

# CARE

Mental Wellness in Shanghai  
A publication of Community Center Shanghai  
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## *School-Related Stress*

*When kids don't want to go to school*

## *Expatriate-Proofing Your Relationship*

*Preventative Counseling for Couples*

PLUS!

Stomp Out ANTs • Navigating a Moral Crisis • Attitude is Everything

# CARE MAGAZINE

## Mental Wellness in Shanghai

A publication of the Community Center Shanghai.

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### Artist's Bio

Zoe Kao is 17 years old and originally from Taiwan. She is a recent graduate of Shanghai American School, Pudong and will attend New York University in the fall, planning to major in Studio Art with a concentration in Computer Art. She has transferred to many schools in her life, but those transitions have always been made easier with art. The art classroom is her favorite spot on campus and where she tends to make her first friend in a new school. Every day events, literary pieces and the scenes from novels inspire her art. "Art to me is about more than expressing ideas," she says. " Art creates a world where I can have freedom and serenity from stress and worries. In my world of art, my true personality can show itself and help me open up to others and help others to understand me."

Cover painting: "Dream", pastel.

## The Editor's Letter

As I look over this issue of CARE, I can't help but notice it is a little "listy". Almost every article includes a list of steps or strategies to help manage emotional difficulties. And then it hit me: lists are probably one of the most powerful and undervalued tools we have at our disposal.

What would we do without lists? Grocery shopping, a day at the beach, a trip back home, a big presentation, birthday parties – they would all be an exercise in forehead slapping if not for the trusty lists that help us remember all the necessary details.

Anything that requires preparation and thought is made more manageable with a list, including mental wellness. In this issue, feature writer Elisabeth J. Luu discusses how school-related stress can hobble international students of all ages. Included in the piece are lists to help you gauge your child's level of stress, provide emotional support, and get their study habits whipped into shape to minimize further pressure.

Check out CARE's other useful lists, too. Brandi Dillon lists eight ways to recognize and eliminate negative thought patterns. If you feel overwhelmed by the business drinking culture in Shanghai, consider the list of solutions in, "Draw the Line on Drinking". Manage work pressures better with Aiching Liu's list

of ways to reshape your attitude from resentful and reactive to analytical and action-oriented. For those facing a moral crisis, carefully deliberate over the list of questions offered in "The Answer to Akrasia", the second part of our series on moral conflict.

But this issue of CARE isn't all bullet points and marching orders. Feature writer Rashmi Dalai sheds light on the trend towards preventative counseling, a step many couples are taking to "expat-proof" their relationships. And if you are wondering what to do about kids and tablets (and phones and laptops), you are not alone. One parent puts this question to our Dear Counselor column.

One of our missions at CARE magazine is to provide you, the reader, with tools to help better manage your mental health. In this issue, I can only think, "Mission accomplished!"

Sincerely,

Rachel Middagh  
*Chief Editor*

I can't think of anything that excites a greater sense of childlike wonder than to be in a country where you are ignorant of almost everything.

Suddenly you are five years old again.

You can't read anything, you have only the most rudimentary sense of how things work, you can't even reliably cross a street without endangering your life. Your whole existence becomes a series of interesting guesses.  
- Bill Bryson



# School-Related Stress



Settling her kids into an international school in Shanghai was a big accomplishment for Lynn\*, an expat mom from Australia. She took painstaking steps to choose the right school for her children from the moment her family made the decision to relocate to China. But once here, she quickly realized that it was just the first step in a challenging new experience for her kids. New social environments, difficult foreign language classes, and high academic expectations all conspired to shake up her normally unflappable kids. In short, they were pretty stressed out about school. **By Elisabeth J. Luu, Ed.M.**

Take  
A Deep  
Breath

Many parents idealize the international school experience before they arrive in Shanghai. They imagine all the rich experiences their children will have, such as studying a new language, or making new friends from different countries. While an international school education will provide your child with unique opportunities, it can also challenge and push them in ways that their previous school experiences never did.

A relatively modern problem, school-

related stress stems from internal fears and anxieties that students face about some situation or experience at school. In a center of commerce and industry like Shanghai, where over 30,000 expat children from nearly 40 different countries are studying in various international and local schools, school-related stress is a growing concern. According to counselors at the Community Center Shanghai (CCS), students grappling with school-related stress accounts for a significant portion of family counseling cases.

## Learning how to feel

Even the littlest students can feel stressed. Small children often become anxious in response to new routines or new environments. It can be especially marked if they are starting school just after relocating to Shanghai. There are so many new experiences to absorb, like having to get up on time every morning; riding the school bus; staying in school the whole day; separating from their parents. Being an expat can add to this list of "firsts", such as interacting with children

or teachers who are from different countries and cultures, learning a new language, or even eating different foods at school.

"Parents should watch for any changes in their children's typical patterns of behavior, which could indicate some form of stress," says CCS counselor Leo Lazo, who is also a psychologist at one of Shanghai's international schools. For example, little ones are more likely to refuse to get up in the morning or to go to school. A cheerful child might become sad, withdrawn, or even aggressive. Another good indicator is mood on weekends versus weekdays. "They're quite happy during the weekend, but when Sunday comes along, attitudes can suddenly change as they know they have to go to school the next day," says Sophie de Fauconval, a CCS counselor who works primarily with children.

Up until the age of eight or nine, children don't always understand their feelings and may lack the ability to communicate them. It isn't uncommon for stress to trigger physical symptoms in small children, such as tummy aches and headaches.

