

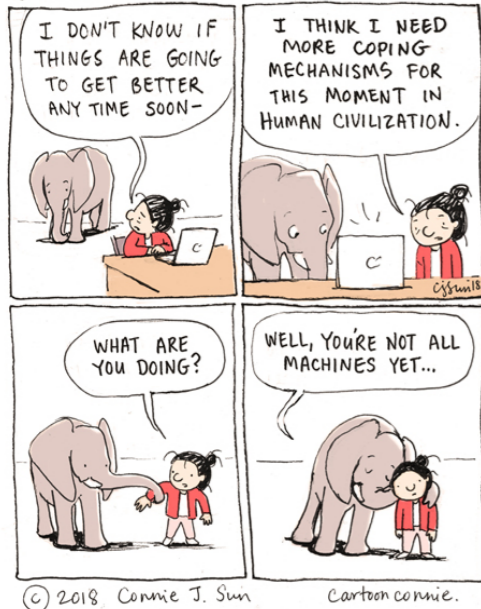
# Do you dare, academia?

MIND MATTERS is a campaign of the IMP, IMBA, GMI and the Max Perutz Labs with the aims to raise awareness about mental health in academia, destigmatize mental health issues and getting help, inform about professional help services on campus and encourage mental health self-care.

Life often presents us with moments of stress and challenges, prompting each of us to seek our own unique methods of solace. Coping mechanisms, whether they involve a comforting bowl of ice cream, a rejuvenating meditation session, or an invigorating run, are deeply personal and can vary widely from one individual to the next. There is no definitive right or wrong way to cope, but the key lies in distinguishing between the healthy and unhealthy avenues of solace.

In our last edition, we invite you to contemplate the first responses you turn to when faced with stress, separate them into these two categories, and encourage you to focus on nurturing the positive ones that contribute to your well-being.

## MORE COPING MECHANISMS NEEDED



*“The first principle is that you must not fool yourself, and you are the easiest person to fool.”*

RICHARD FEYNMAN

◀ From <https://www.conniewonnie.com/2018/10/more-coping-mechanisms-needed.html>



MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS 2023

Coping strategies are commonly classified into four primary categories as follows<sup>1</sup>:

- **Problem-focused coping**, which revolves around addressing the root cause of distress. This category encompasses active coping, planning, restraint coping, and the suppression of competing activities as illustrative examples.
- **Emotion-focused coping**, which is geared towards alleviating the negative emotions associated with the issue at hand. This category includes techniques such as positive reframing, acceptance, turning to religion, and employing humor.
- **Meaning-focused coping**, where individuals utilize cognitive strategies to discern and manage the meaning of the situation they're facing.
- **Social coping (support-seeking)**, which involves individuals reducing their stress levels by seeking emotional or instrumental support from their community or social network.

**Coping strategies are important for managing and maintaining good mental health.**

They are techniques and practices that everyone of us can use to deal with stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges. Delving into vital coping mechanisms for maintaining mental well-being in the challenging environment of academia, our newsletter highlights a selection of effective short- and long-term strategies. Let's try them out!

Try out these mindfulness and self-compassion exercises that Aljoscha Dreisörner and Britta Hölzel shared with us:

### ONE MINUTE MEDITATION

1. **Find your space:** Sit at the edge of your chair with an upright, straight posture. This helps you create a sense of purpose in your meditation.
2. **Focus on your breath:** Close your eyes and take a deep breath into your belly, followed by a long exhale. Direct your attention to the sensation of your breathing and the movement of your belly as you inhale and exhale.
3. **Recenter your mind:** If your mind wanders during the meditation, gently guide your focus back to your breathing. You can gradually increase the duration as you become more comfortable with the practice. It's a small investment of time that can yield substantial benefits.

