

Breathing Your Way To New Beginnings

Self-Care Advice For Post-Graduation

▲ by Christina Sama-Bommarito

It's hard to believe that I graduated from high school 14 years ago wondering what the future might hold for me. I kept asking myself, "Is this really the start of the next phase of my life? What if I don't like collegiate life? What if I don't like my classes, my roommates or my major? What if I don't belong?" Many of you may be asking yourself these same questions.

It's always anxiety inducing to begin a new chapter in life. We tend to be afraid of the unknown. Fear is going to play a role in life. However, how we handle fear is what will define us. Don't allow fears to overpower you. Your college orientation will give each of you the opportunity to meet new people and become familiar with the college you are attending.

The fear of change and not belonging is not uncommon. I know many people don't like change – it scares them. Although challenges may bring on feelings of anxiety, they also strengthen us and

make us who we are.

If you're feeling overwhelmed by transition, I offer you these coping mechanisms and techniques. Take time for yourself. Your schedule may be hectic, however, you must learn to manage your time and give yourself the necessary hours of sleep. Also, remind yourself to "just breathe and relax." Positive self-talk will assist in bettering your state of mind.

Another form of self-care is meditation. Meditation is a practice in which individuals use techniques that allow them to quiet their mind. At its core, meditation allows you to become more aware of what you are thinking and how to deal with your thoughts as they wander. Some techniques that may assist you with meditation include deep breathing exercises, muscle relaxation exercises and guided imagery. Other forms of meditation include prayer and physical exercise.

According to Dr. Andrew Weil, M.D.,

world-renowned leader and pioneer in the field of integrative medicine, an example of a breathing exercise for beginners is simply counting your breaths.

Sitting in a comfortable position in a safe space with your eyes closed, begin by taking a few deep breaths, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. Allow your breathing to be natural without trying to influence it.

To begin the exercise, count "one" to yourself as you exhale. The next time you count "two" and so on up to "five" Then begin a new cycle.

Every time you lose count or find your attention has wandered, simply start again from the beginning. Try to do three to five minutes of this form of meditation every day.

Another technique is guided imagery. Anxiety is brought on by our thoughts and experiences. We have tendencies to dwell on memories. We also have tendencies to chase our future by attempting to control time by planning and hoping. Remember, all we can control is this present moment.

Through guided imagery, you can train your mind to be in the present moment by thinking about a peaceful place in your life, whether real or imaginary. Create details about this place in your mind. Visualize the sights, sounds and smells of this place. Remember, this place is available for you when you need a break.

Encourage yourself that you deserve time out of the hectic life you lead and any related frantic thinking. Your years at college will go by so quickly. You'll be surprised by the experiences you will have within the next couple of years.

Don't be afraid to fail, to make mistakes and to challenge yourself. You are not in this alone. The greatest lesson I learned in college was the value of friendship and family support. Don't hesitate to ask for help.

Turn to a friend, parent, and/or mentor to guide you. Also, you may resort to seeking guidance at the ministry office on your college campus. Remember your Catholic faith will guide you through the most difficult times.

Someone once wrote, "Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away." College is the path that you are choosing as your stepping stone to your career. It is important to value your education in order to reach your aspirations.

However, it is necessary to find the moments to relax, enjoy and experience all that life has to offer. Take this opportunity to write your own story I pray that each and every one of you will become successful and productive citizens of our society.

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