One way to help small children to express themselves is to teach them basic "feeling" words, such as happy, sad, mad or lonely. Read books or watch TV together and discuss how different characters might be feeling and why. Use "feeling" vocabulary regularly in your home so they understand that feelings – good and bad – are a normal part of life: "Mommy is mad because she lost her keys". Ask them how they are feeling when you see their emotions change: "Are you happy now because we are having ice cream?" These small lessons will help them recognize and express how they feel, and understand that other people have feelings too.

## Complaining is communicating

Upper elementary school and middle school students are more capable of communicating their feelings and are more likely to tell their parents or teachers about problems. This is fortunate, as the social and academic landscape at school can offer more challenges.

"As kids get older, the work load and pressures increase at school," explains Lazo. "There is much more pressure to get good grades, to excel in sports, and to be popular." Those pressures can lead to anxieties or fears that can lead to poor

**Parents should watch for any changes in their children's typical patterns of behavior, which could indicate some form of stress**



academic performance. In addition to actually complaining about school, older kids may manifest many of the same signs of stress found in small kids: stomach upset and a loss of enthusiasm. Burnt out older students may stop doing homework, skip classes, or even withdraw from school activities altogether.

To help older students navigate the increased workloads and commitments that come junior high and middle school, help them establish good study and time management habits early on. First, have kids create a distraction-free study area. Remove phones, tablets, and games, and turn off the television. If your child uses

a laptop for homework, insist that social networking sites, Skype and other sources of interruption are closed. Help them with time management techniques, such as using a calendar to plan backwards from major tests and projects. These techniques will help them manage their time now and later in life.

#### ***Social problems are school problems***

As children approach middle school and enter the teen years, social issues become much more important. "Going to school and not having friends is big problem," explains de Fauconval. "A child can sometimes fail academically because he or she doesn't have friends in school." In addition to the regular complexities of being of teenager, expat life can make matters worse. Sometimes children stop including repatriating friends in social activities, knowing that they will be gone soon anyway. Social issues can cause the most pain, and leave isolated teens depressed and fearful of going to school. Some kids become angry and act out aggressively, fighting or arguing with schoolmates in person or online. Online aggression can be especially damaging because it is public and persistent.

Parents should make a habit of checking in with older children's moods and attitudes towards school and friends, especially during relocation and repatriation. Ask for details about assignments and activities, and make note of friends' names and follow up when work is due or social events are scheduled. If kids don't seem happy when talking about friends or if there's no sense of enjoyment from school or extracurricular activities then there may be a problem. Parents should also stay vigilant for serious signs, such as sleep troubles, crying episodes, or refusal to go to school or to do homework. If you are concerned, make an appointment with teachers for a better understanding of what may be happening at school.

#### ***Overcommitted and burnt out***

In high school, the pressure to succeed academically is at an all-time high, as students are entering the years where grades determine where they might go and what they might do after graduation. "At this stage, high school kids can buckle when they feel like they can't live up to standards," says Carrie Jones, Director of Counseling at CCS. "In most international schools in Shanghai, these standards are often higher than those back in their home countries." When high school students need counseling, it is often because they are overworked, trying to augment their CVs with too many sports, clubs or other extra-curricular activities. It doesn't leave much room for downtime with families and friends, leading to burn out and exhaustion.

#### ***Helping or hurting?***

Encouraging your children to push themselves and succeed is a natural part of parenting. You want them to achieve their full potential, and discover new abilities and proficiencies through new activities. But how hard you push can be the difference between helping and hurting.

### ***What Parents Can Do***

- Check in, often. Ask your child how they're feeling about school and friends.
- Evaluate their daily rituals. Observe their usual patterns of behavior, and notice any changes over time.
- Notice their mood before and after school. Do they come home from school dejected and sad?
- Network at school. Get to know their teachers and parents who might be able to share insights about the situations your child is concerned about.
- Find out who is who. Find out who their friends are and who they don't get along with. Support their need to make friends by creating opportunities for them to participate in play dates, parties, or sports.
- Validate their feelings. Instead of saying "You shouldn't feel that way," confirm or reflect what your child has said with phrases like, "Sounds like you were feeling \_\_\_\_\_," or "That makes sense," or "I can see why you would feel that way." Then ask, "What can I do to make it better?" In the case of inappropriate behavior, say, "What could you have done differently?" Give them more appropriate alternative ways of responding.
- Be a role model for feelings. Children do not always know how to express sadness, frustration, or anxiety. Teach them how to express themselves in healthy ways. Model the behavior yourself, and be consistent.
- Let them know they're loved. Let them know that performance is not a prerequisite of their acceptance. Avoid saying, "You could have done better".
- Seek help. When you're unsure of how to help, don't wait or ignore important signs. Seek help from teachers, mental health professionals or others who are experienced with helping children and families cope with school-related stress.

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## Time Management Skills for Students

- Get a calendar. Write down all your assignments and activities so you know what you have to do. Whenever you get a new assignment, add it to the calendar right away so you don't forget.
- Use one calendar for everything. Having all your school, extracurricular and social activities on one calendar will help avoid over scheduling or double booking.
- Use backwards planning. Big projects can be scary. Break them down into smaller steps. Plan time (on your calendar...) to do those small steps ahead of the big deadline. Put them all together and it's done!
- Don't cram. Use backward planning for studying, too. If a test requires five hours of studying, schedule five one-hour study sessions. Research shows your brain absorbs and retains information better if you study in chunks, rather than in one big session.
- Prioritize! Some tests and projects are worth more marks than others. Plan to give them more time and effort.
- First is worst. Attack those subjects you find most difficult or unpleasant when your energy is highest.
- Be consistent. Choose a regular time for homework and studying and stick to it. It will become part of your routine, and will help you understand how much time you need for different subjects and assignments.
- Review regularly. Take a quick peek through your notes everyday to help your brain retain!
- Reward yourself. Finished reading the most boring chapter in the history of the world, literally? Give yourself a treat for getting through it. Rewards help break up study time and keep you motivated.
- Remember to rest. You need physical and psychological rests to perform your best and avoid burnout. Take regular study breaks and get a good night's sleep.

