

Chapter 1 Adult Learner Awareness



Mary Shier

Student Success
An Invaluable Resource for
College and University Students



This resource is a chapter from the book, *Student Success: An Invaluable Resource for College and University Students* by Mary Shier, published by BCcampus Open Education, illustrated by Gordon Shier.

Note that page numbers reflect the page numbers in the full textbook.

The full text can be found at opentextbc.ca/studentsuccess, where it can be read online, downloaded, printed, or ordered.

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Introduction

So glad you're here!

Congratulations! Whether you are starting a course on Student Success, or just reading a resource on Student Success, you have made an important decision in moving forward in reaching your goals. The goal of this text is to provide ideas, suggestions, and skills that will aid you in being a successful adult learner that will find your studies fruitful and rewarding.

If you've decided to move towards your goals through education, you will want to be successful in your studies. You will be investing a great deal of time and resources into your education, so it makes sense to get the most out of it. To be successful not only means achieving good grades, but it means learning useful concepts that will help you in your career and life. This book will help you to learn many things which can contribute to your student success. Take from it the things you feel will be most beneficial to you in your educational journey.

Depending on what kind of student you have been up to this point, achieving student success may mean you may have to do things differently than you have in the past. Some of you have very negative learning experiences which may cause concern over being a student again. Learning as an adult is often a very different experience and many students are surprised at how they can be successful now that they are adults and focused. Everyone has different strengths, different rates of learning, different learning disabilities and abilities, and each learner comes with different levels of education. All these things need to be taken into account to be successful. Learning as an adult is exciting. This module will focus on the many aspects of adult learning that will impact your success.

This module about adult learner awareness helps you identify the specific challenges you may face as an adult learner as well as recognize the advantages of your life experience to enrich your adult learning. It will help you realize the responsibilities of post-secondary education, many of which differ from those of high school. It will also help you evaluate different aspects of yourself in relation to returning to school as well as the impact of your returning to school on those around you that you care about. This module will also discuss many aspects of personal wellness which will help you to stay healthy and keep your



Starting post-secondary education should fill you with anticipation and excitement.

life in balance as you do your studies. Finally, you will create a personal action plan to incorporate the many aspects of adult learning and to move forward in your educational goals.

Learning Objectives

In this chapter on “Adult Learner Awareness,” students will:

- Describe the challenges and advantages of adult learning and life-long learning.
- Describe student responsibilities in a college/university environment.
- Evaluate the spiritual, physical, intellectual, and emotional dimensions of self in relation to returning to school.
- Assess the impact of returning to school on family, friends, and co-workers.
- Investigate personal wellness (support networks, nutrition, fitness, stress, and habits) and recognize its impact on learning.
- Create a learning action plan.

1.1 Adult Learning

Challenges and Fears

Learning as an adult is much different than learning as a youth in school. It has many challenges. Many of you will be taking courses at the same time as working, raising children, managing a household, or being involved in many community activities. Success in college will require balancing your obligations; time management will be crucial. It is important to be on top of your schedule and responsibilities and to ensure you are setting realistic goals for completion.

Many adults are very nervous when they first start in college. You may be asking yourself many questions. Will I be able to succeed? Will people think I'm stupid? I've been out of school so long- will I be able to learn and remember things? Don't worry. You are not alone! Many students experience these feelings of anxiety and fear. You need to know that you are already a big step ahead of many people, because you have already made a commitment to move forward. It may have been nerve wracking to first inquire about getting started in post-secondary courses. For each one of you who has actually started taking steps (like reading this chapter), there are many more who have only thought about improving their education and haven't made that first step and keep putting it off until another day. Congratulations! You are on your way.



Math class at College of the Rockies

It may help you to know that many students who have typically not done well academically in the

past are pleasantly surprised at their ability to do well as an adult. This is due to many things. Often in elementary or high school, students have many issues which can prevent them from being successful. These include: undetected learning disabilities, health issues, personal issues, family crises, poor attendance, motivation issues, social pressures, bullying, abuse, dysfunctional families – the list goes on. These kinds of stresses can affect their grades negatively. And often students mistakenly begin to think that they are not capable. They can equate poor grades with being a poor student rather than making the connection that circumstances played a huge role in their ability to get good grades. It is very exciting to see students enjoy success when their circumstances have changed and they are motivated to succeed to reach their goals.

Of course, many adult students are also dealing with some very difficult personal circumstances of their own, and they are advised to access student support services and make an appointment with an education advisor to find out options for support.

