

## = CHAPTER 10 =

# Taking Control

## Self-Management Strategies

*Rae, a single parent, looked at her on-line calendar and discovered that she had 2 written exams and a practical exam in the next week. She had offered to work extra hours to cover for a co-*

*worker on vacation, and she noted that her 2 children would be off for 1 day for a scheduled school holiday. She wondered, “How am I going to get all of this done?”*

## Student Role Stress

Over the years, research indicates that student attitudes and behaviors are influenced by many sources of stress.<sup>1-3</sup>

Sources of stress include the following:

- Demanding schedule and limited time
- High workload and excessive course requirements
- High expectations of self and self-doubts
- Differing expectations of students and instructors
- Less than optimal learning environment

- Challenging student-instructor relationships
- Uncertainty in future career plans
- Financial concerns
- Unmet personal needs
- Health issues of self or family member

Although these are frequent concerns of traditional students, today's nontraditional students face additional stresses and pressures. Evidence indicates that almost 70% of today's physical therapist assistant students are over 25 years of age and almost half have worked in another career prior to beginning their educational program. Many also have families, dependent children, and preexisting commitments and responsibilities.<sup>4</sup> Many of these students face the pressures of maintaining employment and family and child care responsibilities while attempting to complete the education program.

# Time Management

Careful planning and budgeted use of time will be critical to your experience in physical therapist assistant education. Check your own routines against those listed in [Table 10-1](#). The following are a few strategies that students have found helpful.<sup>5,6</sup>

## *Spend Time Like Money* —**CAREFULLY**

- Realize that time is one of your most precious resources and that when it's gone, you can't have it back again. Make each moment count.
- Budget and schedule your time, including time for yourself (for whatever you need—exercise, haircut, shopping, meditation).

Schedule that time on your calendar and treat that time as you would any confirmed appointment.

- Use a “tickler file” to note important deadlines, dates, and events. Give yourself a reminder several weeks before important deadlines, by writing them on the calendar. Also, write in birthdays and other personal events on your calendar. If you must do something once a year or every 6 months, make an appointment with yourself, just as the dentist does. Do not rely on your memory. There are many integrated online planners that will automatically notify you of upcoming events. These planners also allow you to synchronize this function with e-mail accounts, address books, calendars, and to-do lists. Popular office software, as well as applications for your

- Use a day planner or personal organizer, smart phone, tablet, or notebook computer. You want to be able to access your schedule, telephone numbers, and key information easily. Write EVERYTHING down in this one location. Keep it with you always.
- Schedule classes, study times, meetings, deadlines, and tasks in your organizer. Write them down. Don't rely on your memory. Write addresses and phone numbers in one location.
- Focus your energies on one thing at a time, for a specified period of time.
- Make yourself unavailable to others; avoid distractions.
- Organize yourself. Use a computer for tasks like banking, updating important records, and addresses.
- Do it right the first time, rather than having to do and redo a task. However, be careful that you are not falling into a perfectionism trap.

phone or tablet, provide ways to plan future events and related tasks.

- Avoid writing notes on miscellaneous pads of paper or in multiple locations. Keeping your lists, contacts, and calendar in one system will speed your access time to critical details.
- By spending the time to organize a system, you will save more time later.

TABLE 10-1

**ROUTINES OF GREAT  
TIME MANAGERS<sup>1</sup>**

- Prepare a “to-do” list the night before
- Be realistic about time allocations, including time for school, work, study, play, family, and personal matters, as well as regular time for yourself. Balance your life.

ceed in the ways you spend the most time, and make sure that you have access to this information (computer skills, automobile maps, library orientation). It takes less time to attend an orientation or training session than the countless hours you will spend later on trying to figure it out on your own.

- Plan and prioritize your schedule by the day, week, month, and year. Make prioritizing part of your daily routine.

## ***Be Selective and Focus***

- Spend less time on unimportant obligations and concentrate on people who really matter to you. Stop thinking that you need to know everything, be all things to all people, or absorb all the information that comes your way.

