

What No One Tells You About

# Post-Graduation Depression



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MERCER INTERN

A vertical decorative border on the left side of the page, consisting of a repeating pattern of black graduation caps (mortarboards) with tassels, arranged in two columns.

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DESPITE DIFFICULTIES,  
ALWAYS KEEP OPTIMISM.  
'I CAN OVERCOME THESE  
DIFFICULTIES.' THAT  
MENTAL HEALTH  
ATTITUDE ITSELF WILL  
BRING INNER STRENGTH  
AND SELF-CONFIDENCE.



DALAI LAMA



# OPENING REMARKS

**Congratulations!** You should be incredibly proud of all the hard-work and achievements that have brought you to this moment. Give yourself a pat on the back and acknowledge your accomplishments. Graduating college is a huge success that not everyone experiences.

With this accomplishment comes the stress of looking ahead of what comes next. Looking for a job, finding housing, or rediscovering yourself are all daunting tasks. Being a student was such an integral part of your identity that you may now feel lost or that a part of you is missing. Now that you are a graduate and alumni, you may struggle to find yourself again. Additionally, you may feel very lonely and grieve the life you once had. This is a totally normal experience that unfortunately not many people talk about or are prepared for prior to graduation.

Welcome to post-college life, where you're likely struggling with your mental health, reconnecting with yourself, and finding it difficult to relax. Here is everything you need to know about post-graduation depression and how to cope with it.



# WHAT IS POST-GRADUATION DEPRESSION?



Post-graduation depression, also known as post-college depression, is when someone experiences depressive symptoms following their graduation. While it is not a diagnosable condition found in the DSM-V, it is a very real phenomenon that many graduates deal with. It may seem like a silly idea for some, but for many people, feelings of isolation and sadness are very common following this life transition. For so long, we have equated our identities with being students and when that title is no longer in use, we feel like we lose a part of ourselves. Recent graduates often feel isolated, lost, and lonely.

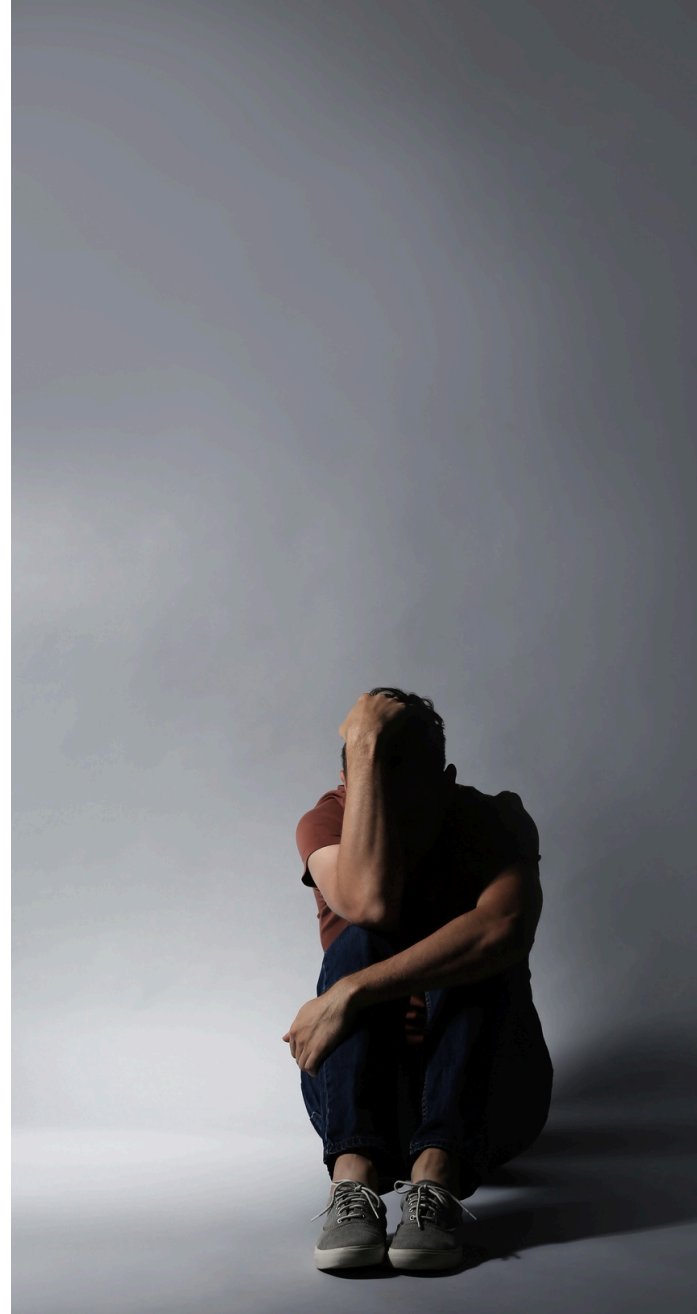
Post-graduation depression may be impacted by many different factors. Take a look at the short list below for some common factors.

