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## **How to survive in a hurricane**

Being a student, stress and academic pressure are practically a part of our everyday lives. Recently, that stress has only been exacerbated by COVID, adding to sudden responsibilities, physical growth, peer pressure and having to make decisions that narrow down our future. We're in a period of transformation: not quite kids but not quite adults. The whirlwind of decisions we're faced with can be daunting and even suffocating for some, which brings to mind the question:

How do you take control over your life when virtually everything around you is changing?

I won't lie and say that there's a magical cure for the stress that weighs us down, but there *are* practical methods that we can take to lighten the load. During lockdowns, things that I've found helpful are: journaling, listening to music, going for walks and just taking a few seconds to breathe. It's surprising what you notice when you let your mind fall away and focus on simply living. These ordinary tasks may seem mundane, but they give us a much-needed mental break and help us steady ourselves against our stress.

Even with these methods however, it can be hard to know what to do when our stress is overloading and our mental health crashing.

Mental health can be a touchy subject. We're reluctant to divulge how we're really feeling, even to our friends and especially when we're standing in front of a blank door with "Counsellor" on it. When someone asks if we're okay, it's almost out of instinct that we say: "yeah, of course." It's as if admitting that we're not okay is admitting that there's something wrong with us, and being vulnerable isn't easy. Sometimes it can seem like everyone around us has their life in order and priorities straight, but in reality we're all facing the same struggles. Fitting in, standing out, stretching and contorting ourselves under the howling force of a hurricane until we become unrecognisable.

I want to offer an alternative to traditional ways of dealing with stress: turning stress into pressure and letting that pressure motivate you. While stress is composed of problems that lead to feeling overwhelmed, pressure is the anxious feeling of wanting to achieve a result.

We need pressure, not stress. Just like how a hurricane sweeps things away, having too much stress can batter you from all sides. However, in the eye of the hurricane, the howling wind doesn't touch you. Pressure helps us focus ourselves in the storm of decisions and doubts. It pushes us to achieve our goals and gives us purpose.

How do we turn stress into pressure?

Rather than seeing stress as a weakness and threat to our lives, we should see it as a challenge. This switch will allow us to consider more options and avoid mental breakdowns. Positive psychology author Shawn Achor says to focus on what we can control. If we stop getting hung up on past regrets, we can more easily move to improve ourselves and our results in any area of life. This is the most crucial step in turning stress into pressure, and like everything else, you get better with practice.

Stress can never completely be erased. As long as we care about something, we will feel pressure to do it well. The key is to not let that stress consume us, but rather turn it into a reason to keep learning and improving. Once we turn our stress into pressure and reach the eye of the hurricane, the winds around us slowly die down and turn into clear skies beyond.