You'll be excited once you get started and realize how much you can enjoy learning.

Advantages of Learning as an Adult

As well as challenges of being an adult learner, there are also some salient advantages. Some of the most prevalent advantages to learning as an adult include:

- **It's your choice.** No-one is making you go to school. You are *choosing* to go to school. As opposed to the typical comment from teenagers who say that they don't see the point of going to school, you actually do.
- **You are motivated.** You have a goal. You know what you need to meet that goal.
- **You have life experience.** Life experience has helped you form your goals, teach you life lessons, and give you a context for learning. It is this life experience that will help you make sense of the many concepts you will learn about.
- **You are mature.** Adults are much better at buckling down and going after what they want. They are not as distracted by peer pressure, socializing, and temptations. With maturity comes wisdom, and you can incorporate that into your learning.
- **You are in control.** You make your own decisions. You choose your activities and commitments. You control your schedule.

Your Past Educational Experience

It is important to understand how college and university is different from high school and how well your own past educational experiences have prepared you for what you will experience. This is another way in which entering post-secondary education “with your eyes wide open” will prove beneficial.

College is a unique experience for all students—whether you just graduated from high school or are returning to education after years of working or raising a family. You are transitioning from one form of

education to another. Some students have difficulty because of the differences between college and high school.

Generally speaking, the university and college experience is usually different from high school in these ways:

- Time management is more important because of varying class and work schedules and other time commitments.
- Instructors seldom seek you out to offer extra help if you're falling behind. You are on your own and expected to do the work, meet deadlines, and so on, without someone looking over your shoulder.
- There may be no attendance policy for classes. You are expected to be mature enough to come to class without being "motivated" by fear of penalties.
- Many classes are large, making it easy to feel lost in a crowd.
- Many instructors, especially in large classes, teach by lecture—which can be difficult for those whose high school teachers interacted a great deal with students.
- Many post-secondary courses require more study time and require you to work on your own.
- Your social and personal life may be less supervised. Younger students may experience a sudden increase in freedom to do what they want.
- You will meet people from more diverse backgrounds. This can open up your perspective and enrich your life.
- Students vary widely in terms of age, experience, education, work experience before university, cultural background, family, and other factors.
- All of these differences, along with a change in living situation for many students, can lead to emotional changes—both positive and negative.



Colleges have students from all over the world with diverse backgrounds.

What does all this add up to? For some students, the sudden independence and freedom can lead in negative directions: sleeping late, skipping classes, missing deadlines, failing to study adequately for tests, and so on. Other students who are highly motivated and work hard in their classes may also have difficulty transitioning to the higher academic standards of post-secondary. Suddenly, you're responsible for everything. That can be thrilling but also a challenge to get used to. All the chapters in this book will help you make this transition successfully.

Exercise: Adult Learning

Think about your own educational experiences and answer the following questions.

1. What are some challenges that you have had in school previously that you are concerned about now that you are returning to school?
2. What are some new challenges that you will face that are unique to being an adult going to school?
3. What are some things you would like to do differently than your previous educational experiences?
4. What are some things you have going in your favour (advantages) that you will have going for you this time as you return to school?

Life-long Learning

Taking all of these things into account will help you embrace the idea of learning as an adult, and will help you let go of some of the old patterns and habits you had as a youth. Some people feel bad about going to school as an adult, thinking that it somehow represents failure to do it earlier. But in reality, those who intentionally keep on learning throughout their lives are the ones who continually upgrade their skills, learn new things, and are interesting people. Changing careers throughout life is a reality in this day and age. People go back to school to change careers at many ages. People go back to school to become more specialized at work, feed a new interest, or change their path. People engage in professional development throughout their careers to stay on top of technology, emerging trends, and current issues. People take workshops and go to conferences on issues they are interested and engaged in, just to stay on top of current teachings. People read books and have community groups to challenge each other and learn. Never be ashamed of learning! It keeps us young and informed.



You are never too old to learn.

The thing to remember is that life-long learning means that we constantly challenge ourselves, improve ourselves, and keep ourselves growing. Life-long learning is a great thing and continually contributes to our personal growth.

There are often specific classes available for seniors. Learning about computers for many seniors is exciting and challenging.

“Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death.”

— Albert Einstein.

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- Text has also been adapted from Upgrading for Academic and Career Entry (UACE) Student Orientation Handbook by Mary Shier, College of the Rockies. Adapted by Mary Shier.