- Difficulties securing a job
- Not feeling fulfilled by your job
- Not getting to socialize with your peers as often
- Issues with finding housing or finances
- Difficulties with relaxing or not practicing self-care

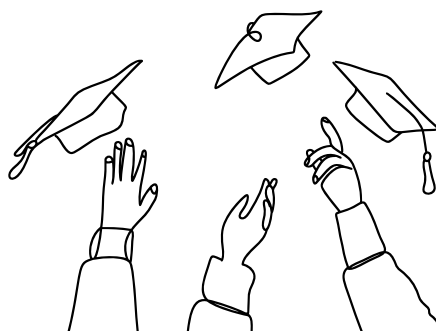
# WHY IS NO ONE TALKING ABOUT IT?

**Why does post-graduation depression seem to catch so many graduates off-guard?**

Why does this happen, and why is no one talking about it? **Our vision of post-college life and our reality often do not match** and sadly, we usually learn the hard way. As students, we were often told about all of the success stories of recent graduates finding jobs and acclimating into the working world. While this may be true for some people, this does not speak to everyone's experience. Dealing with post-graduation depression is so common, yet no one seems to be talking about it or warns future graduates of it. In our endeavors to put our degrees to use and transition into the next stage of our lives, we often find ourselves burnt-out and lacking motivation. We push ourselves to the point of exhaustion, which leads to depression or other mental health conditions.



Among other considerations, it is not uncommon for recent graduates to get caught off-guard by post-graduation depression. It is a harsh reality that many of us do not anticipate. As so many individuals are affected by this, it is important to stay connected with others who can understand what you're going through, and to seek treatment if necessary.



# WHY IS NO ONE TALKING ABOUT IT?

**Loneliness and difficulties with relaxation play a large role in post-graduation depression.**



Read the 2018 study here!



When we are in school, we have easier access to our social circles. Our best friends are easier to get into contact with and spend time with. After moving out of the dorms, it's more difficult to set up dates to get together. Recent graduates report feeling lonely and isolated from their friend groups, which greatly impacts their depression. A study on loneliness conducted by Bruce et al. (2018) found that individuals aged 18-25 reported feeling lonely at a mean score of 47.87, which beats the average 44.03 national average.

In addition to increased rates of loneliness, difficulties with relaxing can cause a significant amount of distress to recent graduates. For so long, we are used to keeping busy with work, studying, and homework that when we have free time, it can be difficult to relax and enjoy the moment. Many people will push themselves to the point of burnout (further discussed on page 7), which is extremely unhealthy to our mental and physical health.

It is vital to learn relaxation techniques and giving ourselves the space to enjoy a do-nothing day. While it is important after graduation to secure a job and fulfill your obligations, it is just as important to take care of yourself.



# SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

SOME OF THE WARNING SIGNS OF DEPRESSION TO LOOK OUT FOR FOLLOWING YOUR GRADUATION INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

## FEELINGS OF SADNESS

One of the most common symptoms of depression is intense sadness or hopelessness, whether it be for a specific reason or not. If you are feeling so sad that it interferes with your lifestyle and causes great distress, you should consult with a mental health professional.