Some parents can exacerbate problems for overextended teens. Signing students up for extra tutoring or intensive programs that are designed to boost test scores to ensure acceptance to the best colleges and universities can create anxiety and lead to burn out. The pressure can scuttle the very goal that parents are aiming for. "Kids get blocked or frozen from stress when they have to start university applications and choosing schools because they're afraid of failure," explains de Fauconval, who helps many European students manage the stress of this process.

Even when parents don't make direct demands on children, unspoken expectations can be a powerful influence. "Most parents working here are quite successful, both financially and professionally, so by the very nature of their jobs, there is silent pressure for children to follow in their parents' footsteps," says de Fauconval. As the children of CEO's, vice presidents, and high-ranking executives, these teens know what it takes to get to those top positions and feel the pressure to be as successful as their parents. Often, they are coached from a young age that success is important, and are programmed to excel in all areas.

### *Being perfect to fit in*

In most international high schools in Shanghai, where high academic expectations are the norm rather than the exception, stress can also stem from students' desires to fit in or to stand out from the crowd. "Everybody knows who has the best grades and who has the lowest grades," says one eleventh-grader, when asked about her experience in a popular international school. With everyone knowing each other's academic standing, a pecking order of sorts is inevitable, and makes matters worse for struggling students who are looked down on for low grades.

Intense pressure at the high school level can cause students to develop what one counselor calls "perfectionist personalities". But when students feel like they can't live up to these standards, it can cause a break down. Overwhelmed older students may refuse to do school work or attend classes, become depressed and anxious, develop sleep problems and eating disorders, or manifest OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) tendencies. In the worst-case scenarios, when anxieties or fears are not addressed, teens can turn to alcohol or drugs to numb bad feelings, or, in rare cases, attempt suicide.

Fortunately, within the Shanghai expat community, parents, friends, teachers and other school professionals are more alert to the potential impact of school-related stress on children. They are generally more vigilant of problems that children may have in school, with friends, or at home because they are all aware of the unique pressures of expat life. In this respect, parents here are more equipped to help their children deal with any potential problems stemming from school-related stress. "For teachers and parents alike, it's all about understanding the individual needs of your child or as student," says Lazo.

Or, one expat mother puts it, "It's about loving your child and helping them to achieve their greatest potential – not your greatest potential".



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# Stomping Out ANTS

By Brandi Renee Dillon, MA LPC

**T**oday you are going to get out there. You are going to go to that grocery store. You are going to make friends. But it is hard when that voice in your head keeps telling you that you are never going to adjust to life here or learn the language. And forget friends. People won't like you because you are introverted and clueless. It's official: you are a loser. Just ask yourself.

You are not a loser. But it does sound like you have a serious case of ANTs – Automatic Negative Thoughts. ANTs are the toxic little nippers we generate in our own minds that chew holes in our happiness, energy and will. It is time you stomped them out. Here's how.

**Take a step back.** Ask yourself, what is going through my mind right now? Is it extreme, biased or unbalanced? By asking this question you can target and analyze the thought and the belief behind it.

**Examine the validity of your thoughts.** Are your thoughts true? Is there another interpretation that is equally valid, but less damaging? For example, you may not be a clueless loser, rather just very uncomfortable in a new social environment, a situation that will eventually pass.

**Consider the costs and benefits of your thoughts.** Ask yourself, "How will thinking this way help me? How will it hurt me?" For example, thinking that you are stupid and incapable of learning Mandarin actually keeps you from taking classes or joining a conversation club. It is a false, unhelpful thought.

**Examine the effects of your thoughts.** Do your thoughts improve your mood or make you feel bad? If it is the latter, you need to think differently. Choose thoughts that make you feel good.

**Think positive. You can control your thoughts.** Drown out negative thoughts with self-affirmations and positive self-dialogue. "I am likable", "I can do this", "I am adaptable". Tell yourself what you need to hear. Train your mind to think positively, and it will.

**Do something you like.** Refocus your attention on something that brings you pleasure. Actively reset your mind to a positive state. Exercise, get crafty, read, or play music you love.

**Save it for later.** Postpone your concerns, worry or negative beliefs until a specific time of day. You may notice that they lose their value with time.

**Talk to someone.** You might find their perspective very different from your own. "You already know more words in Mandarin than me," or "I would love to shop at the local markets but I am too intimidated!" See yourself through their eyes.

# The Answer to Akrasia:

## Navigating Moral Conflict

**A**krasia – moral crises – can arise when people have to make an important decision, but face conflict between what they want to do and what they think is the right thing to do. The outcome can differ greatly depending on how individuals make their decisions: by acting impulsively or examining the crisis in a cool, objective manner. This article will present one particular method helpful in navigating moral conflict. This approach includes spiritual principles that are found in the wisdom enlightenment tradition, as well as concepts from modern psychology. It is also based on a cognitive-behavioral model that requires both self-reflection and action. In six steps, here is one way to negotiate the murky waters of a moral crisis. **By Azin Nasser**

*This article is part 2 in a two-part series on Akrasia – moral conflict. It will present one particular approach to navigating the tension between knowing the right thing to do, but choosing otherwise.*



**“It is important to note that it isn't easy to implement these six steps.”**

*“Be of good cheer. Do not think of today's failures, but of the success that may come tomorrow. You have set yourselves a difficult task, but you will succeed if you persevere; and you will find a joy in overcoming obstacles. Remember, no effort that we make to attain something beautiful is ever lost.” - Helen Keller*

The first step in navigating a moral conflict requires us to investigate the reality of the situation as dispassionately as possible, so we can clearly understand the nature of the conflict and its associated potential consequences. It is important to ask “what questions”. For example, what is the nature of the conflict? What are my needs, wants, and desires? What are my fears, apprehensions, and frustrations? What will I gain and what can I potentially lose? Some of the pitfalls in step one include, escaping the conflict by procrastination, self-deception, biased perceptions, or shifting responsibility or blame to another. This first step is centered on gathering information, finding explanations and investigating the reality of the situation.

