

# THINGS TO CONSIDER

WHEN STUDYING AT HOME

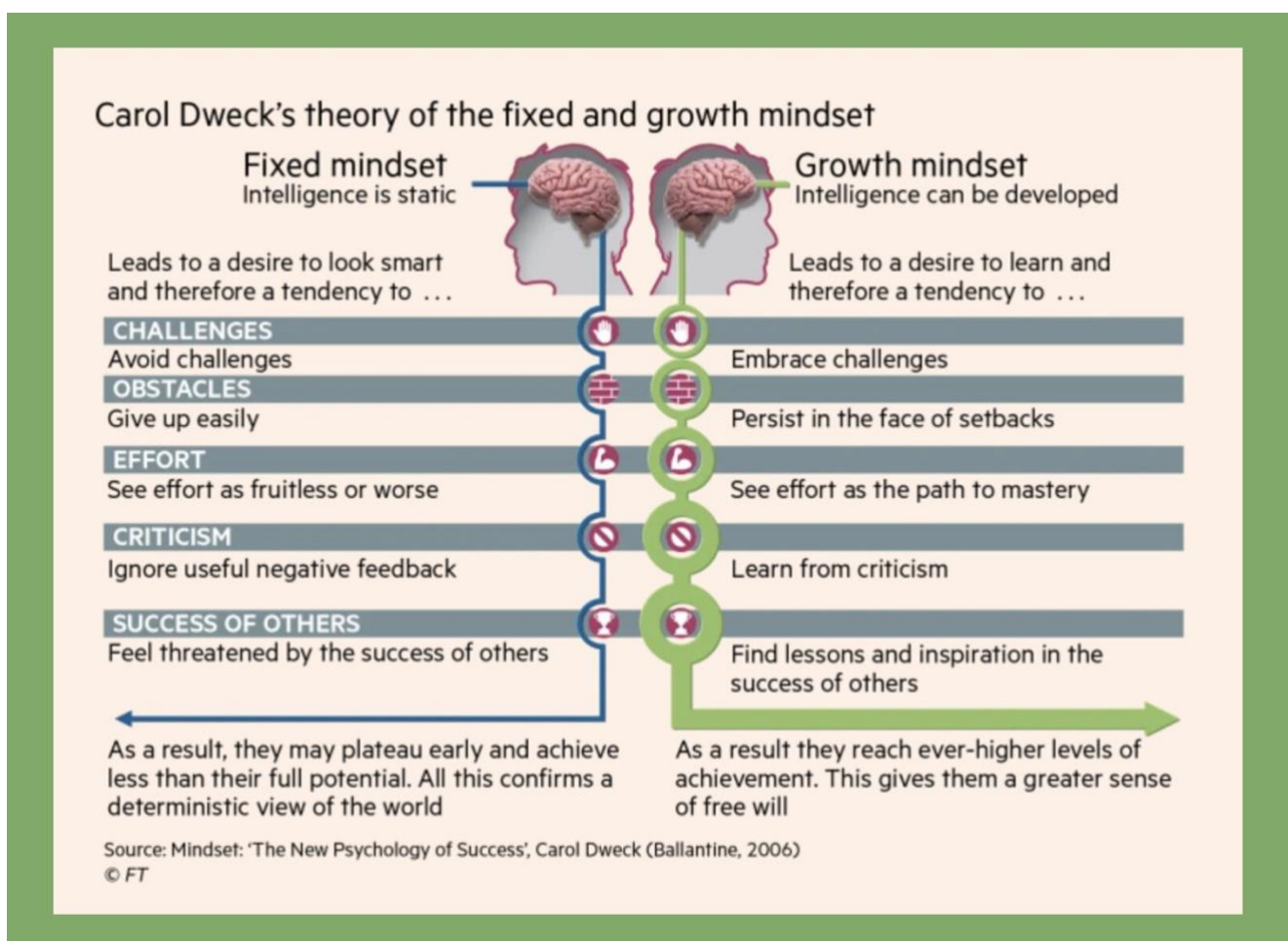
FACULTY OF  
ENGINEERING & THE  
BUILT ENVIRONMENT

*“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”  
— Viktor E. Frankl, Man’s Search for Meaning*

Since the outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), you may be experiencing a range of responses including heightened anxiety about your health, the health of others, as well as huge uncertainty about what the future holds.