## FEELING DISCONNECTED FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Many people find that it is harder to connect with friends and family when they are struggling with depression. They often isolate themselves, causing concern to their friends and family.

## DIFFICULTY STAYING MOTIVATED

Another common symptom of depression is a lack of motivation. When you're already feeling blue, it can be difficult to get up and tackle your tasks for the day. You may find that you do not enjoy the activities you once enjoyed.



## SLEEP DISTURBANCES

You may find that it has become difficult to fall asleep or stay asleep. Some people with sleep disturbances may even experience insomnia. These issues can disrupt your daily lifestyles and routines, especially if you have a job. If they worsen, you should consult with a doctor.



# INFLUENCING FACTORS



## Unemployment and finding a job

Have you found yourself searching for a job right out of college and it seems like no one wants to hire? You're not alone in this frustrating reality. You've worked so hard to obtain your degree to finally begin work just to have your application denied or have an employer ghost you. While it is a frustrating process, it is important to build networks and create connections with others, both in and out of your desired fields. You never know who may have connections for you.

## Change of routines

In college, you may have had a set routine and daily schedule to keep you on track. Adjusting from your old routine to a new one can be difficult. During this stressful time, be patient with yourself. When creating new routines, make sure to lay out your plans and be consistent with your time.

## Problems staying social

Whether you're returning to mom and dad's house or you have your own home, it can be lonely without your friends or old roommates. During college, we spend so much time with our peers, possibly more than we spend alone, so it can be upsetting to be without them. Our friends make up a large part of our college experience. Now that you all are trying to find jobs or have jobs, it can be challenging to find time to plan visits.

## Financial concerns

Many young people have a lot of anxiety when it comes to finances, and it's totally valid! Money can be a huge stressor, especially when it comes to student debt. The higher your student debt is, it's likely you're dealing with elevated levels of stress.

# INFLUENCING FACTORS:

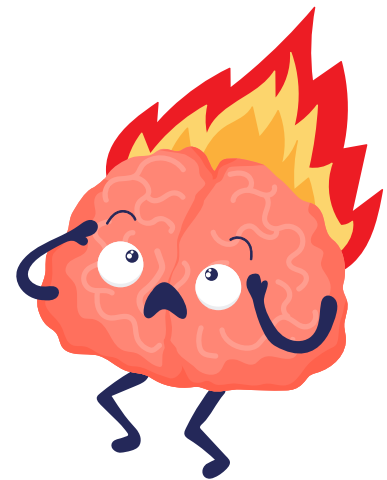
## BURNOUT



WHAT IS BURNOUT, HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M EXPERIENCING IT, AND HOW DO I COPE WITH IT?

At some point in our lives, we all experience burn-out. **Burnout is an extreme loss of motivation and exhaustion that leads to negative consequences to our mental health.**

Putting too much pressure on yourself or overworking yourself can lead to burnout. You may have experienced burnout at some point in college, whether it be around finals week or around the time of your graduation. Burnout is typically caused by stress and leaves you feeling drained. In order to prevent burnout, you should take some time to relax in between working and monitor your mental health.



### Signs to Watch Out For:

- Fatigue
- No motivation
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling emotionally numb or drained
- Isolating yourself from friends and family
- Getting sick or feeling ill

### Tips to Prevent Burnout:

- Practice mindfulness
- Try relaxation techniques
- Reach out to a mental health professional
- Reach out to your family and friends
- Maintain a good sleep schedule and eat well