The next step is to gain personal insight and understanding, and start to become more aware of consequences associated in choosing a given course of action. For example, an individual who is faced with two or more options begins to see more clearly the short-term and long-term “payoffs” and costs associated with each option. Some of the pitfalls in this step include, sacrificing long-term benefits for short-term gain, lack of impulse control, and the delay of gratification.

Step three is to formulate a plan for constructive action by envisioning what could and should be. We must invoke their higher intelligence and self-reflective capacities by asking value questions that clarify “the ideal” based on our personal values and virtues. Since there are always more pathways leading to wrong action than right action, we have to use our inner sense of justice in weighing potential decisions against our core moral values. We need to ask questions such as, which values and virtues are present or absent in the current situation? Which values direct me in creating unity and reducing conflict with myself and others? Which values are aligned with my higher nature and sense of human dignity?

It is important to be realistic about our expectations. Hence, in step four, we move towards implementing a specific plan of action that is concrete, practical, manageable and achievable.

Here we try to anticipate the challenges and the potential stumbling blocks that can hinder our ability to carry out our decision. Here we ask “how” questions. For example, how can I prepare myself in facing any resistance or obstacles to the contemplated course of action? How much pressure do I feel in going through with the action plan? How can I get support before and after implementing the action plan?

In this final step we finally move into executing the action plan with courage and conscious awareness. We also need to evaluate the results of our action. We seek to evaluate both the process of thoughts and emotions associated with how we accomplished our action as well as and its effects on our self and others. We may ask questions such as: How did my action impact others? What is the new situation or outcome as a result of my actions? This new situation now becomes our new reality; hence, there is a looping effect that takes us back to stage one in what can be described as the “virtuous cycle.”

In conclusion, it is important to note that great effort is required in implementing these six steps. It is important to remember that we face decisions many times a day, and factors such as lack of understanding (ignorance), immaturity, or psychosocial developmental issues influence how effectively one navigates moral conflict. Hence, one may have more difficulty in navigating a moral conflict, depending on one's level of functioning and the complexity of the moral dilemma. In such situations, it would be wise to seek the help of a professional who can guide and assist you in this process.



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# Help with Ayi

**F**inding a good ayi or driver can be a big topic of conversation at your dinner table when you first arrive in this city and even years later. While some families make lasting connections with their ayis, others have a hard time finding a 'perfect' helper, even after several replacements. Though there are some cases of ayis taking advantage of employers, usually it is a matter of culture, communication and expectations. **By Scott Shen, MSW LSW**

Facing a language barrier is a common problem for expats who hire a local helper. Many expats learn Chinese to communicate their basic needs, but would prefer even more fluency. A healthy working relationship requires more than just orders – it also benefits from courtesy and consideration, and a healthy dose of cross-cultural understanding. Without these, small issues can escalate into hurt feelings and resentment. How can you offer courtesy and consideration when you are struggling to communicate the most basic concepts?

There are ways to keep the peace while brushing up on your language skills. It is always recommended that you inquire sincerely about your ayi's family. Start by showing her photos of your own family and then ask about hers. Small gifts go a long way, especially if she has a child you can treat. You would be surprised how little gestures can reduce the tension between two strangers.

When training your ayi, remember that she is not you, in every way. She is likely unfamiliar with your cultural expectations about, for example, how to clean a bathroom, or your personal preferences about how it should be done. Explain and demonstrate what you want, and then allow her the flexibility and time you would any other employee learning an entirely new task in a new environment.

This mindset is key, as it is a part of the cultural adaption process. How this process is driven has a direct impact on your

mental and emotional well-being. The more you want your helper to do things exactly the way you are comfortable with in your home country, the more anxious you become if your helper does something 'wrong'.

Broader cultural differences can cause misunderstandings. For example, it is common for ayis to discuss their work with foreign families among themselves. Gossiping and privacy are less significant concerns here than in western countries. If you do not want your helpers sharing your family foibles with outsiders, speak to them, recalling that they are behaving well within acceptable cultural norms. It is your problem, so to speak.

There are risks to working in someone else's home. Your ayi may be bumping up against unresolved emotional issues, such as culture shock, anxiety and anger, or even marital stress. If you find yourself always angry with your helper, consider your own state of mind.

Domestic helpers are as likely to carry preconceived notions about you as you are about them, so it is best that both parties clearly state their expectations and boundaries in the beginning. Let kindness and mutual respect enhance the relationship as time passes. After all, Chinese have this saying too, 'Treat others how you want to be treated' (己所不欲, 勿施于人 / Ji Suo Bu Yu, Wu Shi Yu Ren).



# Expat- Proofing Your Relationship

## Preventative Counseling for Couples



**M**ost couples heading to Shanghai focus on the tactical and practical aspects of their relocation. They hire movers, engage real estate agents, and identify schools. Once here, they find grocery stores, and hire aiyis to help them.