1.2 Student Responsibilities

Students have many responsibilities in a post-secondary environment. Many of them are responsibilities they didn't need to worry about when they were in high school, or at least to a much lesser extent. When you start college or university, you are responsible for your own learning, and if you recently finished high school that means taking care of business you may never have considered before.

- **Administrative duties.** You are responsible for making sure you have done all the paperwork, which includes applying for your program, scheduling and registering for your courses, applying for a student loan if needed, paying tuition and fees before the deadline, and contacting student services if needed.
- **Time management.** Post-secondary education requires discipline and organization. Many people have good intentions but never complete because they just don't make time for it. You need to schedule your schooling into your plan. Set aside specific times to commit to your course/s and record it in your scheduler (day-timer, calendar, phone – whatever you use to schedule your appointments.) Then stick to it as if it was an appointment. Everyone is busy and has a complicated schedule. Everyone seems to be doing too much. But in the end everyone manages to make time for the things that are most important to them. Your level of success will depend on how much your education is a priority for you.
- **Financial management.** You need to manage and control your finances to ensure that you don't have any unexpected financial crises mid-semester. Using a budget, and making sure you have identified sources of income such as employment, student loans, savings, scholarships and bursaries, are vital to a good financial plan.

Author's story

I remember a student who spent her entire student loan the week she received it. I'm sure she felt that she *needed* the things she bought, but she failed to follow a financial plan that would ensure success. Though she worked hard to get into her program, she “blew it.” Her financial struggles resulted in her failing out of the program in her first semester.

— Mary Shier, College of the Rockies

- **Complete tasks** (readings, assignments, labs, essays, test preparations) and keep up. You need to take charge of your learning. You are responsible to make sure that you understand what you are supposed to. It is your responsibility to ask for help when you need it.
- **Attendance.** Unlike elementary or high school, no one is monitoring your attendance and furthermore it is completely your responsibility. No one will call your mom if you don't show up. You are the only one who will suffer. Attendance is critical in keeping up with course

demands from the first day of class. Playing catch up all semester is frustrating and discouraging. Attendance is important whether you're taking a face-to-face class and need to attend lectures and labs, or whether you are doing an online course that requires occasional online conferences or student discussion forums. Even if you are doing a distance course that is self-paced, you need to establish a schedule that will ensure you meet your goals, and then "attend" regularly to that schedule. Commit to "being there."

- **Study regularly.** By working regularly on your courses you are more likely to make steady progress, and can better ensure completion of your courses. Working daily will help you to retain important ideas and concepts. Start now and work regularly! Daily practice is more effective than infrequent marathon sessions.
- **Balance life commitments.** This is more than time management. This is making sure there is a healthy balance in your life. There is no point in striving for one goal if all the others crash in the process.
- **Self-monitor.** Constantly monitor whether or not you are on track with your goals. Are you practicing good study skills, balancing personal wellness, on-track with important relationships? Take stock every now and then to make sure you are doing alright.
- **Employ strong study skills.** Use techniques of review, practice, repetition, questioning, consistency, etc. to ensure strong learning. Use learning preferences to your advantage.
- **Access support services.** Access student services early. Don't wait until you are in deep trouble. Access your support network and keep the lines of communication open.

Exercise: Student Responsibilities

Of the student responsibilities listed above (or of other responsibilities you think of) name the top two you think will be most important for you to focus on to attain student success and state why.

1.3 Dimensions of Self

Succeeding in college is rather like succeeding in life. It's really much more about you than it is about school. So, the most important place to start is to consider why you're here, what matters to you, and what you expect to get out of it. Even if you have already thought about these questions, it's good to reaffirm your commitment to your plan as we begin to consider what's really involved in being a student.

What's Your Plan?

Take a few minutes and write down short answers to the questions below. Be honest with yourself, and write down what you really feel. You are not writing for an instructor here—so don't answer what you think someone *expects* to hear—and you are not being graded on your answers! This is for you.

Exercise: Your Post-secondary Plan

1. How long do you anticipate being in college or university?
2. How many courses will you need to take per term to finish school in your planned time period?
3. What do you anticipate will be the most difficult part of completing your program?
4. Are you confident you will be able to overcome any possible difficulties in completing your program?

Were you able to easily answer the questions? How confident do you feel about your plan?

These are important questions to think about for the simple reason that students who have a clear plan and who are prepared to overcome possible obstacles that may arise along the way are much more likely to succeed. In other words, just thinking in a positive way about your future can help that future come true!

What Matters to You?

