Dealing with Exam Results - Counselling Newsletter

Published: 28 June 2018

It's normal to feel a whole range of things before or after you get your exam results. How you feel is probably related to your expectations, and those of people close to you. There are ways you can deal with the pressure of expectations. No exam result is so important that it will stop you achieving your goals in the long term.

Dealing with exam results

Getting exam results is a stressful experience. It can be really devastating if your marks don't allow you to continue your degree as planned, or you feel like you haven't done well enough to live up to expectations – whether they're yours, your family's or someone else's. Whether you're waiting for results, or you've already got them, you could experience any of the following as part of 'exam panic': disappointment, stress, anxiety, happiness, guilt, confusion, sadness and/or anger. Remember that your exam results are just that – marks given to one thing you wrote down, once. They're not a number that reflects your worth, and they won't stop you doing what you want in the long-term. There may be options to sit a supplementary exam, transfer between courses/ institutions or make up subjects in the summer semester.

Failed a course?

Failing a course can be pretty tough particularly if you don't expect it. There are a couple of common situations, but the lesson to take away from failing a course or subject is that it ultimately doesn't reflect on your value and talents. There are always things you can do to make things better. When it comes to failing assessment or whole subjects/courses, there are a couple of things you can do to make you get back into it and work on building your confidence up again.

Common reasons for failing

- Struggling to get work done. Sometimes there's too much going on. You have friends, family, work, relationships and general life stuff. Fitting study into a hectic schedule can sometimes be a hugely overwhelming task. If this is the reason for failing, it's a matter of working out how to balance it all. Deciding what your priorities are, how to manage your time and having the ability to step back and say 'no' is the key.
- Don't like your course. Sometimes you've chosen an elective or course and thought it was just the thing for you. Then you start it and realise that it's not what you thought it would be. However, just because it's not for you that doesn't mean you won't find something that you like. Have a look around, check out your options and see if
there’s another course or subject that appeals a bit more.

- Not keeping up. The challenge with uni is that each person in the class has a different learning style and speed. Teachers and lecturers often try to aim their classes at the majority - the medium speed learners. If you feel you’re lagging and not able to keep up, don’t be afraid to talk to your teacher or lecturer about what you can do. The sooner you talk to someone about it, the easier it will be to resolve. Your speed of learning doesn’t reflect anything about your intelligence or ability.
- Not able to complete the course. For whatever reason, sometimes we just have to bow out of a course or subject that’s not working well. Whether it’s to do with personal stuff or just generally feeling overwhelmed, it’s nothing to feel bad about. If the reason has to do with how you’re feeling or if you’re just too stressed to complete it, you might be experiencing something that won’t be cured with a quick fix. You might benefit from reading a bit more about how to manage stress.

**Dealing with pressure and expectations**

You could be someone who gets motivated and energised by pressure and expectation. But even if you are like that, both pressure and expectation can become too much, and end up harming your performance and outlook more than they help. There are some things you can do to deal with pressure. They include:

- Talking to someone outside the situation, like a friend or counsellor.
- Talking to the person setting the expectations, and try to make it clear they’re not helping.
- Re-setting your own expectations – they could be unrealistic or just unhelpful.
- Taking some space – go for a walk, play sports or video games and give your brain a break.
- Writing down your feelings.
- Avoiding drugs and alcohol which compound stress.


**See also**

- Counselling services
- Tips for using and responding to feedback
- Exam results