The pandemic is something that no-one in our time has lived through. This crisis offers an opportunity for huge growth, asking you to develop resilience and look at ways in which you are relating to yourself and others. It will necessitate you digging deep within yourself; self-regulating more than usual; maturing sooner; being extra disciplined with yourself and others; self-soothing; making requests of others; and both seeking and offering support more than you are used to.

The good news is that you have choice. There are ways that you can be in control and manage the situation you are in. Put energy into what you can control. Choose a growth mindset over a fixed, victim mindset.



# ONLINE LEARNING STRATEGIES



*Below are strategies that could assist you in achieving a balanced, proactive way of working at home so that you can strive towards being the best, most knowledgeable professional in your field:*

## ACCEPTANCE

The pandemic brings discomfort and disruption to our lives. Use this as an opportunity to become an observer of yourself and gently notice how you are reacting to what is happening. Are you: feeling increased anxiety or worry, complaining excessively, feeling boredom, increased irritability, procrastination more, being overly controlling, getting easily distracted, or even in denial that the pandemic is here. The reality is that your 2020 academic year at UCT is not what you thought it would be. You can however play a role in co-creating how this plays out, together with the UCT academic administration, staff and your fellow students.

## MAINTAIN A ROUTINE

Maintain a stable routine and follow it closely. Routine and structure can help you feel in control and empowered to work creatively with the precious resource of **time**. Distinguish between your weekdays and weekends and develop a schedule for each. Given the demands of your degree, ensure that you spend a good part of the weekend working too.

Wake at the same time daily, shower, dress as you would for campus, tidy your room, set a time when you will begin working and stick to it, include breaks for tea, lunch, body breaks, social media breaks, exercise (eg stretching, doing squats, skipping), and leisure time (eg listening to music, dancing, journaling).

Notice the length of time you are spending on your academic work. Try to work for 45 minutes with a 15-minute break. If this feels challenging at first, start with 20 minutes of work and a 10-minute break. Within an hour you would have worked for 40 minutes then. This is called the Pomodoro technique - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNBmG24djoY>

## PREPARING YOUR WORKSPACE

Make a conscious choice about the space where you will work. Make it comfortable, attractive, ensure that the seating is comfortable, that the lighting is good, noise is minimal, etc. Decorate the space with inspirational objects or pictures.

## NOTICING YOUR HABITUAL PATTERNS

At the end of each day, journal in a notebook preferably (or on your phone) reflections on how you have used your time. What worked well today? What has gotten in the way of you being more productive? What can you do differently tomorrow?

We have habitual patterns and the only way to change those that don't serve us is to notice what we are doing, and this is where behaviour change can happen. Notice your patterns – e.g. here I am doing this again, being distracted with my phone. Work with this in the moment and change your habitual pattern. As you observe yourself more and more you will feel the power of being more in control and doing things that better serve you. But it takes practice and a close observation of yourself.

Procrastinating and being distracted are self-sabotaging mechanisms. Notice these in yourself and choose to do something differently that will take you away from these habitual patterns. Minimise time consuming distractions such as watching series, social media, etc. Rather build social media time into your schedule and stick to it.

## SET AN INTENTION

When you wake in the morning, rise slowly from your bed, and put a smile on your face, regardless of how you are feeling. We can shift the way we think and feel by changing how we hold our body (Wendy Palmer's Leadership Embodiment).

Now set an intention for the day. What would you like to stretch yourself with today? Start small, for example an intention to begin working an extra hour more today; to start a short 15-minute exercise routine, etc.

If you are struggling to maintain a routine, each day just start again. Watch this inspiring clip of Richie McCaw, retired New Zealand rugby player. A reminder to keep making a new intention, and start again - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YtYgIRit10>

## BEING SUPPORTED

Get support from family and friends. This is very important as maintaining changes in our behaviour is more likely to happen when we are supported. However, to do this, firstly reflect on what exactly you are needing from others. It is not enough to expect them to support you. You need to be clear on what support means for you. What requests do you need to make of others that will leave you feeling supported? What boundaries are you needing? What can family or friends do (and not do) that can facilitate your learning? (eg requesting that they respect your work schedule; letting them know when you are available and when you do not want to be disturbed; having a friendly do not disturb sign on your door, etc). Some challenging conversations may be needed if relationships are strained, but this is an opportunity to engage others and garner their support. They too can express what they are needing from you.