# PREVENTING POST-GRAD DEPRESSION

**Strategies to use when combating post-graduation depression.**

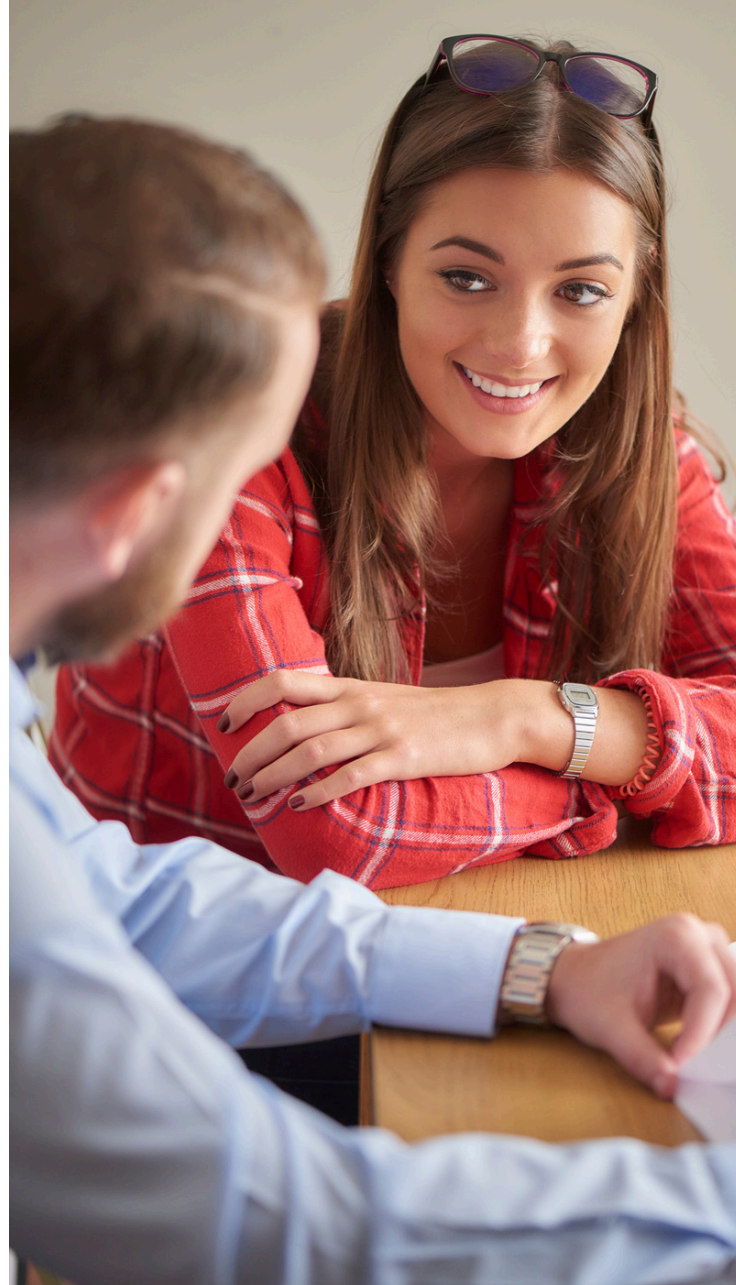
When battling depression after graduation, it is important to review what resources are available to you. This life transition can be stressful and it is vital to take care of your mental health. If your depression begins to feel unmanageable, reach out to a mental health professional.

## **Start Practicing Coping Skills**

There are many different coping skills you can incorporate into your life to soothe yourself. For example, breathing techniques and mindfulness can ease symptoms of depression. More coping skills will be discussed on page 9.

## **Stay in Touch With Friends, Even if it's Online**

Experiencing loneliness after graduation is almost unavoidable. While it will be a challenge to get your friend group together once you all have transitioned into the working world, you can still stay in touch online or virtually. Send a text, initiate a FaceTime or phone call, like and comment on their posts. Your hangouts will come with time.



## **Utilize Your Alma Mater's Resources**

College is expensive, there's no doubt about it. You pay for a lot of different resources, including career counseling and resume help. As an alumni, you are still able to access these useful tools. You can find a mentor or receive career or life advice.

## **Be Gentle on Yourself**

This point in your life is challenging and can get intimidating. Make sure to be kind to yourself and take it slow. Life is not a race.



# HOW TO COPE WITH POST-GRAD DEPRESSION

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If you are struggling with post-graduation depression, you are not alone. When experiencing these depressive symptoms, it is a good idea to utilize coping skills that can help you manage your feelings and maintain good mental health. Consider trying the following coping skills:

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a form of meditation aimed at helping the person practicing it to stay in the moment. There are many different ways people practice mindfulness, such as using breathing techniques, body scans, and listening to guided meditations. The key is to remain calm and to not judge yourself.

