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#BLACK STUDENTS TALK

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ANXIETY IN STUDENTS:

Anxiety is a mental disorder that is **common** in students. **Stress**, **moving away from home**, **adapting to a new environment and university culture**, and **peer/social pressure** are all **potential reasons** as to why anxiety may develop in a student.

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ANXIETY IN BLACK STUDENTS:

In Black students, anxiety and stress could be **a result of all the above**, alongside **racial discrimination** (overt and covert, **imposter syndrome**, **code switching**, being from a **working-class** family, and **pressure** from family and friends as a result of aiming to achieve '**Black Excellence**'.

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WHY BLACK STUDENTS DON'T REACH OUT FOR HELP:

Black students may not reach out for help to university staff due to feeling **unheard** and noticing **favouritism**, **ableism**, and **classism** with staff and our non-Black peers. In addition to there being **assumptions made of us** before we have a chance to speak.

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WHY BLACK STUDENTS DON'T REACH OUT FOR HELP:

Also, **pressure from family or friends**, and feeling that if we do not uphold the **image of 'Black Excellence'** and being **strong**, we have failed and appear weak because we have sought out help.

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WHY BLACK STUDENTS DON'T REACH OUT FOR HELP:

Sometimes, our pain, hurt, or struggle are made into lessons for others, as **opposed to our needs being listened to** so that we can be given **space to heal and rest**.

We deserve to be given the space to be open about how we are feeling, **without judgment**, and to **receive a high standard of care and compassion** like any other student.

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USEFUL SERVICES

Student Minds (Resources): www.studentminds.org.uk

Student Space (Resources, text, email and phone support): www.studentspace.org.uk

Togetherall (Online peer support): www.togetherall.com

Papyrus (Suicide Hopeline): 0800 068 4141 / www.papyrus-uk.org

Mermaids (For the Trans & Non-binary community): mermaidsuk.org.uk

Stonewall (For the LGBTQ+ community): stonewall.org.uk

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USEFUL SERVICES

The Black, African and Asian Therapy Network (BAATN): www.baatn.org.uk

Shout (text support): 85258

ADHD Babes (support group): https://linktr.ee/adhdbabes

Bounce Black (trauma-informed coaching): https://bounceblack.org

Black Minds Matter UK: www.blackmindsmatteruk.com

Voice Collective (for people that hear voices): voicecollective.co.uk

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ANXIETY & STRESS IN BLACK STUDENTS CAN LOOK LIKE:

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TROUBLE CONCENTRATING

Anger
Irritability
Imposter syndrome
Impulsive behaviour
Compulsive behaviour

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PROCRASTINATION

Late assignments
A lack of organisation
Avoiding lectures and seminars

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PHYSICAL MANIFESTATIONS

Insomnia
Racing heart
Tension in the chest
Headaches / Migraines
Quick or increased speech
Changes in eating: stress eating or not eating at all

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AVOIDANCE

Isolation
Ignoring messages / phone calls
Avoiding people (or avoiding family)
Finding it hard to engage with friends like they used to

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CAUSES OF ANXIETY & STRESS IN BLACK STUDENTS:

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IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Imposter Syndrome refers to mentally feeling inadequate or inferior to the people around you. It's feeling as if you've fooled everyone around you into thinking that you're more capable than you really are, despite there being evidence for this not being true.

Being a student can already be stressful as it is, but when **we don't see ourselves represented**, are the **only Black student on our course**, or have **experienced racism at university** all these reasons may cause us to question our value, our intelligence, and our worth. This can result in performance anxiety, burnout, emotional instability, low self-esteem and a lack of confidence.

Questions like **'am I meant to be here?'** or **'am I really good enough'** are questions that run through our minds when we experience racism (or microaggressions) or notice ourselves to be the only Black person on our course. This can make us feel like we are there due to **tokenism** - to fill a diversity quota - as opposed to knowing that we were accepted on the course because we worked hard to be there.