### SELF-COMPASSION BREAK

A mental exercise:

1. **Acknowledge moment of suffering**, what are the emotions, "yes this is difficult"
2. **Common humanity** "others have had similar experiences"
3. **Self-kindness** "how can I be kind to myself now"

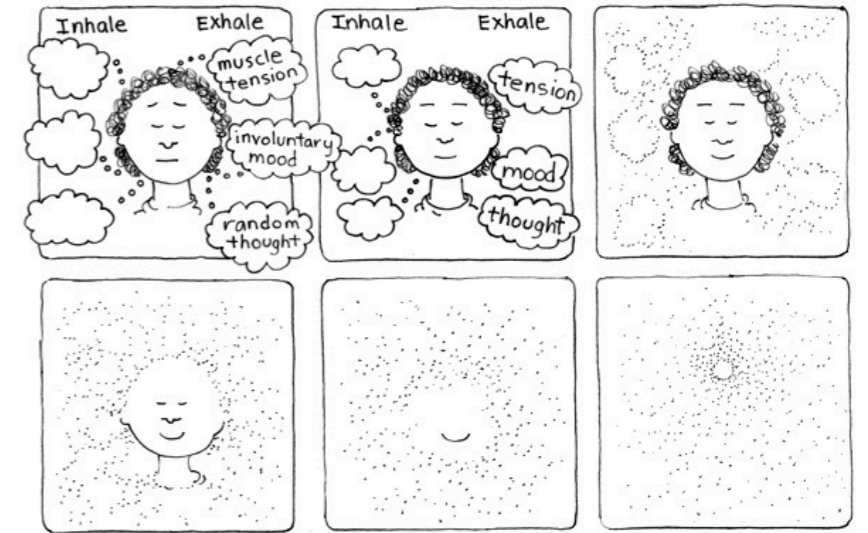
### SELF-SOOTHING TOUCH

Right hand on heart, left hand on belly.



### DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

Harness the power of deep breathing. With one hand on your chest and the other on your belly, breathe deeply into your abdomen. Remember that exhaling should be longer than inhaling, promoting relaxation and stress relief



from Sit Illustrated: the meditation cartoon book

▲ From Sit Illustrated: the meditation cartoon book, <http://www.meditationcartoons.com/meditation/inhale-exhale>

**EMERGENCY HELP: immediate and effective strategies for managing overwhelming stress and anxiety.**

### GROUNDING TECHNIQUE

Explore your senses by focusing on

- 5 things you can see
- 4 distinct sensations you can feel
- 3 sounds in your surroundings
- 2 different scents you can smell
- 1 flavour you can taste

This exercise will ground you in the present moment.

### 4-7-8 BREATHING

1. Inhale calm and deeply, count to 4
2. Hold your breath, count to 7
3. Exhale slowly through your mouth, count to 8

This exercise will quickly calm you down by slowing down your heart beat.

### BOX BREATHING

1. Inhale calm and deeply, count to 4
2. Hold your breath, count to 4
3. Exhale slowly through your mouth, count to 4
4. Hold your breath, count to 4

This exercise will quickly calm you down and helps to relief stress and to concentrate.

1. Folkman S, Moskowitz JT. Coping: pitfalls and promise. Annu Rev Psychol. 2004;55:745-74

**To foster long-term stress resilience, consider these additional strategies for coping and enhancing well-being that our first Zoom-speaker Desiree Dickerson shared with us:**

**Prioritize the basics:** Pay attention to your overall health by ensuring sufficient sleep, proper nutrition, and regular exercise. Stay connected with friends and family to maintain a support system that nurtures your mental well-being.

**Advocate for systemic change:** Promote change collectively, emphasizing the importance of mental health not only as an individual but as part of a team. Continuous conversations about mental health can drive systemic transformation. Let's work together to "make the invisible, visible."

**Connect with like-minded peers:** Seek out individuals who share your passion for research and recognize the importance of a balanced personal life. Learning from those who've mastered the art of managing their time can help alleviate feelings of guilt.

**Mind your headspace:** Remember that you hold the power to direct your attention. Embrace the ability to zoom out and view the bigger picture. It's okay to make mistakes and seek assistance from others. Be gentle and non-judgmental with yourself in your work.