The word *values* refers to “important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable.”¹ What makes you feel good? What things would

1. What are Values? (2016). *Business Dictionary*. Retrieved from: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/values.html>

you be doing if you had all the time, money, and opportunities in the world? Questions like these help us define our own values.



Author's story

I am very fortunate to live in the Rocky Mountains. It is absolutely gorgeous, and I never take it for granted: the stunning views, the fresh air, the smells of nature, the sounds of birds singing, the wildlife. I love that I can literally step outside my door and go for a beautiful walk in the woods. I can also go for a hike to a mountain peak with friends and be home for dinner. I value this time immensely, and it is an activity I wouldn't willingly give up. It contributes to my physical, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of self and helps me be more effective in all areas. Taking time for hiking up mountains pays off enormously. What do you value that is non-negotiable?

— Mary Shier, College of the Rockies

Thinking about your own values can help you know what you want from life and from your education. Take a moment and consider the list of things in the following activity that are valued by some people. For each value, rate how important that thing is to you.

Exercise: Your values

Following is a list of things that different people say they value. For each item on this list, indicate how important it is to *you* by ranking it as very important (5), not important (0), or somewhere in between.

What do you value?

| Value | Ranking (From 0 to 5) |
|--|-----------------------|
| Making a good income | |
| Having good friends | |
| Learning new things about your interests | |
| Having a nice car | |
| Having intelligent conversations | |
| Staying current with the news | |
| Playing sports | |
| Hanging out with friends | |
| Playing computer or video games | |
| Cooking | |
| Online social networking | |
| Sleeping | |
| Reading a good book | |
| Travelling to new places | |
| Shopping | |
| Being liked by others | |
| Studying and reading textbooks | |
| Having nice clothing | |
| Watching television | |
| Enjoying time alone | |
| Getting out in nature | |
| Working your job | |
| Looking good, personal hygiene | |
| Meeting new people | |

| Value | Ranking (From 0 to 5) |
|--|-----------------------|
| Going to movies or entertainments | |
| Eating nice meals out | |
| Exercising, being physically active | |
| Being your own boss | |
| Having a positive romantic relationship | |
| Engaging in your hobbies | |
| Setting your own schedule | |
| Volunteering your time for a good cause | |
| Cleaning house | |
| Attending classes | |
| Going to religious services | |
| Talking on the telephone, texting, email | |
| Going to parties | |
| Participating in clubs, organized activities | |
| Other: _____ | |
| Other: _____ | |

Look back at the values and activities you rated highly (4 or 5), which probably gave a good indication of how you enjoy spending your time. But now look at these things you value in a different way. Think about how each relates to how you think you need to manage your time effectively while in school. Most students feel they don't have enough time for everything they like to do. Do some of the activities you value most contribute to your college experience, or will they distract you from being a good student?

Students who enter college or university with their eyes open and who think about their own values and motivations will be more successful. If you have a good idea of what you want from life, the rest of it can be learned. In this book you'll learn how to stay motivated, manage your time well, study well and many other things that will help lead you to success.

As you consider your values, it can be useful to think of them in terms of the dimensions of self: physical, spiritual, intellectual and emotional. Changes in your goals and routine will impact all these dimensions. Have you considered the impact returning to/continuing in school will have on the different dimensions of your self?

For example, the intellectual side of yourself will likely be stimulated and stretched. However, if you normally tend to spend a lot of time with friends but have to cut down on socializing time in order to implement good study skills, how will that impact your emotional self? Can you incorporate study groups into your study plan to help feed the emotional self's need for interaction with people? If you

need to stimulate the physical self through fitness, can you plan to review and listen to lectures while going for a run or bike ride? It may just take getting into the habit of downloading lectures onto your cell phone and taking them on the go. What are some ways to keep your spiritual self nourished through your demanding load at school?

Exercise: Dimensions of Self

Evaluate the spiritual, physical, intellectual, and emotional dimensions of self in relation to returning to school.

1. For each dimension, evaluate how important it is to you currently and the kinds of the things you currently do to nourish these dimensions (e.g. exercise, read, attend church, etc.).
2. For each dimension, evaluate how these activities and practices may change or be impacted when in school. This could be due to time limitations or change in location or other factors. Which dimensions may suffer the most while you are in school?
3. What adjustments can you make to minimize negative impacts and maximize a healthy balance in your dimensions of self? What are some sacrifices you may need to make in order to make it all work?