While many couples know that moving to China will add stresses and strains to their lives, most do not think to seek adequate support where they may need it most - in their own relationships. **By Rashmi Dalai**

According to Community Center Shanghai (CCS) counselor, Ai-Ching Liu, the distress that most couples feel in coming to Shanghai doesn't come from culture shock as much from the way the new situation shakes up their personal dynamic. "Many people think they have very strong marriages and that's why they can move to China together," she explains. "They come here and realize their relationship is not as stable as it was in their home country."

She believes many couples too quickly place the blame on China. They attribute their weakening connection to the chaos of moving here. They plan to talk and reconnect more once they're settled in, or intend to be more intimate when work and home schedules are more manageable. But in reality, life anywhere is full of stresses. Unless couples make time to address their problems, they will only compound beyond the challenges of life in Shanghai.

To stop the problem before it starts, a growing number of expats are beginning to add a relationship counselor to their relocation team. They are using counseling as a preparatory tool to ensure a smooth transition. Sometimes known as "expat proofing" a relationship, preventative counseling helps couples address their issues and maintain their connection before their new lives in Shanghai push problems to the surface.

This type of counseling can be influential enough to determine the difference between a difficult and successful China experience. According to CCS counselor Azin Nasseri, "The better you can create harmony and unity in your relationship, the more successful you will be in China. The greater the conflict, the more you will suffer and have a quicker exit from China."

### ***Bolster your bond***

Preventative counseling helps couples deal with the stresses that can send a relationship into a crisis period. It is especially useful at times of transition. During large life changes, most couples don't have the time to focus on strengthening their relationships, but these are the very times that intimate connections are most at risk.

Preventative counseling can bolster a couple's bond, provided both partners are receptive. "It's very important for couples to be focused on values and habits they had before arriving in Shanghai. But at the same time it's quite important to also be open minded and tolerant concerning the new culture they will face," said Simona Renzoni, another CCS counselor.

Within these sessions, couples start by examining their reasons for coming to Shanghai (usually as a result of one of the partner's work). They compare and share their feelings and expectations about



the change. They work together with a counselor to create an awareness of each person's perspective, develop skills to communicate effectively, and understand what's necessary to maintain a healthy relationship.

The counseling sessions also allow families to work out the more practical details of daily life – schools, where to shop, how to handle the pollution, where to seek good medical care. The sessions are dedicated times to talk. Within these discussions, couples can explore the pros and cons of life in Shanghai and evaluate how these factors affect each other's commitment to the experience. This can keep partners working together.

Finally, preventative counseling can give couples tools to recognize common stresses of life in Shanghai: culture shock, burn out for the working spouse, a breakdown in intimacy, and feelings of anxiety, depression, loneliness, boredom,

and resentment. Counselors recommend at least five sessions to adequately “expat-proof” a relationship.

#### ***The sooner the better***

While it may seem counterintuitive, the benefits of preventative counseling are most potent when a couple first arrives in Shanghai. This is a time when most couples are most jointly invested in the adventure of the relocation, and receptive to confronting issues in a relationship.

However, there is also no bad time to seek preventative counseling. According to Ai-Ching, the greatest mistake couples make is waiting too long to get help. “If couples feel that they are easily angered, or impatient, or easy to get exhausted, it's a sign for them to think they should talk to somebody about their situation.” Other warning signs include: one person feeling they are sacrificing more than the other, one or both partners feeling depressed, lonely, disconnected frustrated, and distant.

Many couples wait to seek help for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they don't want to look like they have a problem. Or, because the problem isn't clear enough to them, they don't feel the need to seek the help of a health care professional. In other cases, couples try to rely on the help of family and friends back home. But often these people don't provide the necessary support because, from their outside perch, they view the China experience differently – exciting, and a treasure trove of help, time and opportunity. Meanwhile, the other expats can be equally as unsupportive. Within the small and tight-knit nature of some communities, where everyone seems to know everyone else's business, many people don't feel comfortable sharing their personal issues. Finally, many couples believe they can fix their problems themselves, and wait too long to acknowledge that they can't.



“While it may seem counterintuitive, the benefits of preventative counseling are most potent when a couple first arrives in Shanghai.”



The result is that unresolved tension and conflict build, and can manifest themselves in toxic ways. Sometimes people begin to exhibit addictive behavior. “Women will say I have to buy certain things. Afterwards, they feel better but it's because they are using this to calm themselves. They are so frustrated by their life here,” Ai-Ching says. For men, the behavior can be different. “Sometimes they say I just want to play this video game. I just want to surf the internet. It's kind of a ritual. They have to do certain things, otherwise they can't calm themselves down. Otherwise they get angry.”

In all cases, Ai-Ching points out that the need to repeat certain activities to handle emotions is a form of addiction. This behavior enables people to avoid their fears and unhappiness. The longer these habits continue, the harder it is for couples to break them down and find their true feelings.

As these conflicts penetrate a relationship, couples can grow more distant. The forces of work, materialism, boredom, and loneliness can lead to tangible pain. “Pain of one of the family members translates to pain of all,” says Azin. “Stress, when not handled properly can turn ugly.”

It's at this point that relationships break down and true crisis – infidelity, discussions of divorce – enter. Counseling goes from a relationship management tool to crises enter prevention tool, one with a lower chance of success.

#### ***Beyond the beginning***

Once a couple feels well equipped for life in China, the key to sustaining the benefits of preventative counseling is to remain open, flexible, engaged, and willing to listen. “We don't need to be in such a hurry to say our opinion,” says Ai-Ching. “Just listen.” She also reminds couples to pause and take the time to acknowledge each other's feelings. “Repeat and rephrase what your partner has communicated to you. For many couples, they just hope their spouse can listen to the words they have said.” Rephrasing can really help create the feeling of being understood.