Our imposter syndrome is then further confirmed when encounters with non-Black students or staff result in negative stereotypes or narratives being placed on us such as the '**.... but you're Black**' trope, that results in us feeling that we are meant to fit into these narratives set for us. This can result in Black students **working harder than necessary** to increase our levels of success and achieve a level of 'excellence' so that we can **prove ourselves** to be on par with our non-Black peers.

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CODE SWITCHING

Code switching is a language practice where a person's linguistic style changes based on who they are with / who their audience is. It's often used by Black and other people of colour as it enables assimilation so that it's easier for us to adapt and fit into spaces that we may not usually be accepted into.

Code switching doesn't just refer to language, but also fits into **feeling pressure to dim our 'Blackness'** so that we can easily fit into spaces that may not initially be accepting of us. Sometimes we do this to **prove to others that we don't fit into the negative labels or stereotypes** that have been placed on the Black community. It's like, feeling the **pressure** to represent all Black people even though we know that's not possible and we are **just one Black person.**

A **heightened awareness** of **our speech**, **body language**, **how we dress**, **how we interact with others** in the presence of non-Black students and staff can create **a lot of pressure** and **increase anxiety**, as we worry that a certain image of us may **confirm** biases, narratives, and stereotypes. As well as simply not wanting to stand out more than we already do.

We may **overanalyse** ourselves in these contexts, which can increase stress and also result in anxiety. As instead of purely focusing on being at university to get a degree, make connections, and make friends **we are aware of what we aren't and people's assumptions of us**. We either **downplay our 'Blackness'** or parts of ourselves to make others know that we belong and have a right to be there just like other students – even if we may not necessarily feel that within ourselves.

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BLACK EXCELLENCE

Black Excellence is a term used amongst the Black community to describe the successes and achievements of those within the community. The term summarises us being ‘our ancestor's wildest dreams’, in that our strive to do well and be great keeps our humanity from being questioned and proves to other Black (and non-Black) people that we can do anything. It is working towards the advancement of Black people and upholding our communities, rather than the individual.

Although Black Excellence helps to highlight the many great things that we do within the Black community, it is a complex term that can **result in anxiety due to feeling the pressure from family and friends to exceed in every single thing that we do**. Not only do we feel pressure from our non-Black peers and staff, but we can also feel pressure from within our own community.

It can make Black students feel like **we can’t be ourselves** and **every single thing we do has to fall within the term of ‘excellence’**, and when we don’t meet these standards it can leave us **feeling like we’ve failed**. The stress that comes with having to always strive to achieve a level of excellence/success, always hustling, and being greater can result in **never feeling like we meet the standards set for us**.

Black excellence can result in us losing ourselves in the process, instead of **focusing on our mental health and our wellness.** The strive to do well for the collective can **create more stress** than necessary, especially as it **doesn’t afford us a chance to rest** and just **simply be a student.** Sometimes, **Black Excellence is merely existing and functioning on a day-to-day basis.**

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LABELS & NARRATIVES:

Labels and narratives surrounding Black people can be very damaging, especially in how we are seen in the world and are not afforded the same luxury of being able to rest and show emotions like our non-Black peers. These narratives and labels affect how we navigate and experience the world, especially in academic settings.

Labels such as being 'strong', although well meaning, can come off as **dismissive** and **dehumanising**. As Black people, we are not always afforded the chance to express our emotions and are **expected to just deal with stress and anxiety**. When we reach out for help it may have taken us a lot to even do so.

The narrative of being strong Black people does not just only come from peers and staff but also can be **learnt** from our own observation of those that have come before us. Seeing our parents or relatives 'just get on with life' no matter the circumstance, can result in us feeling that we need to do the same in order to achieve a level of success. As well as **prove** to our parents or relatives that **we are working hard for the sacrifices and hard work they have made for us.**

This state of '**keeping up appearances**' can result in **burnout**, **procrastination**, **avoidance**, and **insomnia**. When we do not afford ourselves rest, healing, or the care we deserve, it may **manifest physically** or **result in anxiety** and therefore **affect our wellbeing** (mental, emotional, or physical), **studies**, and **our relationships with those around us**.