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1.4 Impact on Your Network

The decision to return to school doesn't only impact you. It impacts family, friends, and co-workers. It often means that you are no longer as available to people as you normally are. This can impact others in numerous ways. Sometimes people are resentful because they feel they don't have as much of you as they are accustomed to. Others are incredibly supportive and step up in ways that you never expected. One thing you can count on is that it will change things. You will need to keep the lines of communication open and not just pretend everything is as usual.

Families need to understand why your goals are important not just for you, but for the whole family. Have discussions not only about what you want to accomplish, but why. Identify the outcomes you see from doing this. That will help your loved ones get on board. Families need to discuss how the family will support you in your goals. Often that means a redistribution of chores and responsibilities. For example, teenagers can take responsibility for a regular meal night. It's important to discuss things in advance so expectations are clear. Having a family that supports you in your goals can be a huge boost to your success.



Eating meals together around the table is quality time.

Look for signs that your schooling is impacting those around you – either positively or negatively. Whether at home, at work, or in important relationships, you may need to reaffirm relationships so that others aren't hurt by the fact that you have replaced time with them for time investing into your future. Reassure them that it is temporary. Paint a picture of how things will change once you've finished your

schooling. Thank people for stepping up to the plate for you, whether it's at work or at home, a little or a lot. Gratitude goes a long way.

Exercise: Impact on Others

Think about the people who are important to you that will be most impacted by you going to school.

1. Make a chart with three columns.
2. In the first column, list the people who will be impacted the most and note their relation to you (e.g.: daughter, co-worker, etc.).
3. In the second column, note specifically the impact it will have on each person.
4. In the third column, note what you can reasonably do to alleviate negative impacts or enhance positive ones.

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1.5 Personal Wellness



Personal wellness means being physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually healthy. A healthy lifestyle helps balance all these aspects to achieve wellness. Your decisions and choices will impact both your short-term and long-term wellness. It is important to take into account your overall personal wellness in order to increase the potential for academic success in your educational program and get the greatest benefit out of it. In this section you will learn about some of the various aspects affecting your wellness, such as nutrition, fitness and lifestyle choices. You will assess your personal wellness and identify goals for improvement.

Physical Health



There are many lifestyle choices that we make that impact our personal wellness; negative choices can become vices and cause addictions that can impede wellness for a few hours or lifelong, as well as positive choices which can promote health and help form healthy habits. Some of the most rudimentary lifestyle choices are choosing to nurture and protect your body.

- **Get enough sleep** every night and try to be consistent about your sleeping routine. Studies show this helps your brain function more effectively.
- **Keep hydrated.** Drink plenty of water throughout the day. Avoid pop, alcohol, and sugary drinks.
- **Eat a balanced, nutritious diet.** Good nutritious food and a well-balanced diet will fuel your body. Avoid junk food and processed food.
- **Exercise regularly** and stay fit.
- **Keep alcohol intake reasonable.** Over-consumption of alcohol reduces the ability to function efficiently or think clearly. It can cause devastating accidents. It can lead to alcoholism, which can destroy families and relationships, and can eventually lead to liver failure and death.
- **Don't smoke!** It causes lung cancer, emphysema, chronic cough, shortness of breath, and dull skin, and it causes you to smell bad.
- **Be cautious about vaping.** New information is coming out connecting vaping with serious lung diseases. It is also causing nicotine addictions in young people. Be cautious until more information is known about the causes.
- **Don't do non-pharmaceutical drugs.** They mess with your body's ability to do its job, and can cause addiction.
- **Avoid harmful habits** that can take over your life. Gambling can ruin a family's finances. Sexual addictions can ruin relationships, and unguarded promiscuity can result in unwanted sexually transmitted infections (STI's) or unwanted pregnancies.
- **Follow safety rules.** Buckle up. Wear your helmet. Use ladders carefully. Wear safety goggles, gloves and other protective equipment when required. These choices will help prevent unnecessary accidents that can have serious long-term effects.
- **Spend time outdoors** and get fresh air and sunshine. Fresh air and sunshine help give the body vitality and vitamin D, which provides numerous benefits.
- **Stay active.** Keep moving. Go for walks. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Ride your bike.
- **Stay home** when you are sick. Rest. It allows your body to fight and recover from illness, and keeps others safe. No one wants your illness, so stay home from work or school.
- **Be cautious about cell phone proximity.** Cell phone manufacturers recommend keeping your phone at least 5-15 mm away from your body. There are concerns about the dangers of radiation exposure, though the findings are inconclusive. If interested, see the CBC Marketplace video: The secret inside your cellphone (https://youtu.be/Wm69ik_Qdb8?si=7Xfe4HcGUUBfji9U).
- **Keep current** about newly discovered health dangers. Are you aware of any health dangers you didn't know about before?