- Avoid becoming side-tracked by details or by lower priority requests that demand your time and talent.
- Finish what you start; there is satisfaction in knowing that you have completed what you set out to do.
- Periodically review whether what you are doing is a good use of your time. If not, drop the activity and move onto the next scheduled task or project. Review your accomplishments at the end of the day.

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## ***Prioritize on a Daily and Long-Term Basis***

- Not everything and everyone is equally important to your personal well-being.
- Determine essential information/skills you will need to suc-

- While reading, write summarizing notes in the margins of the page or take simultaneous notes of major points and definitions when reading on another page. All of these activities (especially taking notes) help you to process and learn the material at the same time that you are reading it.

### ***Learn to Say “No”***

- This is hard for many people. The habits you develop now will stay with you throughout your life. Say *yes* only if you have the time or if it is imperative that you become personally involved in the activity.
- Resist the urge to be a volunteer with multiple projects.

## ***Reduce Your Standards***

- Let go of perfectionism. Compromise with yourself and relax your standards on how you do things.
- Don't make it mandatory that you "know it all."
- Prioritize what is most important to know.
- Use others as resources.
- Function effectively and efficiently. Focus on the results, rather than the method used to get there.

## ***Delegate as Much as You Can***

- It is often worth it to pay someone else to do a task, if it will save you time. Also, it may be worth paying an expert, rather than spending your time learn-

ing how to do a task that can be completed in minutes by a trained person.

- Organize family members and roommates to divide household work.

### ***Consolidate Similar Files, Things, Tasks, or Errands in One Location***

- Keep class notes and projects organized in the same folder or location. Dedicate book case space, file drawer space, or an area of your home that will not be disturbed. It will save time in not having to locate materials to begin studying. Organize materials in loose-leaf notebooks while they are still active. Store materials from previous courses in files.
- Organize computer files in separate folders, with a retrieval

## ***Confront Issues and Problems Early, Before They Compound***

- Deal with problem people and events early on.
- Get help in courses; make appointments to talk with faculty, and work out group project responsibilities at the first sign of trouble, rather than waiting until the situation is irreconcilable. It will take far less time to deal with a problem in its early stages than to deal with a more serious situation.

## ***Don't Waste Time Worrying***

- Focus your energies on productive studying, constructive thoughts, discussion, and review before exams.

- Cut negative thoughts off when you recognize them. Replace them with more positive images (see [Table 9-4](#) in [Chapter 9](#)).

## ***When You Make a Mistake, Don't Dwell on It***

- Don't waste time feeling guilty about mistakes you made, things you didn't do, or opportunities that you let pass by.
- Try to remember that a mistake is another way to do things—no more. AND, avoid making the same mistake TWICE.

## ***Overcome Procrastination***

- Make commitments for your time and stick to them.
- Don't offer excuses for why something is not done or accept

system that makes locating files easy. Back up hard-disk files on USB drives or external hard disks. If you revise a document, be sure that you save the revised file with a new date or sequential number (Revision X, month-day-year). Throw away all drafts when the project has been completed. Be sure to save the finished project with the date and a name like “FINAL XXX (with date)” and other identifying information.

- Avoid making several trips when you can do several errands in one trip, even if it means delaying action for several days. Consolidate phone calls to be returned for one sitting.<sup>7</sup>

that past habits are unchangeable.

- Be accountable for your time and efforts. Set deadlines and stick to them. Use the buddy system where a friend or colleague checks in with you to ask about your progress.
- Work a little on big projects every day. Spend time on the most difficult parts first. Reward yourself at the end of a specific time you have spent by doing something more pleasurable. Be strict with yourself.

## ***Make Meetings Count***

- Always have an agenda and a defined objective for the meeting. Set a quitting time in advance. Keep the meeting on track if the subject wanders. Start and end on time.

- Move meetings along toward the assignment of tasks.
- Summarize in writing the decisions made, tasks assigned, and direction developed and distribute to all concerned after the meeting.

