

Cover story



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Suneeta Kaul is a journalist, having started her career with The Economic Times in New Delhi. She has worked with several publications in various cities since then, and has also done a stint in the corporate world. Keenly interested in current events, she is a champion of social justice, equality and human rights, besides being a gender and street animal welfare activist.

TOP PROBLEMS OF STUDENTS

Facing the challenges head on



The new year is upon us, and that means resolutions, promises, plans, setting goals. This is particularly so for students, who draw up study timetables and elaborate schedules. (Whether they stick to them or not is another story!)

So, what are the main challenges students are likely to face in the coming year? Well, the issues are the same, regardless of whether it is the beginning of the year, the middle, or the fag end of it, and they range from anxiety, fear, stress, restlessness, inability to concentrate, and so forth. And then there are times when one feels nothing is going right, even simple portions of the syllabus assume frightening proportions,

and it all seems to be too much.

It is not uncommon for students to go through these phases – at some point or the other, most of them feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the effort required to pass the hurdle of exams. Despair, disappointment, a feeling of worthlessness are common emotions. However, the thing to remember is that none of these problems are insurmountable.

Here's a look at some of the most common challenges faced by students.

Lack of motivation

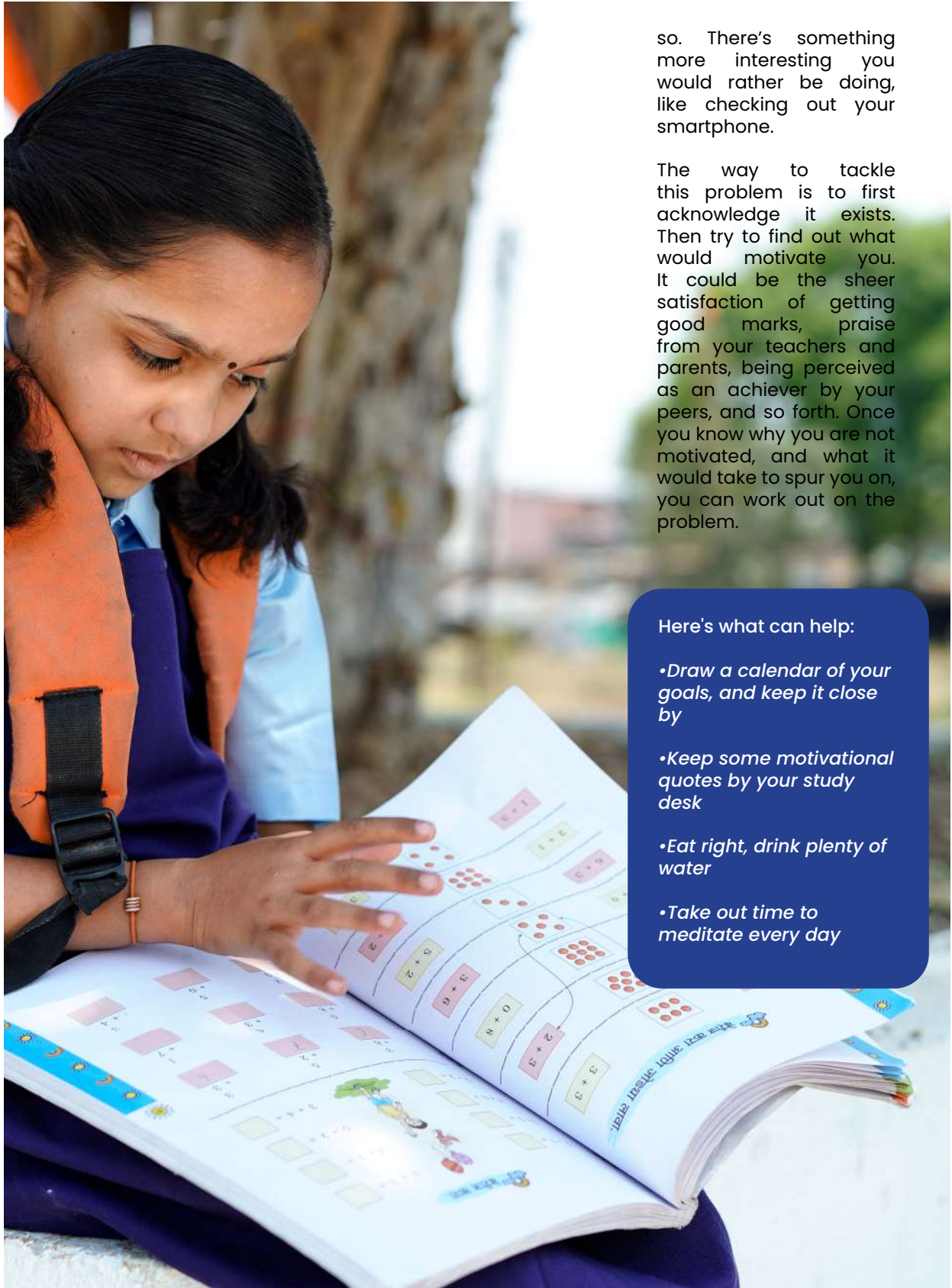
Just because you are a student, it does not follow that you will necessarily