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HOW TO HELP BLACK STUDENTS STRUGGLING WITH ANXIETY & STRESS:

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HOW TO HELP BLACK STUDENTS STRUGGLING WITH ANXIETY & STRESS:

When we open up to you, **give us space** to talk and process our emotions **without judgement or trying to fix us.**

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HOW TO HELP BLACK STUDENTS STRUGGLING WITH ANXIETY & STRESS:

Don't pressume anything of us. Give us a chance to just **be ourselves** and **form our own narrative**.

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HOW TO HELP BLACK STUDENTS STRUGGLING WITH ANXIETY & STRESS:

Give us space to **figure out what's going on** - we will talk **when we're ready**.

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HOW TO HELP BLACK STUDENTS STRUGGLING WITH ANXIETY & STRESS:

Ask us: I've noticed you've been more distant/stressed/anxious/avoidant, **how are you doing**?

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HOW TO HELP BLACK STUDENTS STRUGGLING WITH ANXIETY & STRESS:

When we ask for help, **don't tell us we're strong**. If you're unable to help us **signpost** us to **more useful services** that can help us.

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AFFIRMATIONS FOR BLACK STUDENTS EXPERIENCING ANXIETY & STRESS:

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I will pour into myself and prioritise rest

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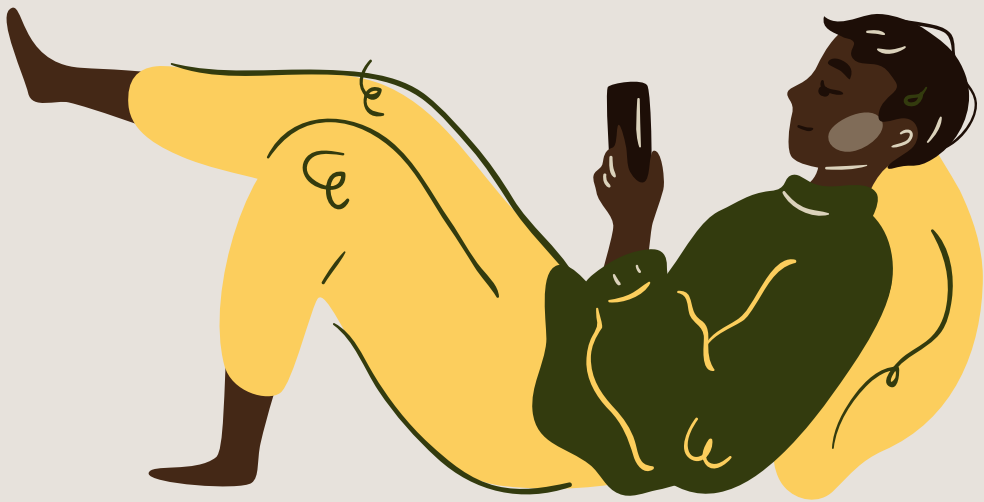

Sometimes ‘Black Excellence’ is getting out of bed, brushing my teeth, and feeding myself. I don’t have to always be on point or have it together - ‘Black Mediocrity’ is just as valid and needed in celebrating my capabilities

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Procrastination and avoidance probably means I'm feeling stressed, anxious, or overwhelmed, what can I do to make this process easier for myself?

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I will take care of myself and nourish my body even when I don't feel like it, because I know it'll make me feel better

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Resting and taking time for myself is not wrong. I deserve moments of rest, peace, and stillness

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I am allowed to take time with my work, and if I need help it's ok to reach out. Asking for help does not make me weak or mean I've failed

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Spending time with people that validate me, care for me, and give me a chance to be out of my head and feel less anxious is important, and the least I deserve

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I am allowed to physically remove myself from environments/people that cause me stress, trigger me, or no longer serve me well

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Doing things that bring me joy, help me de-stress, and give me a moment to unwind and connect with myself (and my spirituality/faith) is **not** laziness. It's self preservation, self care, and love

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