Ai-Ching also recommends that people don't only focus on their own lives. She believes people need to work as much on themselves as on their relationships. “I suggest my clients read a lot of different things. I tell them to broaden their views and perspectives about life. Know the people around you better. Don't worry only about superficial things.”

Azin reminds couples to not let life in Shanghai make them lopsided. “True inner happiness comes when life is balanced,” he explains. Too often, he sees people bend towards achievement and money. But people also need to maintain their health, spirituality and family relationships to feel complete.

And, if a relationship feels near a tipping point, couples should come back to counseling.

Finally, just as couples developed their China entry plan, they also need to create a China exit plan. Creating a future goal together helps remind people why they are in Shanghai, and what they are aiming to get out of the experience. Couples need to maintain a vision throughout their expat experience. If they see a good picture, then no matter how difficult life is, they will still feel they are working together towards the future.



# Attitude is *Everything*

## Techniques to Decrease Work Stress

**A**lthough work-related stress can have very real negative effects, we often choose to ignore these warning signs. Instead, we suppress it and keep it inside until after work, when we can engage in stress releasing activities, such as going to the bar, spending time with friends, browsing the internet, shopping, or eating. But if these activities alone were all the balm we needed, low productivity induced by work stress would not cost businesses billions of dollars every year. We can use solutions that utilize cognitive techniques to help manage stress.

By Aiching Liu, LPC



### Common Signs of Work Related Stress:

**Physical symptoms**, such as headache, muscular pain, stomach upset, heart palpitations, lowered immunity, insomnia, skin problems and weight fluctuation

**Psychological problems**, such as depression, discouragement, pessimism, feelings of being trapped, overwhelmed or unable to cope, inability to concentrate, indecisiveness, panic attacks and other anxiety disorders

**Behavioral symptoms**, such as increased sensitivity or aggression, increase in sick days or absenteeism, loss of creativity and motivation, drop in work performance, problems with interpersonal relationships, disinterest, and isolation



When we encounter people or situations that generate stress, we should start by identifying the thoughts and underlying philosophies that lead us to experience stressful reactions. Then, we can correct our misperceptions and interpretations. Our reactions will follow accordingly, morphing into analysis, action and solution-seeking behavior. By applying this technique, we can decrease levels of stress.

Below is a list of six strategies that can help decrease stress at work:

**1. Get rid of blame and self-pity.** When you are upset at work, don't just keep on repeating to yourself how angry you are at the selfish coworker, the ignorant boss,

or the unjustified work ethics that are against your personal standards. What you need are emotional management skills. Unresolved frustrations can create stress. When you keep telling yourself, "I am so angry because my boss doesn't know anything," you should actually also be asking yourself, why am I getting so angry at a person who does not know anything? You may think that it is bad management decisions that make your job more stressful than it should be. But rather than staying in this mindset, why not view your situation as an opportunity to sharpen your persuasive communication skills and make yourself more effective at working harmoniously with people who disagree with you?

**2. Find a sympathetic ear and cool off before responding.** When your superior confronts you in front of your colleagues or gives you ungrounded criticism, you should not just passively keep it in your heart, but you should not immediately become aggressive and defend yourself either. What you need is a cooling-off moment to help yourself perceive right, think right, and respond right. This is what having a supportive ear gives you. This person can also help you gather more information to evaluate your current situation and win your superior's favor by having a cooperative attitude. Think of it as a type of problem solving technique.





**3. Use reactions in the workplace as a gauge for your ideas.** For example, you may have a wonderful and thoughtful idea, but when you discuss it during a staff meeting, you don't see any nodding heads. Instead, your boss raises sharp questions and your colleagues show no interest. Because of this, you feel lonely and unappreciated. But instead of indulging yourself in self-pity, why not take those cheerless receptions as quality control checkpoints that can allow your idea to reach its optimal value? Turn the tables on your colleagues and ask them for feedback, remembering to receive their comments analytically rather than emotionally.

**4. Things can and do happen unexpectedly.** For example, when the new product or procedure you designed has defects, don't waste your time lingering on how you should have known how to prevent it or by blaming people. Instead, focus on solving the problem. This will win you time and help you need to correct the mistakes.

**5. Letting go is to regain control.** It is only when we open our palms that we can hold more in our hands. For example, you may be frustrated because you did not get the promotion you wanted and even more frustrated that the person who got it, in your opinion, does not deserve it. But if you cannot let go and move

on, your bitterness can turn you into an unpleasant person to work with. It is only when you continue to give your best in the workplace that you can help yourself eventually get the promotion you deserve.

**6. Take preventive counseling.** Stress can damage the chemical equilibrium in our brains and eventually cause psychological, behavioral and physical problems. You should not wait until your stress becomes completely overwhelming before you find help. Preventive counseling can help you detect burnout symptoms earlier and alter your thinking so you can enjoy your work and your life as well.

# Draw the Line on Drinking



**S**hanghai, with its blistering pace of commerce, is an obvious draw for young professionals seeking experience in the global marketplace. Exciting internships, abundant entry-level positions, language programs and international MBAs all offer a gateway to business opportunities in China. But forging new pathways and relationships in this environment may require some serious drinking. Add to that the beers after work and the free-flow drinks at the club on the weekend, and some young expats might feel like a chronic hangover is the norm in Shanghai.

**By Andrea Smollan, MACP**





Knowing where to draw the line can be tricky: do you offend potential business contacts by refusing to ‘gan bei’ or do you miss out on bonding and networking with fellow expats?

