



reCAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services
University of California, Santa Cruz

Ways to Use Your Smartphone Smarter

Smartphones—while they provide useful functions, they can have downsides. One is interfering with sleep. The blue light emitted by phones (and other electronic devices) can mess with our sleep-wake cycle and cause trouble falling asleep.

Smartphones can also cause sleep issues when we keep them close to (or even in) our bed, allowing us to be disturbed at any time by a message or call. For some, even if the sound is off, having a phone by the bed makes it tempting to keep checking messages or social media late at night, again interfering with sleep.

Overuse of our phones can make us anxious if we can't have them readily accessible. It can feel like an addiction. Frequent smartphone checking is associated with more stress and poor focus and inattention. And, using a phone while driving can result in an accident.

Another phone-related issue is that being too focused on your phone can prevent you from being more social IRL. Overuse of phones can leave us rusty at meeting people and having face-to-face conversations. Smartphones can also interfere with existing relationships if we ignore the people we're

with while we do stuff on our phone. What's more, when we rely on messaging and texting to communicate, we lose some of the nuances and intimacy of in-person conversation and relationships.

What can you do if you feel your smartphone habit is out of control?

1. **Set clear goals and expectations.** Make concrete goals for how many times a day is reasonable to check messages or social media, how much time is OK to spend on your phone, and what apps/sites/social media feel useful and healthy vs. unhealthy for you. (Read more about screen time vs. media content [in this Time Magazine article](#).) If needed, let others know when you are and are not available to be in touch. Agree with friends, family, and

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All About CAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) offers confidential mental health services to registered UCSC students all year:

- Helpful workshops, trainings, and self-help tools
- A variety of therapy and support groups
- Let's Talk drop-in consultations
- Brief individual, couples, and family counseling
- Medication services
- Referrals to on- and off-campus resources
- Crisis services in person Mon-Fri 8 am-5 pm and by phone 24/7 at (831) 459-2628

To make an appointment, call (831) 459-2628 or stop by (Student Health Center, East Wing, 2nd floor) weekdays between 8 am and 5 pm. To learn more, visit our [website](#), check out the [CAPS blog](#), and like us on [Facebook](#)!



Dear CAPS,

I am freaking out about finals—I'm feeling so stressed! What do I do?

—Stressed Student

You're not alone! Most students feel stressed with finals! There are a few things you can do to minimize your stress and the impact it has on your well being.

First, remember that stress is harder to manage if you aren't taking care of the basics: sleep, diet, and exercise. We know many students cut back on these self-care elements when they get busy with studying, but it's important to prioritize your well-being as much as possible. For example, studies show that students who take time away from the books to exercise regularly do better in school



than those who spend all their time studying.

One way to try and keep a healthy balance is to get serious about organizing your time. Make a list, with the most important tasks that

are due first at the top, then tasks due soon that are less important, and finally, tasks that are due later and are less vital. Use the list to create a schedule that includes studying and also some time for study breaks, eating, being active, socializing, and sleeping.

Another tip that helps you prepare for finals is to use multiple ways to study. According to research, people learn better when they use a variety of techniques, such as rewriting and highlighting notes, using flashcards, working in study groups, and reading material out loud.

Use your study breaks wisely. Try doing relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, yoga, or stretching, during breaks. A *little* venting about your stress may help blow off steam, but avoid talking about stressful things for long periods, and avoid being around super-stressed people if you can help it. Too much talk about your anxieties and stressors can backfire, making you feel worse.

Handling Transitions

Do you relish change, or do you dread it? Not everyone feels the same about transitions and change. And, research shows that even changes that seem positive on the surface (e.g., graduation, moving to a new home) can be disruptive and unsettling.

One reason is that many people feel uneasy about the unknown. When we can't predict what is going to happen, we may feel anxious or unsafe. Although change can still be hard when we know what to expect, it's even harder when things are unknown or uncertain.

With transitions such as the end of the quarter (and for some, graduation) around the corner, how can you try and handle transitions in a healthy way? One strategy is to do your best to plan for what you can and try and let go of worry about what you can't. This is easier said than done, of course!

How do you try and let go of the worries? A few strategies from cognitive-behavioral therapy can come in handy. First, try using a journal or journaling app to track your thoughts and feelings so you can get a better idea of your patterns and

triggers. Do you tend to worry at night before trying to sleep? Do you start catastrophizing every time you talk to your parents? Knowing your patterns and what sets off anxious thoughts helps you predict and better cope with your fears.

Once you can see your thought patterns more clearly, there are a number of ways to try and alter unhelpful patterns—those that don't lead to good insights or solutions and leave you more anxious than before. A few different types of strategies to

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help you cope with and reduce the impact of unhelpful thoughts are:

1. Distraction
2. Using logic and rational responses
3. Self-compassion
4. “Meta-thinking.”

Using some of these tools can be helpful any time, including when you’re going through any big changes and feeling anxious.

Distraction

People often confuse distraction with denial. Ignoring your feelings and fears is typically not that helpful. However, distracting your mind at times can be a healthy part of managing your thoughts (as long as you have other tools to use as well and you don’t avoid facing your problems and responsibilities).

Distraction is helpful when you notice your thoughts aren’t going anywhere, there is no immediate solution to a dilemma, or thinking is getting you too worked up in the moment. Each person will have their own preferred forms of distraction. A few might include watching a favorite show, texting or calling a friend, taking a walk, cleaning, doing homework, playing music, playing video games, and drawing.