## CONNECT WITH BUDDIES

Working at home over a long period of time can be a lonely experience. It is important to be in contact with your peers, in one-to-one meetings as well as group meetings. Schedule regular check in times to connect with each other but also to work together. Rotate who takes the lead in initiating the contact times. Choose your buddies wisely – you want to have contact with people

who are encouraging, positive and striving to do the best they can. Motivate each other, be accountable to each other, have check-ins at a mutual times to go over work, someone take on the role of time keeper, etc.

Practice compassion for others. We are all in this together and this is a time to show care and concern for those around you. Reach out to assist with those struggling with areas of work which you have mastered and make requests of others if you need help.

## SELF-CARE

Pay attention to your body. This includes good nutrition. Reduce your sugar intake because the mind functions less well with excess sugar.

Have a weekly exercise routine. Too little physical activity negatively impacts on mental acuity. Here are 10 minute long exercises which can be done in small spaces

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F\\_hfFHX\\_YhM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_hfFHX_YhM)

A series of half hour physical movement sessions will be recorded and available for EBE students to access when it is convenient for you. If you are interested in accessing these, please email [nazeema.ahmed@uct.ac.za](mailto:nazeema.ahmed@uct.ac.za) for the links.

Establish good sleeping habits as inadequate sleep contributes to poor mental functioning. The 4-7-8 breathing technique has been found to be effective for those struggling with insomnia -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkApvfRgeNw> If you are interested in reading more about good sleeping here is an article to read <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/324417#how-to-do-it>

Avoid smoking, drugs, alcohol, stimulants, and appetite suppressants.

## MANAGING INFORMATION

Focus on reliable, authentic sources around the pandemic, but limit the amount of information you have access to as too much can leave you feeling overly anxious. The news can become a distraction and much of what is happening is out of your control. If you are wanting information on the corona virus, visit reliable sources such as the [World Health Organization](https://www.who.int/) and look at this [guide to coping with stress during the Covid-19 outbreak](#)

## NOTICING YOUR THOUGHTS AND MOOD

Anxiety is part of living, so finding ways in which to best manage it is helpful. Regulating emotions involves accepting feelings and realising that they come and go. You do not need to be attached to them. Below are some ideas to help with managing anxiety.

- Write about what you are feeling anxious about. Now ask yourself this recurring question 'what would happen then?' and see what you find.
- Think of your thoughts and emotions as passing clouds. Develop a relationship to them. They are not you. You are *having* thoughts and feelings and these change over time.
- Notice where your mind goes. How helpful is this? You have control over how much you let your mind dwell on things. Reframe the thoughts you are having. Ask yourself if there is another way to think about the situation. If you have difficulty letting go of thoughts, consider practicing a mindfulness practice.

- Anxiety resides in our body and is best managed by focusing on your physiology. Regular, daily mindfulness practices have been found to be effective in reducing anxiety and depression. It helps us notice when we are caught up in anxious thoughts. You can then do something about by interrupting this pattern. Choose a regular time to do the mindfulness, attach it to an activity for example before starting to work, after breakfast, etc. Set a reminder on your phone. Forgetting is a big part of why we struggle to develop a new behaviour. The deeper you breathe into your belly (and not surface chest breathing) the more relaxed you will feel, as the parasympathetic nervous system comes on board. Your breath is an anchor you can return to.
- Here are two short guided mindfulness practices.  
3-Minute Breathing Space—Regular Version (05:02; John Teasdale) - [stream](#) - [download](#)

6-minute mindfulness <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oz7OxbAgrGM>

There are also wonderful Apps you can download of your phone. Students have reported these ones to be helpful. Headspace <https://www.headspace.com/>; Insight Timer <https://insighttimer.com/>; Calm <https://www.calm.com/>

- Another fantastic meditation resource can be found here: [Here is a Dropbox link](#) to download Melli's 7 Days of Mindfulness audio course. In addition, a couple of extra meditations can be downloaded here: <https://mrsmindfulness.com/meditation-audios/>