Look at the impacts of your drinking with a critical eye. Drinking is understood as harmful if it causes a problem in any area of your life. Setting boundaries and sticking to them is the key to staying in control. If you would like to cut down on drinking, here are a few guidelines that might help:

- **Make a list.** Write down the reasons why you want to change your drinking. Perhaps you are tired of feeling like a train wreck, worried about those memory gaps, or want a clearer head at work. Think about the effect of drinking on your life and what areas you would like to work on. Knowing why you want to change will help you stick to difficult decisions and help you keep this motivation in your mind when you are tempted.

- **Make a plan and set limits.** Keep track of how much and how often you have been drinking. Decide for yourself how much is enough. Allocate a limit to the number of drinks allowed at business dinners or when out socialising. Decide how many drinks, how many times a week. Define what your goals are, both short term and long term. Having a plan beforehand will make it easier to set limits.

- **When ‘no’ is not an option.** It may feel like placing limits on drinking might sabotage your career. Try to remind yourself that these settings aren’t necessarily about drinking, but about building relationships. And one drink does not have to lead to a binge. If saying no or setting a limit is too difficult, find ways to pace yourself or use strategies to help minimize the number of drinks you have to guzzle: excuse yourself take an important business calls, secretly pay the staff to serve you water or watered-down drinks, say you are ‘allergic’ to

alcohol (many people use this excuse) or when you just can’t take it anymore, get a doctor’s note.

- **For social drinking, identify triggers and temptations.** Identify places, people, situations, thoughts and feelings that encourage your drinking. Do you drink when you are lonely or stressed? Do certain friends push the party a little too much? Think about ways to respond when temptation arises and when you don’t want to drink, and learn how to say no. Practice saying ‘no, I don’t drink or I’m not drinking right now, thank you.’ Remember, you do not have to drink if others do. If handed a drink, just decline politely.

- **Find other hobbies or social activities.** It may feel like the only way to meet people in Shanghai is over drinks. Remind yourself that not all social clubs or sports teams in Shanghai focus on drinking and if they do, you don’t necessarily have to be a drinker to be a part of them. If you find

yourself with friends or colleagues who push you to drink, be clear and firm about your intentions. If they do not respect your choices, spend less time with them and seek other social opportunities.

- **Ask for support.** Lean on friends, family or colleagues who are aware of your decision to cut down drinking. If you are struggling to find support, seek a counsellor. Acknowledge that emotions are triggers too and if you are drinking because you are lonely, bored, homesick or lacking confidence, speak to a professional for support and guidance.

- **Don’t give up.** If you don’t meet your goals at first, small changes can make a difference to your health and success in Shanghai, even if it is one drink at a time.



### References/Useful Resources:

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism  
<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/>  
 Alcoholics Anonymous Shanghai  
<http://aashanghai.com/>



# Dear Counselor

Do you have a question about mental health? Submit it to [counseling@communitycenter.cn](mailto:counseling@communitycenter.cn). A member of the Community Center Shanghai counseling team will answer selected questions. In this issue, counselor Sophie de Fauconval responds. The Dear Counselor email account is confidential and CARE magazine will not publish identifying information. The column is not intended to replace in-person counseling.

## Dear Counselor,

A few weeks ago, two of my son's friends phoned me, concerned that my 17-year old boy was feeling depressed. Apparently, he had posted on his Facebook page some worrisome comments about being sad. I didn't suspect anything and I cannot tell you how frightened I was, and how completely clued-out and stupid I felt as a parent. Although we have found help for my son, I need advice about teenagers and social networking sites. Specifically, where do you draw the line between their need for independence and privacy, and their wellbeing?

## From Border Patrol

## Dear BP,

A whole new set of parenting issues arises when kids join the online community. Setting firm rules about access and being as present in their online lives as you would be in their offline lives is a good way to prevent some types of problems. First, try to set up computers in a common place, such as the living room. Set a schedule for internet access that is realistic and reasonable. For example, you might choose to limit access during homework, meal times, or after a certain hour in the evening. You can set the same guidelines for phones and tablets. Educate your children about social networks as soon as they have an account. Teens need to understand the unique properties of internet socializing: it is public, hurtful comments can cause real harm, and content is insuppressible and lasting. Discuss what each of these means. Ask to see their accounts regularly, and check out your child's "friends". (You can also ask if to join their online network, understanding you might be denied.) If you see inappropriate or worrisome comments, discuss them with your child. Remember, you are legally responsible for your children's actions online.

## Dear Counselor,

we have a tablet especially our two children, and we are considering getting another to keep them from fighting over it! I can see that they benefit from the learning apps, and I also appreciate the way it keeps them constructively occupied when I am busy. I think it is a great parenting tool and aid. For example, we also like to bring the tablet out to restaurants so they aren't bored while we eat. Our household is definitely "pro-pad". I know others are very anti-pad, and I don't get it. What are the drawbacks?

## Yours, Team Tablet

## Dear TT,

Tablets are wonderful tools, especially for learning. However, it is important not to forget that children need other sources of distraction. With tablets, children don't learn how to entertain themselves and keep counting on the outside world to amuse them. Tablets provide an amazing number of stimulations, more than the world can give you. Therefore children can get easily bored in real life, and need more and more stimulation to feel truly amused or occupied. Children also need to discover their own body and to confront it with the world around them. This is how they understand boundaries, consequences and interactions. Tablets should stay a learning tool and entertain support but shouldn't become the only one. From 3-5 years old, three hours per week with screens is enough. Starting from 5 years old, they shouldn't spend more than one hour a day (after school time). As a tip, I would say that the screen time should be equivalent to the time spent with the parents playing, telling stories, cooking etc.

