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How can we support students' mental health and well-being during the pandemic?

Coronavirus, a name we are all forced to familiarise ourselves with in the past 2 years. A virus that gathers families together anxiously waiting in front of televisions for 4 pm announcements, a virus that separates friends with a screen, a virus that makes us forget how to socialise or act "normal" while hanging out. Nobody prepared our rangatahi for the challenges we faced in the past 2 years. Covid-19 introduced traffic light systems, lockdowns, and social distancing, while our academic grades are declining, classes are cancelled, and our mental health is often neglected.

We assume people are "okay" because well... they look "normal". But why are we making assumptions? It is human nature to skim through the pages and only spot the words highlighted in neon yellow, in font size 48, bold and underlined. We rarely dig deeper than the surface to spot the bottom of the iceberg. Things we struggle with that we never show; things that we only keep to ourselves; the burden on our shoulders that is crumbling our fragile bones. Don't assume people around you are "fine", and living their best life. Especially during these times of a pandemic, our rangatahi can often be overwhelmed and don't always get the opportunity to see each other face to face. Message a friend you haven't heard about in a while and ask them how their day is going, or even call them from time to time for a quick check. What they are showing is just the tip of the ice burg. Everyone should be aware of their mental health and well-being and acknowledge how they are feeling, whether it is positive or negative.

We can support our mental health and well-being by taking things slow. We often compare ourselves with other people. We are affected by the information we see on social media to a great degree. When coronavirus stroke, we spend most of our time at home. We use our phones more often, caught up in the addictive endless scrolling. Lockdowns made it impossible to engage in in-person conversations. We mostly stay up to date via social media. We compare the way we are dealing with Covid with our friends on social media. We feel disappointed that we may not be as productive as perhaps other people. But we are individuals and everyone copes with things differently. Nobody could foresee the devastating pandemic, so it is ok to take things slow, and remember not to rush ourselves.

We can support our mental health and well-being by opening out and having a chat with supportive friends and family. We are not alone in this pandemic. We don't have to carry the load on our own, we can open up and share how we are feeling with a parent, our friends, or even with a pet or a stuffed animal. You could get the stone off your chest when you share your emotions, and you could feel even better when people resonate with you. We should be proud of ourselves for going this far in the pandemic, and still making progress even in online learning during these uncertain times. Students could feel isolated from time to time

during pandemics, but opening out to others can benefit your well-being because it could reduce your stress and anxiety and increases your sense of belonging.

We are all different, and we don't all have the same ways of learning. We could take care of our well-being by being aware of our mental health, taking things slow, and talking with friends and family.