### ***Remember That Working Hard Is Not the Same as Working Smart***

- Working smart involves delegation, project planning, finding new ways to do things, accepting help from others, and giving up perfectionism.
- Being “busy” is not an end in itself. Reevaluate what you are actually accomplishing.

# Financial Management

*Sasha had worked for 4 years as a clerk in a busy physical therapy outpatient clinic. She had recently been promoted to the position of billing coordinator. Her new job description included 30 hours per week of office work, some driving, and evening meetings several times per month. She felt that her job would perfectly complement her studies in the physical therapist assistant program; also, she was unwilling to give up her steady income now that she had worked her way up to a supervisory position. What would make this a manageable plan?*

TABLE 10-2

## HOURLY WAGE CHART

<i>HOURLY WAGE</i>	<i>TIME PER WEEK (HOURS)</i>	<i>SEMESTER WAGES (15 WEEKS)</i>	<i>SAMPLE TAKE HOME PAY<sup>A</sup></i>
\$7.25	5	\$543.75	\$420.59
\$7.25	10	\$1,087.50	\$841.18
\$7.25	15	\$1,631.25	\$1,261.77
\$8.00	5	\$600.00	\$464.10
\$8.00	10	\$1,200.00	\$928.20
\$8.00	15	\$1,800.00	\$1,392.30
\$9.00	5	\$675.00	\$522.11
\$9.00	10	\$1,350.00	\$1,044.23
\$9.00	15	\$2,025.00	\$1,566.34
\$10.00	5	\$750.00	\$580.13
\$10.00	10	\$1,500.00	\$1,160.25
\$10.00	15	\$2,250.00	\$1,740.38
\$12.00	5	\$900.00	\$696.15
\$12.00	10	\$1,800.00	\$1,392.30
\$12.00	15	\$2,700.00	\$2,088.45

A. Less FICA at 7.65% and federal taxes at 15%.

Just as you can plan for use of your time, you can plan for use of your financial resources. It is unlikely that you will have the time to work in a job that will provide for all of your school-related and living expenses. Value the investment you are making and seriously consider financial aid options. Explore alternatives that may be available in your institution, such as a tuition fee waiver, work-study, cooperative education, or special programs that may be available for a select group of students.

## *Whether to Work*

Many students wonder if, when, and how much they can work while in school. It is important to look carefully at how much your time is worth and whether working in a minimum wage job is a good use of this time. In addition, you must look carefully at what contacts, skills, and/or knowledge you are gaining and whether that exposure will benefit you in the long run.

For example, a physical therapy aide position in a physical therapy clinic may be quite beneficial in the long run, given the career networks and exposure involved, even if the pay is low. An entry-level clerical position in a university office may not provide that same benefit for the same wage and time commitment.

Further, you need to consider how much time you will have available to study if you work; studying “at work”

usually does not work. Constant distractions interfere with effective studying. In addition, your employer will expect your attention to the job!

## *Time Versus Money*

Your time may be more valuable to devote to succeeding in your studies. In [Table 10-2](#), you can see that a student who works 15 hours per week and makes a wage of \$10.00 per hour brings home less than \$1,800 each semester. It may be well worth taking out a loan for the same amount of money.

# Budgeting

A budget is a planning tool that can both reveal problem spending areas and help fine-tune your cash flow. The mere process of gathering information to begin or maintain a budget can help you to control your spending, quantify

your needs for financial aid, and make plans to save, invest, or pay off debt.<sup>8</sup> [Table 10-3](#) shows budget categories that might be useful for a growing family.

Basic budget guidelines are as follows:

