1. TREAT YOURSELF

Work out a supervision plan that works for both of you. Try to set up regular meetings, so as not to put off arranging a meeting. Keep your meetings with your supervisor and think in advance what you would like to ask him or her. At the same time appreciate that he or she is very busy. Hand in drafts that are well written, so that his/her feedback can be more useful.

2. AVOID SELF-SABOTAGE

Try to avoid self-sabotaging behaviour such as procrastinating, not sleeping enough or being very disorganised. Keep reading textbooks systematically - it’s a way to make small units of progress, and keeps you being productive even if you are stuck on a problem. If you have had a day of hard work, relax in the evening without feeling guilty even if you feel you have not made progress. Trust that inspiration will arrive in the end!

3. LET GO OF PERFECTIONISM

Accept that good enough is OK. If you are too much of a perfectionist - and many mathematicians are - you can find it difficult to finish tasks. Trust the experience of your supervisor when deciding what is good enough for a thesis or project.

4. PERSEVERE

A PhD thesis is a test of perseverance. A good analogy is that of a marathon. The runners who complete it are not the ones who run fastest, but the ones who do not give up despite all the difficulties in their way.

5. MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR OPPORTUNITIES

Make the most of your time as graduate student. It will go much faster than you expect (although at times it may seem a never ending task). Use the career services, teaching opportunities, and chances to give talks. Make good use of these years to develop transferable skills: you can improve your time management and organisational skills, become more confident in speaking in public and learn how to network effectively (for example there are career services workshops to help you with this).

6. LEARN HOW TO DISCONNECT AND CLEAR YOUR MIND

Try to disconnect from your research often enough. This can boost your creativity and reduce stress. Sometimes your subconscious can make progress on a problem even when you are not thinking about it - or even when you are asleep!

7. TREAT YOURSELF

From time to time reward yourself. You have been working hard and deserve some treats. Also, don’t forget to take care of yourself, to eat healthily, get enough exercise and sleep well. All this will help you to handle better the stress of the week.

8. BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

You are not an impostor and you deserve your place at Oxford! Insecurity is not uncommon among good and hard-working students.

During moments of low self-esteem there are several ways to boost your confidence, such as to set a small goal and achieve it. Talk to friends, family and mentors. Other people have been through similar circumstances and often will be happy to share their experience and advice on how to overcome difficulties. The University has a number of resources to help students in many areas of life (the counselling services being one of them).

9. DON'T LOSE YOUR SENSE OF HUMOUR

DPhil studies can get very serious, so some laughter will help you to see things in perspective and to relax. Of course there are almost limitless sources of humour, but you might like to look at, for example, PhD Comics, Improv Everywhere, Ig Nobel Awards or some funny youtube videos like the science Lady Gaga parody Bad Project.