Personal wellness includes nutrition.

Emotional Health

As well as looking after your physical health, it's also important to look after your emotional health. Emotional health keeps your heart in check, and helps you to keep your emotions reasonable. Here are some ways to stay emotionally healthy.

- **Don't hold onto grudges.** It helps to keep bitterness out of your heart.
- **Do things that bring you peace.** Maybe that's going for a nature walk or a hike in the forest.
- **Visit family and friends.** Get together with people you care about. This is always good for the heart. There is nothing like talking to a good friend and feeling known and understood.
- **Join a team.** Go curling or play recreational soccer. Meet new people while you learn a new skill and keep active.
- **Have some down time.** Sometimes it just feels good to let things go and watch a good movie. Rest, relax, cry, laugh and enjoy.
- **Be aware of your feelings and attitudes.** Accept them and acknowledge your thoughts. Use positive self-talk.
- **Develop your self-esteem.** Pursue things that matter to you. Get good at things that you care about. Give to causes that matter to you. Volunteer. These will help you feel good about yourself because you will feel like you are part of something important and are making a valuable contribution to the world.
- **Make work count.** Using your gifts, skills and talents helps work be fulfilling and meaningful.



Reach heights you didn't think were possible.

Mental Health

Your mental health can be impacted by hormonal or chemical imbalances, circumstances, and lifestyle. This is a complicated issue, and in cases of serious depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues, it is important to get medical help through a doctor, counsellor, psychiatrist, or other health professional. But everyone, no matter what level of mental health, needs to keep stock of their mental health. Keeping in a state of wellness can be helped by using these strategies:

- **Eat well.**
- **Sleep well** and keep a consistent schedule.
- **Exercise.** Staying active is good for your mental wellness.
- **Socialize.** Often when people struggle with mental health issues, they are tempted to lock themselves away from others, but this can often cause things to spiral downwards and get worse. Get together with people who make you feel good. Develop and strengthen relationships and enjoy a sense of belonging.
- **Meditate.** Sometimes meditating on positive things helps provide a concentrated focus which can improve mental wellness.
- **Keep informed.** Learn. Educate yourself about your condition, and stay abreast of common discoveries in the field.



Make time for the special people in your life.

- **Support groups.** Support groups bring together people of common mind and problems. They support and encourage each other and provide accountability. People are checking up on you to see that you are staying on track.
- **Trust someone.** Share with a friend. Have a confidante.
- **Avoid destructive influences.** Avoid websites which specifically exist to humiliate, berate, and degrade people. Yes, they exist, and they are toxic for your mental health.
- **Take action.** Make a decision to take action in ways that seem to be working for you. Be consistent in your plan.
- **Stay sharp.** Challenge yourself intellectually and continually learn new things. Be active and purposeful about lifelong learning.
- **Try new things.** Engage in creative and stimulating activities.

Spiritual Health

As well as looking after your physical, emotional, and mental health, you also need to look after your spiritual health. Your spirit is the deepest part of you – the part that makes you *you*. Spirituality is different for everyone. It is what provides you with meaning and purpose in your life. Your faith, values, beliefs, principles, and morals define your spirituality. For some, spirituality is nurtured through traditional religions, while for others it comes through relationships or being at peace with nature. Spiritual wellness brings inner peace, strength and hope. There are a number of ways to achieve spiritual wellness depending on your beliefs.



- **Align your actions with your beliefs.** There is nothing that can cause internal turmoil more than when your actions are in conflict with your moral standards. Stand up for what you believe. Being at peace within will nurture your spiritual health.
- **Nurture your faith.** Go to church, a bible study, a spiritual home group, or a worship service.
- **Pray.** If you believe in a god or higher power (or even if you're not sure if you do), take time to pray, talk, adore, communicate, beseech, ask, learn from, and listen to your god or higher power.
- **Meditate.** Take time to focus on things that matter to you.
- **Reflect.** Reflect on your experiences – both the joyful and the difficult ones. What did you learn from them? Can you grow from them?

