

Self-care tips for working students

There are thousands of distance learning and part-time students in South Africa who balance study, work and family life daily. The drive and determination of these students - who often hold down fulltime jobs successfully while advancing their career goals - is hugely admirable and worthy of respect.

But it is important that these working students periodically take time to reflect and regroup, to ensure they are taking adequate care of their personal, emotional and mental wellbeing, to avoid burnout.

“As a distance learning student who is also working, you may be struggling to find the time and energy to keep up with your studies, your family, and your work responsibilities in equal measure. But ensuring that you are taking care of yourself is the first step on the road to ensuring academic success and achieving your career goals, while maintaining your mental, physical and emotional health,” says Siyavuya Makubalo, marketing manager at Oxbridge Academy.



Siyavuya Makubalo, marketing manager at Oxbridge Academy. Image supplied

Makubalo says having many competing responsibilities can mean that working students feel like they're being pulled in so many different directions, but that keeping the end goal in mind, while practising self-care, can really smooth the path ahead.

“ It is important to learn to take care of yourself, because while putting yourself first sometimes can be a challenge, it's essential for creating a healthy work-study-life balance. ”

Prioritising time

Makubalo says by students prioritising their time, taking care of their physical health, taking guilt-free breaks, staying connected and managing stress, students can ensure they perform academically while holding down a job.

“Balancing work and college can be overwhelming, so it’s important to plan your time carefully. Create a schedule that includes study time, work hours, and other important commitments. Make sure to set realistic goals and prioritise tasks that are most important.”

Planning and sticking to a schedule can unfortunately be further hampered by loadshedding, so this has to be taken into account, she says.



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“By communicating with your college where necessary, planning ahead, using alternative power sources, downloading course materials, finding alternative study spaces and staying organised, you will be able to overcome this challenge.”

Physical health

It is also important to take care of one’s physical health.

“Good physical health is essential for academic and career success, so make sure you eat as healthy and balanced as possible, get enough sleep and exercise regularly. Even small changes, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator, and packing your own lunch for work, can have compounding positive effects.”

When taking breaks, enjoy them to the full and without guilt.

“Juggling work, studies and family life is stressful, but ultimately rewarding when you reap the fruits of your efforts,” says Makubalo.

“But you don’t have to be in a flat spin for the duration of your studies. Make sure that when you take your planned breaks, whether that be during the day, over weekends, or on holidays, you can relax and disconnect completely to recharge your batteries.”

Help is available

Finally, help is available and should be sought when needed.

“A good college that puts their students first will have support structures in place for students who require them – whether that be academic support or otherwise. Reach out and ask for help when you need it.”

Makubalo says while distance learning students who are also in employment face a unique set of challenges, they are also

positioning themselves uniquely and competitively in the jobs market comparative to their peers, while continuing to earn an income.

“By developing strong time management skills, seeking out social connections and support where necessary, and maintaining motivation and their holistic wellbeing, these students set themselves up to make a success of their academic and ultimately their professional pursuits.”

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