# SUPPORT

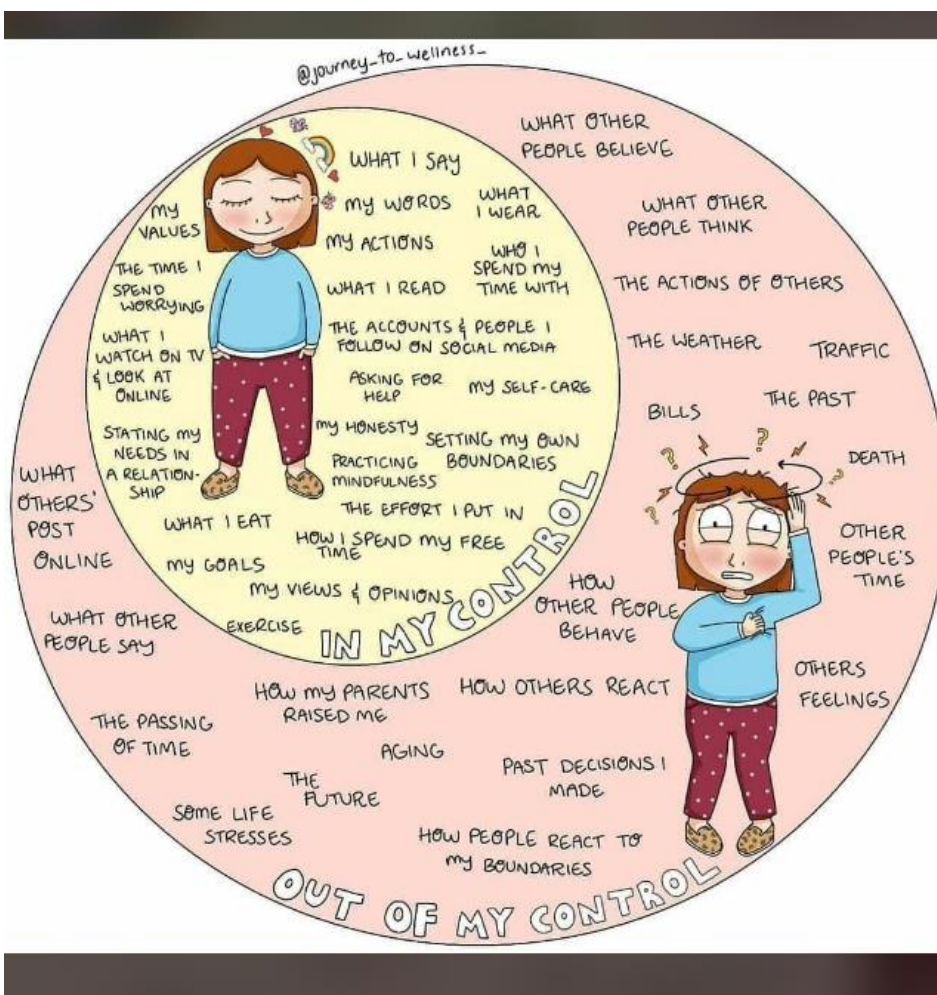
RESOURCES AVAILABLE



For support of your emotional or psychological or medical health contact the Student Wellness Service by sending an email to: [sws@uct.ac.za](mailto:sws@uct.ac.za)

If you would like to schedule an appointment with an EBE psychologist, please email [nazeema.ahmed@uct.ac.za](mailto:nazeema.ahmed@uct.ac.za) Include in your email the department the best times of the day that you have internet connectivity. An appointment will then be set up for online consultations.

You can call the South African Depression and Anxiety Group **0800 171 171** (toll-free from a Telkom line 24 hours a day) or send an SMS to **31393** to request a call back; or email [office@anxiety.org.za](mailto:office@anxiety.org.za) for a counsellor to call you back. The [SADAG website](#) has useful information about how to cope with the daily stresses of working during the national lockdown. You can also visit the [SADAG Facebook page](#) to access the Daily Expert Q&A from 13:00 to 14:00.





# GROWTH MINDSET



## MINDSET SHIFT FROM LOCKDOWN TO BECOMING OPEN-MINDED

### MIND UNDER LOCKDOWN STATE

### AN OPEN-MINDED PERSON

I am stuck at home.

I am safe at home.

I am spending more time with my family

I will run out of items. I cannot buy anything new.

I have enough at home. Let me use it wisely.

Let me reduce, recycle and re-use.

Everything is shutting down. I'm panicking!

The most important places - grocery stores, medical facilities etc. are still open.

My distance learning is still happening. I am not missing out on my learning.

There is too much insecurity. I feel anxious and unsafe.

While I cannot control the situation, I can control my actions by keeping myself safe - by washing my hands regularly, by taking all precautions and by staying at home.

I can keep myself healthy by practicing mindfulness, exercising every day, eating nutritious food and sleeping well. I will also do everything that makes me happy while I am at home.