**Incorporate play:** Discover ways to unwind and engage in activities that bring joy and pleasure. Create habits around activities you enjoy, and the repetition will help you find relaxation and happiness in your downtime.



▲ From Sit Illustrated: the meditation cartoon book, <http://www.meditationcartoons.com/meditation/mind-cleaner>

▼ From <https://phd-comics.com/comics/archive.php?comicid=1785>

### Stop unhealthy coping strategies

Avoidance, isolation, escapism, passive aggression, and denial are all coping mechanisms that individuals may employ in response to stress and challenging emotions.

**Avoidance** involves steering clear of the source of stress or discomfort, often leaving problems unaddressed and festering beneath the surface.

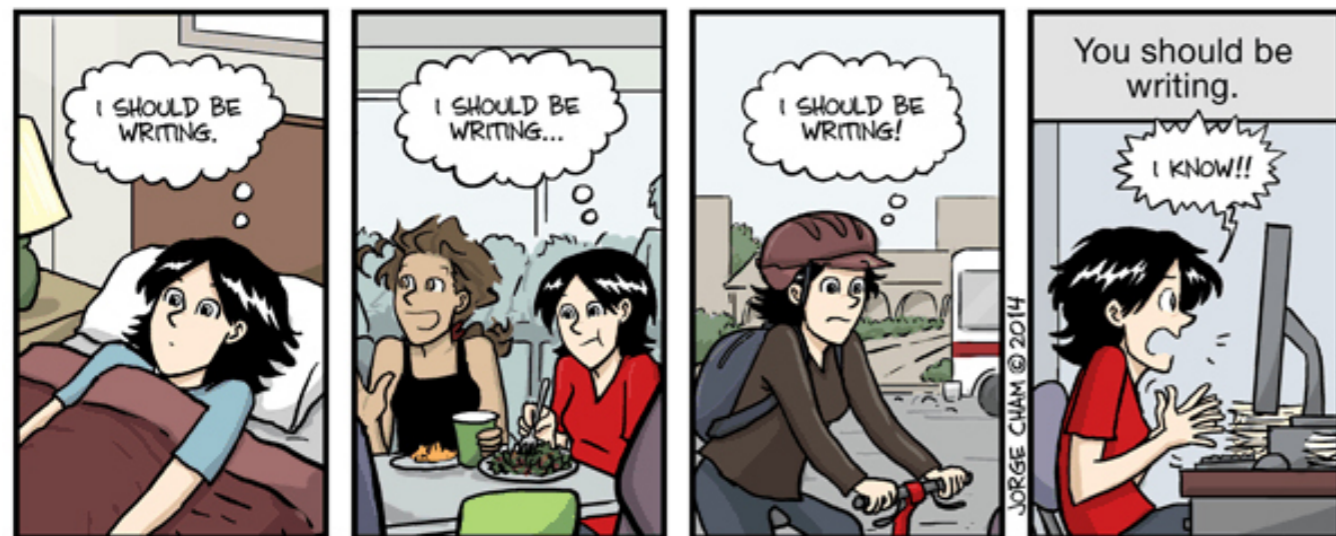
**Isolation**, on the other hand, entails withdrawing from social interactions and support networks, leading to feelings of loneliness and a lack of emotional outlets.

**Escapism** is a retreat into distractions like video games, social media, or binge-watching TV as a means to divert attention from real-life problems, but it often results in reduced productivity and personal growth.

**Passive aggression** manifests as indirect expressions of anger or frustration, which can undermine effective communication and harm relationships.

**Denial**, perhaps the most deeply rooted of these mechanisms, involves refusing to acknowledge problems, often prolonging the suffering and hindering one's ability to seek appropriate help and solutions.

**While these coping strategies may provide temporary relief, they ultimately hinder personal growth and overall well-being, making it crucial to seek healthier alternatives when facing adversity.**



This message brought to you by that manuscript you're supposed to be writing.

[WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM](http://WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM)

### Start setting boundaries

Besides effective coping strategies, setting boundaries is crucial for our well-being in academia as it helps maintain a healthy work-life balance, prevents overwork and allows us to prioritize self-care, ultimately fostering sustained productivity and mental resilience. Nina Junker explained us the basics:

**1. Identify your boundary management preferences.** Check the illustration on the right.

**2. Know the consequences of your preferences.**

**3. Act in line with your preferences by using fitting boundary tactics.**

#### Physical tactics:

- build physical barriers
- build space for transitions („no man's land")
- manage physical artifacts

#### Behavioral tactics:

- delegate tasks
- ask for support
- use technology
- prioritize
- set rules
- consciously decide on meeting times

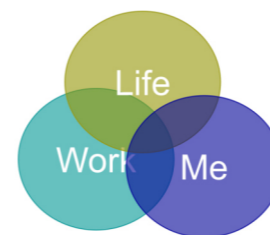
#### Temporal tactics:

- temporally separate tasks
- schedule time for all of your roles

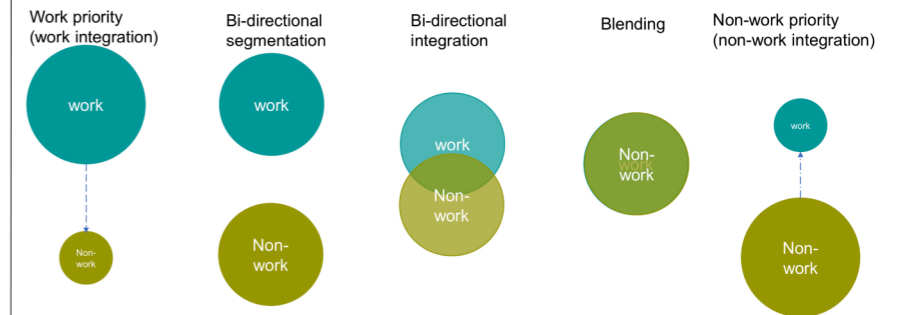
#### Communication tactics:

- talk about your preferences
- set and communicate expectations
- Learn to say "no"

**Boundary management is an act of self-care!**



Self-care is extremely important for effectively coping with the stressors of academia. However, sometimes some struggles might be too big for handling them by ourselves. Luckily, we are not alone but all in this together. We can help each other to get better and support our colleagues in getting professional help.



▲ **Boundary management preferences** from Nina Junker presentation.

### HELP SERVICES

**IVip – Institute for Vitalpsychology**  
IMP, IMBA, GMI and VBCF  
Verena Monschi: [v.monschi@vitalpsychologie.at](mailto:v.monschi@vitalpsychologie.at)

**Work & Occupational Psychology Team, University of Vienna**  
Employees of the University of Vienna  
[rm.arbeitspsychologie@univie.ac.at](mailto:rm.arbeitspsychologie@univie.ac.at)

**Psychological counselling services for students Vienna**  
Students and persons applying for studies  
[psychologische.studentenberatung@univie.ac.at](mailto:psychologische.studentenberatung@univie.ac.at)

**Crisis Intervention Center Vienna**  
Adults of the age of 18 onwards  
<https://kriseninterventionszentrum.at>

**Mental Health Coaching on Campus**  
IMP, IMBA, GMI, Max Perutz Labs and VBCF  
Florian Grössl: [florian.groessler@imp.ac.at](mailto:florian.groessler@imp.ac.at)

**Ombudspeople**  
Ombudspeople and their contact details are listed at the training unit website <https://training.vbc.ac.at/resources/ombudspeople/>

### ENDING EVENT

**Our MIND MATTERS campaign is coming to an end, thank you for going on this mental health journey with us!**

We would like to talk about our take aways and hear your feedback:

**When: Friday, 24.11., 16:00 - 17:00**

**Where: Max Perutz Labs social room**

**We are looking forward to seeing many of you!**

**“You need to have burned, to burn out”**  
NINA M. JUNKER