feel raring to study and achieve academic excellence. While it is true that as a student, you have to put in hours of hard work, the motivation to do so may just not be there.

This is a serious problem, and as a student, you need to examine the reasons. Why do you lack the drive to study and do well in your academic life? Are you feeling an overall lack of motivation, or is it only for some subjects?

Some of the reasons for low motivation are a lack of belief in one's abilities to do well, fear of failure, poor health, stress, discontent in the family, and so forth. Often, you feel you would like to start to study, but you find excuses to postpone actually doing





so. There's something more interesting you would rather be doing, like checking out your smartphone.

The way to tackle this problem is to first acknowledge it exists. Then try to find out what would motivate you. It could be the sheer satisfaction of getting good marks, praise from your teachers and parents, being perceived as an achiever by your peers, and so forth. Once you know why you are not motivated, and what it would take to spur you on, you can work out on the problem.

Here's what can help:

- Draw a calendar of your goals, and keep it close by
- Keep some motivational quotes by your study desk
- Eat right, drink plenty of water
- Take out time to meditate every day

Too many distractions

This is the age of social media and smartphones – there’s so much interesting stuff out there, it’s easy to get distracted. Who wouldn’t want to watch a video or a reel or a story, on Facebook or Instagram? Or listen to music of one’s choice?

Yes, there are plenty of distractions in today’s world that come in the way of studies. No, that does not mean you should not get

access to a smartphone, you should not have a social media account. It means you should learn how to allocate a certain amount of time to entertainment and shut out the distractions during your study time.

Agreed, it is easier said than done, but you can always take help from your elders. Involve them in your study plan. Make sure you agree on when you can use your smartphone, and when it is absolutely off limits.

Here’s what can help:

- *Create a reward system – finish x amount of your studies, give yourself five minutes of entertainment*

- *Limit your socializing to weekends*

- *Remind yourself of your goals, that will help in cutting out distractions*



Difficulty in concentrating

Okay, so you have motivated yourself and even eliminated distractions. But you may still not be able to make much headway. Reason: lack of concentration. The moment you start your studies, you may find your mind wandering. Instead of actually studying, you might find yourself staring at your books, seeing nothing, registering nothing.

Clear your mind before starting your studies. It helps to deliberately push away random thoughts

and start thinking of what you have to study before actually starting. And remember, lack of concentration is a common problem. However, some people find it harder to concentrate than others. If you are one of those, you might need help. Do not hesitate to talk to family elders or your teachers about it.

Sometimes, it is difficult to concentrate simply because your mind is tired. If you have been working too hard, you might find it difficult to keep up the tempo. So, take small breaks, refresh yourself, and then get back to work.

Here's what can help:

- Meditate for some time every day
- Make sure your study area is in a quiet corner
- Think about what you have to study for the day before starting