## Exercise

Physical activity is great for mental health! You don't need to go all out at the gym, but if that's what makes you feel better, go for it! You can walk around your neighborhood, watch guided workouts on YouTube, or take up a sport.

## Journaling

Journaling has helped many people to express their feelings and maintain good mental health. You can simply write about your day, how you're feeling, or write a letter. Some people even write checklists. In addition to mindfulness, you can use journaling as a form of meditation to ease your depression and other anxious feelings.

## Talk Your Feelings Out with Friends or Family

Sitting down with friends or family and expressing your emotions can alleviate that stressful weight off your shoulders. Arrange a time to talk to someone you trust and allow yourself to share everything you're feeling. They may be able to provide advice if needed!



# SUPPORTING A RECENT GRADUATE



The time period following graduation can be scary for many people. This is a time of uncertainty, which leaves many people feeling stressed and anxious. Supporting those in your life who have recently graduated college is important and can help ease their symptoms of depression and prevent further consequences to their mental health.

Reaching out to your loved one who recently graduated will likely make them feel really good. They've been going through so much stress that it will make their day to hear from you. You can send a simple text, such as "I was thinking about you. I hope you're doing well!" or talk to them on the phone or FaceTime them.

Encourage your loved one to take care of their mental health. With the anxiety-inducing process of finding a job or acclimating to one, your loved one may be neglecting self-care. Share some self-care tips with them or coping skills you think might be useful. If necessary, suggest that they seek mental health treatment.

One of the most important ways to support a recent graduate is to be patient with them. They're going through a lot right now, and putting pressure on them may worsen their depression symptoms.

# TESTIMONIAL

**Hear from Kelly G., someone who suffered symptoms of depression after she graduated college.**

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Kelly earned her B.A. in the spring of 1988. She reported that following her graduation, she experienced symptoms of depression.

“I missed having friends. I didn’t have any when I came back home and it made me feel very isolated. It made me make mistakes, like taking people in who weren’t really good for me.”

Kelly went to a college in an entirely different state away from home. Most of her close friends were friends she made at her school, who were local to the area. After graduating, Kelly returned home and felt isolated. Her symptoms of depression lead her to make decisions she would later regret.

Like most people, Kelly was unaware of post-graduation depression and was not prepared to manage her symptoms. She expressed wishing she kept in touch more with her friends from high school to help alleviate her depressive symptoms.

When asked what advice she would give to recent graduates struggling with depression, Kelly responded:

“Seek help with it so you don’t make mistakes, like letting people close to you who don’t deserve it.”



YOU'RE OFF TO GREAT  
PLACES!

TODAY IS YOUR DAY!

YOUR MOUNTAIN IS  
WAITING. SO...

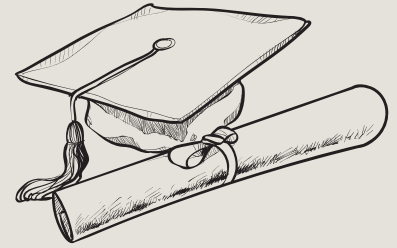
GET ON YOUR  
WAY!



DR. SEUSS

# AUTHOR'S NOTE

CAITLIN GOLDEN



Post-graduation depression was never something I gave much thought to, despite having a background in psychology. So many people are affected by intense depression following graduation, yet no one seems to talk about it, nor warn you about it. I felt very lonely after earning my degree and had trouble allowing myself time to relax and take care of my mental health after four years of hard work and long nights doing homework. It feels good knowing that there is a community of people also battling post-graduation depression and that we can all relate to each other and share our experiences.

I graduated from Stockton University in Galloway, New Jersey in December of 2023. I earned my B.A. in psychology with a concentration in forensic psychology and a minor in victimology and victim services. I currently intern at NAMI Mercer and have written two other tool kits entitled *Dating Violence and Sexual Assault* (2023) and *A Guide to Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (2024).



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