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TIPS FOR GRADUATES: How to survive college enrollment

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*"We change, isolation teaches us, shapes us and reveals fears we didn't know about."
M. Atwood*

Dear graduates,

in the situation as we write this text we have a million information, thoughts and feelings in our head, and the faces of the graduates we met either during our clinical work or whether we know them from our personal lives pass through our heads. Of course, we also remember the time when we were high school graduates and preparing to finish high school and enroll in college. All these feelings, all these plans, questions, things and events and all these memories were in one way put in the background due to the global pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus which brought everyone fear and exposure to stress due to uncertainty due to new and unknown situation. An earthquake was an additional stress for some young people living in Zagreb.

If we were to write these messages in the period before we were all affected by the pandemic and the earthquake experience, we would also write that this is a period where you usually have a lot of questions, feelings of pressure around the decisions you make, expectations of yourself or others to you have a lot of (final) answers about your future... like it's a click on your computer. This situation also raises a number of new questions and uncertainties, as everything takes place in some new circumstances.

Some of you will be angry, some sad, some full of enthusiasm and desire to fight, some of fear, some will even think that it is not fair that we emphasize their status and say that everyone is affected in this situation. But everyone will react in a different and at the same time similar way, because everyone has lost something and a change has happened to everyone.

A few months ago, the information to most of us that there was a disease in a country far away from us seemed far away. Gradually, the situation grew into a global pandemic, which affected us and brought many restrictions, constant conversations and media reports about health, the spread of infection, restriction of movement and new rules and changes, which radically changed our way of life as we knew and to which we are accustomed. Often it was



so much information that we often did not know where to place or what to do with it, and those things that were at the center of your thoughts and worries, such as how to finish high school, pass the state exam or prepare for enrollment, others have fallen into the background.

In situations like this, scientifically based information contributes to reducing uncertainty and feelings of fear and helplessness. We can get them from organized public services, primarily related to health protection measures in order to protect first our health, and then the health of people close to us and dear, but also unknown to us, but to other people close to us. You can also gather information through modern forms of communication related to all the questions you would ask if the situation was like before the pandemic and if you were in school every day. The reality and living conditions we are used to so far have changed - you do not listen to classes in school, do not go to trainings, do not go out... The current way of life has been transferred to the virtual world and is, to some extent, available to us in another way.

We know that this is a period in which in some ways you "stand on your own two feet" and become an adult. But remember, adults also rely on others in crisis and stressful situations. Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. Rely on others, ask parents, friends, professors for help with structuring learning information, submitting documents, applying for individual studies, share your concerns, listen, collect and select ideas that might help you. By relying on others when we need to, we preserve our strength, both physical and mental, so that we can focus it on what is most important to us.

The first places where you can inquire and get information are certainly your school and the desired faculty, and you can also look for them on the websites of the National Center for External Evaluation of Education (www.ncvvo.hr), the Ministry of Science and Education (www.mzo.gov.hr) and Become a student (www.postani-student.hr).

It is important for us to guide you and to make you aware of the fact that a student, and soon a student, is just one of your roles. You are also a friend, a child, a grandson, a neighbor, a citizen, maybe a dancer, a photographer, an athlete, someone's partner... At the same time, you are a person affected by an intense stressful experience. Try to fit this into your self-image, your sense of self-worth, but the expectations you have of yourself.

Try to remember things that normally help you in stressful situations - both to relax and to overcome problems and use them as your own tool and shield during this period. It is important to direct you to raise awareness of the fact that schooling is one of your roles. You are also a friend, a child, a grandson, a neighbor, a citizen, maybe a dancer, a photographer, an athlete, someone's partner... you are also a person affected by an intense stressful



experience. Try to fit this into your self-image, your sense of self-worth, but the expectations you have of yourself.

Take some time each day to relax and socialize with those you missed the most during quarantine (according to safety recommendations and respecting physical distance).

In case you notice more intense changes in emotions and behavior (difficulty sleeping, anxiety, low mood, difficulty concentrating, motivation...), which significantly interfere with what you are trying to achieve during the day, consult a psychologist or psychotherapist in agreement with your parents. In times of stress, such as the one you are going through now, taking care of yourself comes first.