Feeling overwhelmed

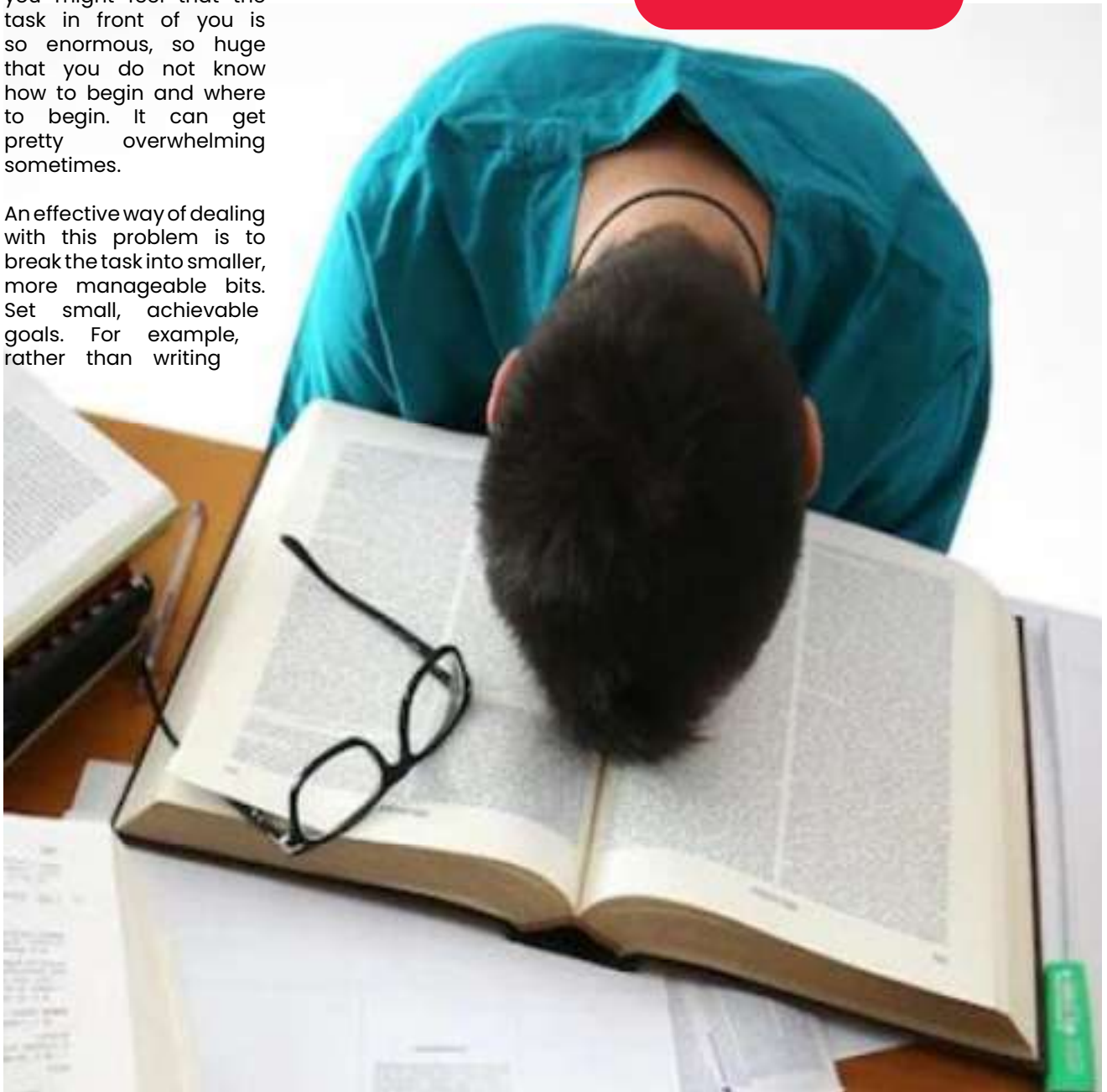
These days, there is a lot of burden on students. Apart from regular school and college, there are tuitions, study classes, and whatnot. Small wonder that sometimes, you might feel that the task in front of you is so enormous, so huge that you do not know how to begin and where to begin. It can get pretty overwhelming sometimes.

An effective way of dealing with this problem is to break the task into smaller, more manageable bits. Set small, achievable goals. For example, rather than writing

an entire essay at one go, divide the tasks into smaller portions. Write the introduction first. Take a break. Think about what you will say next. Then write the next section. You can also break it down into the numbers of words to be written, for example, 100 words at a time.

Here's what can help:

- Break the portion to be covered into smaller bits
- Reward yourself for achieving milestones
- Set new targets



Struggling with time management

As a student, you have so much to do – studies, extra-curricular activities, family, friends, and so forth. In the midst of all this, it can get challenging to find time to do it all. And when it comes to studies, to which subject should you allocate more time? That, in itself, is a major challenge.

Let's face it, there are only 24 hours in the day! So, how will you find time to do everything you have to do? There is no silver bullet that can solve the problem of lack of time. The only thing you can do is approach your task in a methodical manner and stick to a schedule.