Logic

Using logic is a strategy many of use naturally. It makes sense that

there are times that reasoning with ourselves can be useful. Sometimes we can recognize that our thoughts are distorted, untrue, or harsh, and we can “talk back” to ourselves with alternative messages. The key to using logic is to think of messages that are both *helpful* and *real* to us: I’m sure we’ve all had someone try to reassure us by saying something like, “Everything will be OK.” That sort of statement may not feel true or helpful to us. So, when we’re talking back to our unhelpful



thoughts, we need to find responses that make sense. For example, “Even though I can’t find a solution yet, I know eventually I’ll come up with one.” Or, “What I am fearing is not that likely to happen.”

Self-Compassion

Sometimes we’re way too hard on ourselves. We criticize and beat ourselves up. Usually this is not too helpful. While holding ourselves accountable for our behavior is important, it’s healthier to treat ourselves kindly than harshly. For instance, when faced with a difficult transition, telling ourselves we’re weak and can’t handle it may leave

us feeling that way. Alternatively, if we can tell ourselves, “This is hard. It’s natural to feel anxious. I’ll do my best,” we may feel more capable of moving forward.

Some people worry that if they are kind to themselves, it’s an excuse to stop trying. Not at all—you can be self-compassionate while still striving to learn, grow, and change. In fact, a compassionate approach may help us feel more inspired to keep trying, while a harsh approach may make us feel like giving up.

“Meta-Thinking”

This means “thinking about thinking.” When we try to notice our thought patterns objectively and disengage from the *content* of our thoughts, it may help us reduce anxiety. For instance, when fears about an unknown future come up, instead of

agonizing about a lot of bad possible outcomes, we can take a step back: “I’m noticing that when I get stressed, I start thinking about how things could go wrong. Maybe I need to take care of myself right now—I think I’ll take a walk.”

[Mindfulness](#) is one way to engage in meta-thinking.

Final Thoughts

Some transitions are harder than others. Change can be exciting, too. Try to embrace any changes you’re going through right now. We hope the tips described here may help!

Upcoming Events

LET'S TALK: A drop-in space where you can have a brief, confidential, one-time chat with a professional CAPS counselor. No appointment needed! Let's Talk is held four times a week from 1 to 3 pm at different locations in fall, winter, and spring, except holidays. All registered undergrad and grad UCSC students are welcome at all locations of Let's Talk. **Let's Talk will be offered Monday through Thursday in Week 10 and Monday through Wednesday during finals week. For more info, visit our [website](#) or call CAPS at (831) 459-2628.**

PARENT-STUDENT SUPPORT GROUP: A supportive environment for those struggling with the unique challenges of parenting while being a student. Children up to age 1 year welcome with parent. **The final meeting is Monday, June 3rd, from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. at Family Student Housing #712, Family Center.** Call group facilitator, Susan Gulbe Walsh, Ph.D., at (831) 459-2377 for more info.

TRANS, NON-BINARY, GENDERQUEER, & GENDER QUESTIONING STUDENT SUPPORT GROUP: This weekly drop-in group provides a welcoming environment and support to discuss topics of interest brought up by group members. Wednesdays from

3:30 to 4:30 pm at the CAPS Central Office Group Room. **Last meeting is June 5th!** Call group facilitator, Lain Lease, L.M.F.T., at (831) 459-1476 for more info.

BUILDING RESILIENCY: A walk-in group for undocumented and mixed-status students. An environment that provides a safe and confidential space to process topics of interest selected by students, offers support, and addresses the importance of self-care. Wednesdays 6:00 to 7:00 pm, EOP Conference Room, Academic Resources Center. **Last meeting is June 5th!** Call group facilitator, Erica Lopez, L.M.F.T., at (831) 459-2572 for more info.

GRADUATE UNDERSTANDING MYSELF AND OTHERS WEEKLY GROUP: Open to UCSC graduate students who would like to participate in a weekly supportive group to learn more about yourself, significant life events, significant relationships, and how you relate to other people. The first step is to get in touch with CAPS to learn more about the group and see if it meets your needs. The group's location and the day and time it will be offered are still to be determined. Please contact group leader, Alana Jacobs, Psy.D., at (831) 459-4038 during business hours to get more information.

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- partners on rules for phone use when you're together (e.g., no checking messages during dinner or on a date).
2. **Limit your use gradually.** Remember those goals you set for your phone use? Work on reaching the goals gradually. For instance, if a goal is to cut back on how often you use your phone to check messages, if you check every few minutes, try every 30 minutes and build to every hour, then every few hours.
 3. **Set your phone on silent and limit notifications.** Constant notifications can add to the "addictive" qualities of smartphone use and distractibility. You want to be in control of deciding when to check messages rather than letting yourself be on constant alert for them.
 4. **Protect your sleep.** Don't use your phone just before bed or in bed, or consider [using a setting or filter](#) that will change the color of blue light to make it less disruptive to your sleep-wake cycle. Turn off your notifications and ringer at night. Keep the phone out of arm's reach, preferably across the room, when you are sleeping.
- The bottom line is that your phone is an amazing tool that can make life easier and more fun. But, it can also make life more problematic if you aren't thoughtful about how and when you're using it.
- Get more good ideas about changing your smartphone habits [in this Time Magazine online article](#) and read about the neurochemistry of "smartphone addiction" [in this Psychology Today column](#).