De-stressing and Improving Mental Health

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I've often heard discussions on the significance or unimportance of mental health. People from all backgrounds have different ideas and opinions about mental health; some downplay its importance or even claim mental health is a myth and others insist on its value. I subscribe to the latter. I believe that my mental health impacts me for short and long periods, whether for a couple of hours or an extended period of days or weeks. Good mental health makes me motivated to tackle my to-do lists and gets me excited about any activity.

When I experience not feeling mentally well, whether from the stress of upcoming tests or quizzes or the anxiety that I won't get into the college of my dreams, I know that I should take a break. Poor mental health causes me to lose that motivation and stop being the energetic person that I am. It can make me lose concentration during class or make me skip a club's practice. Therefore, I need to recognize when I've fallen into this state. I have a few different ways where I can de-stress and improve my mental health.

One of the many ways I de-stress is by doing activities I enjoy. The best way to understand what you genuinely enjoy doing and find activities that suit your unique personality is to imagine a day when you have no homework, chores or other responsibilities. This can help you focus on your interests and hobbies. If I had one of those days, I would watch one of my favorite movies, like *Rush Hour 3*, eat a good meal such as a Popeye's chicken sandwich, talk to my friends in person or online or take a walk outside. While I can't do everything on this list because I don't have the time for it, I can choose which ones to do depending on the time of day, the weekdays or weekends and how much stress I have at that time.

For days that I have a bit more free time, I can watch *Rush Hour 3* or convince my dad to drive me to pick up a Popeye's Chicken Sandwich. Watching movies allows me to be engaged in a world other than my own, where I can completely eliminate my current thoughts and "pause" my worries. After the movie, I'll be calmer and ready to get back to work. Sometimes, however, nothing makes me feel happier than a good meal. Getting my favorite meal allows me to enjoy myself and think about how good the food is rather than if I'm going to fail my next chemistry test.

Talking to friends or walking around the neighborhood would be my best choice when I don't have much time. That's when I'm able to let my true feelings and thoughts through without the fear of being judged or mocked. Getting these thoughts off my chest makes me feel freer, and I can get ideas or tips on how to deal with whatever challenge I'm facing.

After a whole day of school, practice after school and hours of homework, I often wind down my night by talking with my best friend, David. He's always there for me, cheering me on my achievements and giving me advice on my challenges. It's great to know that I'll always have someone to lean on for support and motivation. Going for a walk is also a great way to de-stress as I get the bright rays of sunshine on my skin and the whiffs of wind. Nature's an appreciated contrast to the harmful blue-light-filled iPhones and laptops. These things combined help me to calm myself by remembering that my life isn't just me studying for a test or writing an essay for a class inside my dark bedroom.

In the end, there's no set way for me to de-stress, and there shouldn't be. Every day is different, and the amount of stress varies, even by the hour. Therefore, it's vital for me to understand what I need and how to de-stress myself at any given moment. Life isn't about grinding for the most prestigious colleges or striving to get valedictorian; instead, life's made up of small moments. Whether passing the time with friends or enjoying my favorite movies, these bring me the most joy. These little things allow me to pause in my busy daily life to help me pause and gain perspective on what I'm going through and how to overcome any obstacles. Therefore everyone needs to find their "little" joys to push through the journey we call life to enjoy it to the fullest.