Creating a short-term, medium-term and a long-term plan will enable you to get a better grip on what you need to accomplish. A short-term plan could be what you need to do on a particular day, or in a particular week. A medium-term

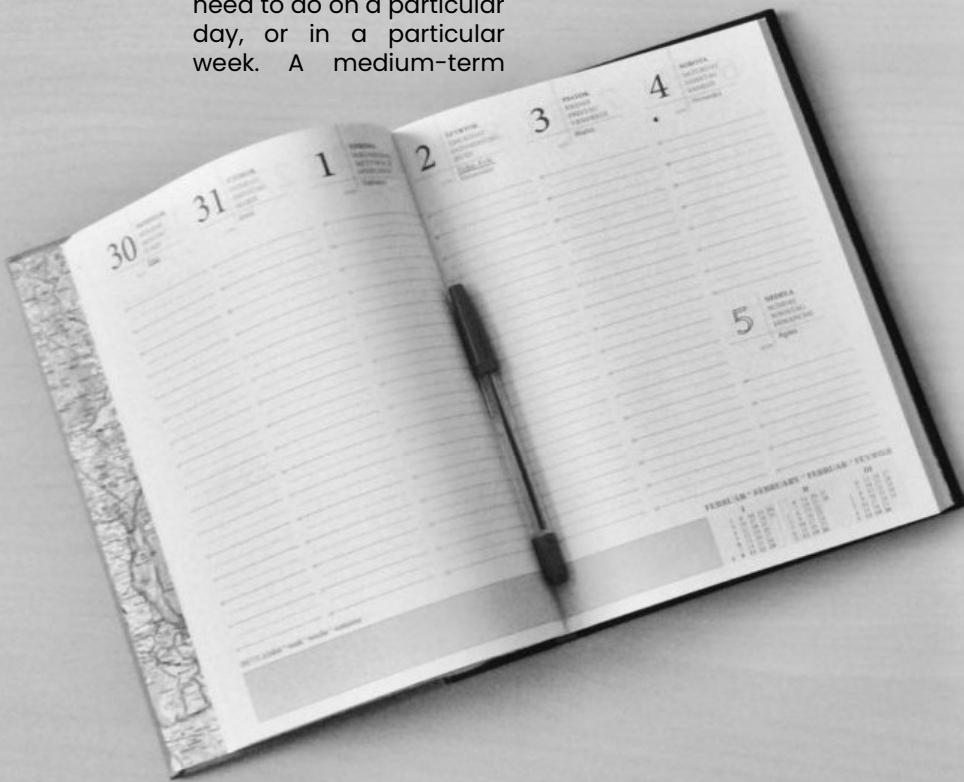
plan could be a month, or a semester. And a long-term plan could be a year.

Waking up early will give you sufficient time to plan your day. Creating a time table, or a schedule at the beginning of the month or a year will help put things in perspective and give you an insight into what you need to do in a particular span of time.

Do remember that you could plan and plan, and all of it could come to nothing if you don't stick to it. You need to instil a sense of discipline in yourself and make sure you meticulously follow the plan you have created. At the same time, a little flexibility is also essential, otherwise it might become too demanding, which would be self-defeating.

Here's what can help:

- Create a short-term, medium-term and a long-term schedule
- Stick to your plan
- Leave some room for emergencies and unexpected events



Feeling stressed, anxious, depressed

Mental stress is increasingly becoming a big problem for students, who carry the burden of expectations all the time. Your parents expect you to excel, your teachers demand that you get good grades, you yourself want to shine and be seen as a brilliant student. It is natural to sometimes feel that the burden is too much to bear. Feelings of inadequacy can creep in, leading to self-doubt and anxiety and depression.

What you need to understand is that these feelings are far more common than you think. You might feel you are the only one to be going through such emotions because you

are inferior, weak, dull. You might be surprised to know that your peers are going through the same trauma, the same problems. It's just that they don't show it, and don't talk about it. Just as you don't.

But just because these feelings are common, it does not mean you need not do anything about them. The best thing to do is to talk to your parents, your family elders, your teachers. Tell them what you are going through, what you are feeling. Together, you can devise a way to overcome the problems.

If you feel you can deal with the problems on your own, then have a go at it. Write down what makes you anxious. What are you afraid of? What is the cause of your stress? Ask yourself what the worst-case scenario is. Then work up from there, step by step.

Here's what can help:

- Learn to recognize the signs of stress
- Talk to a family member, or a teacher, or a school counsellor
- Discuss the worst-case scenario, and work your way up from there

Overcoming the challenges faced by students is not easy, but it is not all that difficult either. You need to first figure out what your challenges, your weaknesses, your problems are, and then find solutions to them. Involving your parents and your family members very often makes it easier to tackle the issues that are troubling you.

In the end, do remember, everyone cannot be a topper. If everyone could be number one, there would be no number one, right? What you need to do is your best. Aim high, put in your best effort, and learn to be content with your abilities and capabilities. Success in life is not measured by just academic excellence; it is an amalgam of various factors, such as emotional intelligence, social skills, financial wisdom, and, most important of all, the ability to be happy and make others so. ■