## COUNSELING DIRECTORY

Community Center Shanghai counselors come from around the world, encompass a broad range of expertise and experience, and offer services in eight languages (all counselors are fluent in English). Counselors are available seven days a week, daytime and evening. There are counseling offices in Pudong, Hongqiao and Huangpu.

If you are struggling with anxiety, depression, infidelity, addiction or any other mental or emotional issue, please contact Carrie Jones, Counseling Director, at [counseling@communitycenter.cn](mailto:counseling@communitycenter.cn) or 136 3631 7474. She will help match you to a counselor best suited to your needs.

**Counseling Locations**  
**Care Center, Pudong**  
 Lane 333 Biyun Road  
 Building 8, Unit B 101 A  
 Tel: 136 3631 7474 (Carrie Jones)

**Hongqiao Center**  
 Lane 3215 Hongmei Road  
 Sheng Lun Lan Building, Unit 201, 5B  
 Tel: 021-6406-4276

**BMF China, Huangpu**  
 588 Yan An East Road near Zhejiang Lu  
 East Ocean Center, East Tower, Room 24F  
 Tel: 021-6322-1515x220

**Carrie Jones, LCSW**  
 Specializes in children and teens. Also works with adults on issues including anxiety/stress, depression, transition, grief and loss, self-harm, eating disorders, addictions, and parenting concerns.  
 Location: Pudong  
 Time: Weekdays and evenings.

**Sarah Yang Mumma, LSW**  
 Specializes in treating adults for depression, Dysthymia, anxiety/stress, relationship problems, cross-cultural concerns and low self-esteem.  
 Conversational Mandarin.  
 Location: Pudong  
 Time: Tuesdays/Thursdays, daytime.

**Sharon S. Lui, MAMFT**  
 Specializes in marital and pre-marital therapy, relationship issues, cross-cultural marital therapy, anxiety, and chemical dependency. Also fluent in Cantonese and Mandarin.  
 Location: Hongqiao and Huangpu  
 Time: Monday – Friday, morning, afternoon and evening. Saturday morning.

**Marisol Gallardo**  
 Specializes in child-parenting problems, marital issues, divorce, and assembled families. Families, couples and individual adults welcome. Also fluent in Spanish.  
 Location: Pudong and Huangpu  
 Please contact her for availability.

**Brandi Renee Dillon, MA, LPC**  
 Specializes in treating individuals that suffer from depression, anxiety, substance abuse/dependency, cultural adjustment and transition, suicide and other mental health related conditions.  
 Location: Hongqiao  
 Times: Monday – Friday, 8 am to 5 pm.

**Aiching Liu, LPC**  
 Specializes in cross-cultural relationships, parent-child relationships, marriage conflict resolution, expat adjustment, emotional management, personal growth, career planning, children and teenagers coping skills, EAP. Individuals, couples, families and corporate clients welcome. Also fluent in Mandarin.

Location: Pudong  
 Time: Monday – Saturday, morning, afternoon and evening.

**Azin Nasser, MA, PhD (c)**  
 Specializes in marriage counseling, positive psychology, personal growth and EAP services.  
 Location: Hongqiao  
 Times: Monday - Saturday, morning, afternoon and evening.

**Sophie de Fauconval, MSCP**  
 Specializes in treating children and teenagers for anxiety, depression, ADHD, school difficulties, conflicts, opposition. Also welcomes adults. Also fluent in French, understands Dutch and Spanish.  
 Location: Hongqiao  
 Time: Monday – Wednesday, morning, afternoon and evening.

**Leo Lazo, LCP-I**  
 Specializes in treating children and adolescents for depression, anxiety, family and relational issues, adjustment issues, grief and loss. Is also available to see adults and couples. Also fluent in Spanish.  
 Location: Hongqiao  
 Time: Tuesday -Friday evenings, Saturday all day, and Sunday after 3:00pm.

**Andrea Smollan, MACP**  
 Specializes in treating adults for a variety of daily difficulties and mental health conditions such as, but not limited to, grief, trauma, depression, anxiety, poor self-esteem, eating difficulties, substance dependence, and stress. Also specializes in working with children and adolescents, and welcomes couples.  
 Location: Hongqiao  
 Times: Monday – Saturday.

**Simona Renzoni, MA, CSW**  
 Specializes in individual psychotherapy with adolescents and adults, treating a broad range of daily difficulties as well as major psychiatric conditions. Also speaks Italian and French.  
 Location: Hongqiao  
 Times: Weekdays.

**Scott Shen, MSW, LSW**  
 Mainly works with children and adolescents with mental, behavioral and emotional issues. Also available for adult clients with cross-cultural issues and other mental and emotional difficulties. Speaks Mandarin and Shanghaiese.  
 Location: Pudong, Hongqiao and Huangpu  
 Times: Weekday evenings and weekends.

**Simone Setterberg-Schwank, MS, PhD (c)**  
 Experienced working with children, adolescents, and parental therapy. Fluent in English, French, German, Italian, Swedish, and understands Norwegian, Danish, and some Mandarin.  
 Location: Hongqiao and Huangpu  
 Times: Monday – Saturday.

**Jennifer Miles, MA, LMFT**  
 Specializes in trauma, specifically sexual abuse, rape and PTSD. Has extensive experience working with teens with eating disorders, personality disorders, cutting and anxiety disorder. Uses exposure therapy, dialectical behavioral therapy, brainspotting, and cognitive therapy. Works with children, adults, couples, and families.  
 Location: Hongqiao, Huangpu, and Pudong, upon request  
 Times: Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday morning, afternoon, and evening.



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