TABLE 10-3			
<b>SAMPLE BUDGET (FAMILY OF FOUR WITH TWO WAGE EARNERS)</b>			
Rent and utilities	\$1,200	\$14,400	33.85%
Insurance	\$300	\$3,600	8.46%
Savings	\$50	\$600	1.41%
Other	\$10	\$120	0.28%
Tuition and fees	\$320	\$3,840	9.03%
Books and supplies	\$100	\$1,200	2.82%
Food and beverages	\$400	\$4,800	11.28%
Household operations and maintenance	\$50	\$600	1.41%
Childcare	\$600	\$7,200	16.93%
Furnishing and equipment	\$50	\$600	1.41%
Clothing	\$150	\$1,800	4.23%
Personal allowance	\$50	\$600	1.41%
Transportation	\$120	\$1,440	3.39%
Medical care	\$60	\$720	1.69%
Recreation, entertainment	\$50	\$600	1.41%
Contributions, donations	\$5	\$60	0.14%
Credit card payments	\$30	\$360	0.85%
<b>TOTAL Expenses</b>	<b>\$3,545</b>	<b>\$42,540</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>INCOME</b>			
Household salary (after taxes)	\$2,150	\$25,800	60.36%
Scholarships	\$167	\$2,000	4.68%
Loans	\$1,245	\$14,940	34.96%
<b>TOTAL Income</b>	<b>\$3,562</b>	<b>\$4,2740</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>INCOME LESS EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$17</b>	<b>\$200</b>	

1. A monthly budget is often the most useful; because some ex-

penses and income items are paid less frequently, figure their annual or semiannual amounts and then divide by 12. The goal is an estimated picture of your future cash flow.

2. List all of your income and expenses. Take a look at the expense categories in [Table 10-3](#) to assist you.
3. As one of your regular expense items, you should include payments into a savings (or investment) account (otherwise known as paying yourself first). A good minimum savings goal is 10% of your gross income. The importance of this step cannot be stressed enough; given enough time, it can literally bring you financial independence or save you in an emergency.
4. Subtract expenses from income. You should have a positive

amount remaining; this is your bottom line and cushion for unforeseen expenses. A negative bottom line is a sign that you need to work at reducing your expenses or increasing your income. [Table 10-4](#) demonstrates average budget allocations as a percentage of gross income for each general expense category. They are meant as guidelines and suggested maximums. Educational expenses are likely to account for 15% to 50% of a student's budget. Realistically, few students can absorb these expenses without making compromises in other areas.

TABLE 10-4
<b>RECOMMENDED BUDGET ALLOCATIONS<sup>8</sup></b>

<i>BUDGET CATEGORY</i>	<i>RECOMMENDED AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF GROSS INCOME</i>
Housing plus utilities	30% to 35%
Transportation and related costs	17% to 19%
Food	15% to 20%
Health care (including insurance)	5% to 9%
Clothing	5% to 7%
Savings	10% and up
Entertainment plus vacations	3% to 6%
Debt (credit cards, personal loans)	5%
Other expenses	5% and up



Adapted from Kratzer C. *Managing Your Money: Developing a Spending Plan*. Cooperative Extension Service. Circular 594. Las Cruces, NM; New Mexico State University. [http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/\\_circulars/CR594.pdf](http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_circulars/CR594.pdf). Accessed July 13, 2013.

# Managing Guilt

Students who are single parents or have families with children often struggle with the demands of the academic program and juggling multiple responsibilities. These students often feel guilty that they are unable to be as accessible to their children or families and their employers and also succeed academically. At the same time, as members of their families make sacrifices to support their education, students report feeling selfish in spending the time needed to complete the academic program.

Although this is a temporary situation with a positive long-term outcome, many students need extensive support in the short term to assist with unexpected emergencies, transportation needs, family illnesses, and financial crises.

There may be services on campus that can assist students to access available support. Neighbors and friends may also be available to help. [Chapter 14](#) offers many ideas for students coping with the stresses of completing an educational program.

## Support Systems

Students often encounter barriers that can become a source of frustration, confusion, and disappointment. A strong support system serves as a powerful mediator of the stress involved in an intensive educational program. Your family and friends can certainly provide emotional support and encouragement. They may also provide a welcome relief from the rigors of studying, writing papers, and practicing clinical techniques.

## *Peer Support*

Peer support involves sharing experiences and reactions with those who have had or are having common experiences. Peer support can provide valuable mediation of stress that is experienced during the educational process and later during the transition from school to work.[9-11](#)

During your physical therapist assistant education experience you will have opportunities to both receive support and to give support. It is important that you realize how powerful collegial support is while going through this process together.

