide an overview of the topic using the *Workshop Overview*
- Have students complete the *Worksheet Identify Your Obstacles*, then talk about it with a partner
- Talk through the *What Is Languishing?* Handout to help them better understand the concept of why they might be feeling disconnected from their emotions and lives in general
- Take the Human Flourishing Program's measure for a flourishing self-assessment (barebones version here: <https://bit.ly/3lz0qYE>, better interface here: <https://nyti.ms/3DJTDHP>), then discuss
- Complete the *Practicing Gratitude Self-Work*, then encourage everyone to fire off a quick "thank you" text to someone who matters to them
- Do some mindfulness journaling with the *Mindfulness Worksheet*
- Talk about the concept of flow as a group using the *Get Into the Flow Worksheet*. If you really want to dig in, watch Dr. Csikszentmihalyi explain the concept here: <https://bit.ly/3rUX4cy>.
- Work through the Case Study *Back to "Normal" and Feeling Stuck*
- Encourage participants to remember the goals they set for themselves and offer words of encouragement that they can find their way out of the rut



Getting Unstuck

Workshop Talking Points *continued*

- Languishing is a state of mind where negative thoughts are more common than positive ones. Someone who is languishing does not currently have a good sense of well-being and might find it difficult to focus, function or find enjoyment in life
- People can take steps to get unstuck and improve their well-being when they:
 - Do something nice for someone else on a regular basis
 - Find time to interact with others every day, especially getting to know someone on a deeper level
 - Lean into their curiosity and learn something new
 - Engage in spiritual activities
 - Exercise on a regular basis
 - Practice gratitude
 - Take time for mindfulness
- It is also possible to get unstuck by exercising your capacity for resiliency with the four “R”s:
 - Recognize
 - Reframe
 - Reflect
 - Reach out
- Taking small steps to improve positive thoughts can help improve well-being