- **Read.** Read your Bible, Quran, The Book of Mormon, or whatever your book of faith is. It may be a self-help book, an Alcoholics-Anonymous book, a Celebrate Recovery book, or a book on healing relationships. Read things that feed your spirit.
- **Sing or play.** If you can sing, sing your heart out to express yourself, express thankfulness, worship your god – communicate your inner feelings and thoughts. Or play a musical instrument to communicate your heart and your mood. There is something inherently profound about expressing yourself through music.
- **Forgive.** Practising forgiveness protects your heart from anger and bitterness.
- **Enjoy nature.** Take a walk in the forest, or along a river. Listen to the birds sing, or watch the chipmunks play.
- **Give.** Volunteer. Give to your community. Be a mentor. Focusing on others instead of yourself can bring great fulfillment.
- **Clarify meaning and purpose.** Know what matters to you. Define your values and beliefs. Be purposeful.



Mountainside Community Church in Fernie BC

What are some other ways you develop your spiritual health?



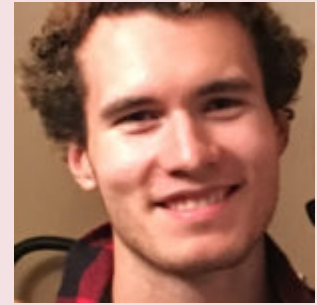
Aspects of Personal Wellness

Of course, in many of these aspects of personal wellness (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual) everyone will veer from good habits at least every now and then. But it's good to keep them in check and be conscious of the impact of the lifestyle choices you are making. Too much of anything can become a destructive force in your life. Do you spend too much time on your cell phone, watching TV, on social media, on the internet, or playing video games? Is there something you do in your life that you know you should scale back on?

Reflections of a Former Student: Positive and Negative Influences

Peers

One of the most difficult things to come to terms with regarding your personal well-being is the people you spend time with. Many of us choose our friends based simply on who makes us feel the most comfortable, but being comfortable with a bad situation can be a negative thing in the long term. While close bonds with your friends are extremely important, it's also vital to evaluate every once in a while: Do the people I spend time with uplift me? Do they reinforce habits, behaviours, and thought patterns that better my well-being, or are they holding me back? This isn't as simple as spending time with only "positive" people with nice things to say to you. This is about finding people who are willing to challenge your weaknesses and push you to succeed on your own terms, while also being aware of your emotional needs. Finding this balance is incredibly difficult, and letting go of unhealthy relationships can be one of the hardest things we'll ever have to do in life.



Gordon Shier

Media

Furthermore, in the modern world, this goes beyond just the people we give our time to, but also extends to our relationships with the various media we consume. Ask yourself, do you have a tendency to always engage with dark and violent movies, or depressing music? These things aren't inherently bad to enjoy, and can be a healthy emotional outlet during the times when we deal with our own dark emotions, but media consumption can be thought of like a diet, and needs to be balanced as such. The emotional connection we get from media can become addictive, and if you find yourself always coming back to media that puts you in a depressed or angry state of mind, try integrating a little more variety into your media diet. By no means does this mean abandoning your personal taste for horror movies, for example, but once in a while try to throw on a good rom-com, and engage with it emotionally rather than judgmentally. Contrast the experiences you have with different media, and you will have a fuller experience with your engagement as a whole. It may even make you appreciate your old favourites in a whole new light!

— Gordon Shier, illustrator and animator

What you're doing now in terms of personal health will have a significant influence on your academic performance. Setting healthy habits early on will improve both your academic performance and long-term health.

Considerable research has demonstrated that the basic elements of good health—nutrition, exercise, not abusing substances, stress reduction—are important for preventing cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers, and chronic respiratory diseases, known to be the causes of nearly two thirds of deaths worldwide¹. The key risk factors for these non-communicable diseases are high blood pressure, smoking, high BMIs, low physical activity levels, alcohol consumption, and poor diet.

Wellness is more than just avoiding disease, however. Wellness involves feeling good in every respect – in mind and spirit as well as in body. Good health habits also offer the benefits of increased energy;

1. The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(14\)60648-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)60648-6)

better focus; less stress; more resilience; less lost time due to colds, flu, infections and other illnesses; more restful sleep; and improved mental health.

This video from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention introduces the positive benefits exercise has on health including disease prevention, longevity, weight control, and better sleep. It also explains aerobic activity and muscle strength training.

Video: “Physical Activity Guidelines” (length 4:42)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lEutFrar1dI>

It’s also interesting to note how different dimensions of health affect each other. Physical health can impact emotional health and mental health.

Video: “Exercise and the Brain” (length 4:18)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: [#oembed-1](https://opentextbc.ca/studentsuccess/?p=54#oembed-1)

This neuroscientist, Wendy Suzuki, explains the positive impact exercise has on memory, learning, mood and health. In fact, it highlights the brain-changing effects of exercise in this fascinating Ted Talk.