Peer support involves the following:

- Discussing feelings about similar experiences and emotions
- Validating goals
- Sharing information, tips, and resources

- Participating in social and recreational activities
- Empowering your colleagues to take effective action
- Practicing skills
- Collaborating on projects

This doesn't mean complaining and griping with your friends. It involves listening and acknowledging the feelings and beliefs and relating your own experiences.

Providing support involves the following:

- *Empathy*: Understanding of the other person's feelings, experiences, and goals, and knowing how to correctly communicate this understanding to the other person(s). Being caring, sensitive, and responsive are basic to establish a supportive relationship.
- *Respect*: Respect for the experience and feelings of the other person.

- *Sincerity*: Honesty and genuineness.
- *Trustworthiness*: Honesty and willingness to maintain confidentiality and be consistent.
- *Self-disclosure*: Relating to one's own experiences and feelings.

## Take Action

### *The Buddy System*

Having a “buddy,” “peer mentor,” a “big sister,” or a “big brother” is the way that many educational programs arrange for a peer support relationship to develop. If a program exists in your university, use it. If not, you may want to suggest developing one.

### *Rest and Relaxation*

Even though the demands of the academic program are great, you can

relax occasionally and participate in social activities with your classmates and future colleagues. Identifying a class “social chair” is often a way to formalize regular social events outside of class. Again, scheduling social events is as important as scheduling your exercise commitments and personal priorities.

## ***Celebrate!***

Many landmark events occur during the educational process. Important exams, first clinical experiences, papers, projects, and presentations are just a few examples. It is important to celebrate your achievements during the process and acknowledge and recognize the positive accomplishments of your classmates.

## ***Involving Significant Others***

Significant others, the people who

are closest to you, are critical to your support and well-being while going through the program; yet, they are often left out due to the tremendous demands that the education program places on your time, effort, and attention. Keep significant others involved as much as possible and help them to know how they can best support you.

### ***Keep the Memories Forever***

Photos, videos, and other records of the time your class has spent together will solidify the supportive experience and provide a long-lasting memory of the time you spent in your educational program. Appoint a class photographer or class historian to spearhead this effort.

## **Summary**

Students face many sources of

stress and uncertainty during the educational process. Time management, financial management, and peer support strategies are valuable and are proven ways to gain a sense of control over the sometimes overwhelming demands of the educational program.

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# PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

1. Evaluate your personal habits in regard to time management. What changes can you make in each of the following areas that will save you time?

<i>TIME-MANAGEMENT STRATEGY</i>	<i>IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENT</i>
Writing daily to-do list	
Keeping your addresses and phone numbers in one place—on computer, phone, or tablet.	
Scheduling sufficient time for personal needs, studying, and exercise	
Doing things once well, so that they don't have to be done over again	



Lowering standards of perfectionism	
Taking notes while you are reading assignments	
Saying no	
Delegating tasks to others	
Organizing work space and study materials	
Addressing high priority tasks first	
Using an agenda for all meetings	



2. Create a personal home budget, following the guidelines presented. What changes do you need to make to manage your finances while in your education program?

<i>EXPENSES</i>	<i>MONTHLY</i>	<i>ANNUALLY</i>	<i>PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL</i>
Rent and utilities			
Insurance			
Savings			
Other			
Tuition and fees			
Books and supplies			
Food and beverages			
Household operations and maintenance			
Childcare			
Furnishing and equipment			
Clothing			
Personal allowance			
Transportation			
Medical care			
Recreation, entertainment			
Contributions, donations			
Credit card payments			
TOTAL Expenses			The preceding percentages should total 100
<i>INCOME</i>			
Salary (after taxes)			
Scholarships			
Loans			
TOTAL Income			The percentages in the Income section should total 100
INCOME LESS EXPENSES			

### 3. Evaluate your support network.

How can you improve your support to others? How can you improve the support available to you?

<i>YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK</i>	<i>EXAMPLES OF SUPPORT</i>
To whom do you give support?	



From whom do you receive support?	
From whom do you request support?	