Video: “The Brain-changing Effects of Exercise | Wendy Suzuki” (length 13:03)



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The next video talks about the effects exercise has on mental wellness for students.

Video: “Exercise and Mental Health” (length 3:35)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: [#oembed-3](https://opentextbc.ca/studentsuccess/?p=54#oembed-3)

Exercise: Personal Wellness

Consider the various aspects of personal wellness and health (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual) listed in this unit and take an inventory of your own wellness. In what ways are you doing well? What ways could use improvement? Can you set some short and long term goals for your personal wellness?

Your report should be approximately one page.



Hiking contributes to many aspects of wellness: physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional.

One activity can contribute to many aspects of personal wellness. An outing such as hiking incorporates physical exercise, fresh air, social time with friends, and time of contemplation in nature.

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1.6 Learning Action Plan

To create an action plan, you will take all the information you have gathered in all of the activities in this module, and you'll put it all together. At the end, you'll have a realistic plan to help you realize your goal of returning to school. The action plan is the map to the next part of your journey.

What are the benefits of having an action plan?

- It gives steps to follow to reach your goal.
- It gives you a timeline to reach your goals.
- It can help you keep on track.
- It gives you something that you can keep referring back to.

Creating your action plan is a helpful step towards reaching your goals.

Exercise: Action Plan

When creating your Action Plan you may involve the help of others who may offer helpful suggestions.

Use your word processing program to answer the following three questions. Fill in as much information as you can. You won't be able to complete the whole thing, but you will have enough information to finalize your plan to incorporate the concepts in this module. Review the exercises you have completed in each section of this module for ideas of things you need to include. Here are the categories to fill out:

1. What are the things that you need to do **now**? Include a timeline. For example:
 - Call and make an appointment to meet with an education advisor next Tuesday
 - Attend the scheduled information session Thursday at 3pm
 - Go to high school and get my transcripts on Monday afternoon
 - Start an exercise program this week
2. What are the upcoming things that you need to do **soon**? Include a timeline. For example:
 - Register for Biology 12 course in August for September start
 - Apply for Licensed Practical Nurse program by December 15
 - Apply for student loan next May
 - Once accepted into LPN program, apply for scholarships and bursaries
 - Explore daycare options in August, select best options, get added to those wait-lists

3. What **supports** can you access during your next steps? Make a list of supports, including both personal and academic supports. For example:

- My friend Jody said she could watch my kids one day a week.
- Financial Aid told me about a bursary I can apply for once accepted.
- My Uncle offered to help me with my book costs.
- The advisor told me about a study group I can access once in my program.
- My friend Krisha told me she can help me learn to make more nutritious meals.
- I can start going on healthy walks with my friend Satvir.

Make sure your plan meets *your* needs. Finalize your plan and set out your next steps. Remember, you can always adjust your plan as needed. You may discover other things that need to be added or adjusted.

Your journey is not over — it has just begun!

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1.7 Chapter Review and Activities

In this chapter, you have investigated many aspects impacting adult learning. Keep these factors in mind throughout your education so that you remind yourself to keep things in check. Your action plan should be a summary of things you need to be doing to help you with student success. Add to it as you go through the course and discover other helpful practices. Hopefully this module has inspired you to embrace the idea of adult learning.

Exercise: Adult Learning

1. Describe the aspects of adult learning from this chapter that impacted you the most. Explain why.
2. Describe what you expect will be your greatest challenges while you are going to post-secondary school.
3. What will be your main goals for contributing to your personal wellness during your time in school?
4. What do you look forward to as you embark on being an adult student?

Key Takeaways

- Advantages of adult learning include: motivation, flexibility, freedom, choice, maturity, and life experience.
- Challenges specific to adult learning include: time management, responsibility, balancing work and family, anxiety and fear.
- Life-long learning is a valiant goal. Continual learning at all ages keeps us sharp, interested, and current.
- There are numerous student responsibilities that you didn't have to consider in high school. It is all up to you now to make things happen!
- Knowing what your values are directly impacts your goals and, in turn, the spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual dimensions of self.
- Your decision to do post-secondary education will likely change things for those around you. It's important to consider the impacts your education will have on others and the things you can do to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive ones.

- Personal wellness includes physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental wellness, and these are all important to keep strong, to maximize learning and student success. Taking inventory of your strengths and areas to improve can help keep you balanced throughout your educational experience.