

WELLNESS NEWSLETTER

**Counseling Department
Community Center Shanghai**

Issue No.2



To arrange an appointment,
email counseling@communitycenter.cn,
call 13636317474,
or connect on WeChat.



This unique time period as we face the Coronavirus is unprecedented territory and has resulted in a myriad of adjustments and adaptations we all must make. The uncertainty and rapidly changing circumstances can produce a wide range of issues, responses, and emotions. It is normal to feel some degree of distress and disorganization. In the hopes of offering support to our community during this time, CCS is creating this Wellness Newsletter where CCS Counselors will address some of the challenges and difficulties that are common to many people. If you have an issue you would like to see featured in this newsletter, you can email counseling@communitycenter.cn. Also, if you feel you or someone you care about could benefit from additional support, CCS does have counselors available for virtual sessions via phone or video.

WORKING FROM HOME

Isn't it great to avoid the daily commute and to be able to enjoy the presence of a pet (or a kid) on your lap as you work? There definitely are benefits to working from home, but many people also report increased stressors as working from home has become a popular nationwide workstyle following the breakout of the Covid-19 epidemic. Incidents like kids making a dramatic entrance in the middle of video conferences certainly can give us a laugh, but sometimes it isn't so funny when we struggle to deal with issues like boundaries, efficiency, and stress that are associated with this "dreamy" workstyle.

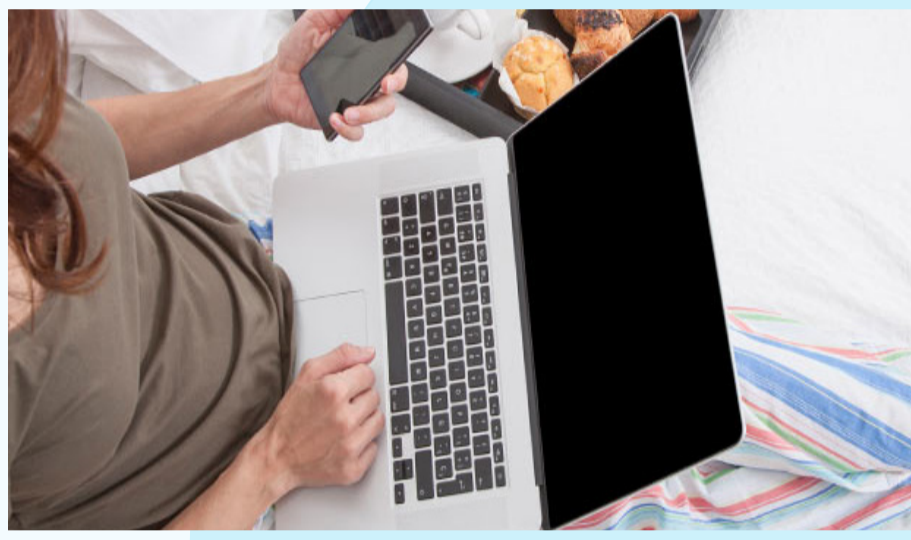
Boundaries

Generally, we regard home as a private and relaxing place and our workplace as the opposite. So how do we manage when we have to mix the two? Setting up clear boundaries is the key. Find an area and time that allow you to focus with minimum distractions. If you don't have a lot of space in your home, you can be creative about designating specific times for work. Little ones can benefit from visual signs - perhaps a special coat you wear or a sign on the door - that let them know when parents aren't available to play and should not be disturbed.

Efficiency and Stress

Sometimes efficiency takes a hit as we spend extra time getting everyone online for a virtual meeting or need to spend more time than normal to organize our thoughts before composing an email or report. It is necessary to

assess and clarify the expectations on performance during this special period, as well as to make efforts to reduce the stress and unease associated with the epidemic. A simple work schedule with priorities and deadlines can come assist with this.



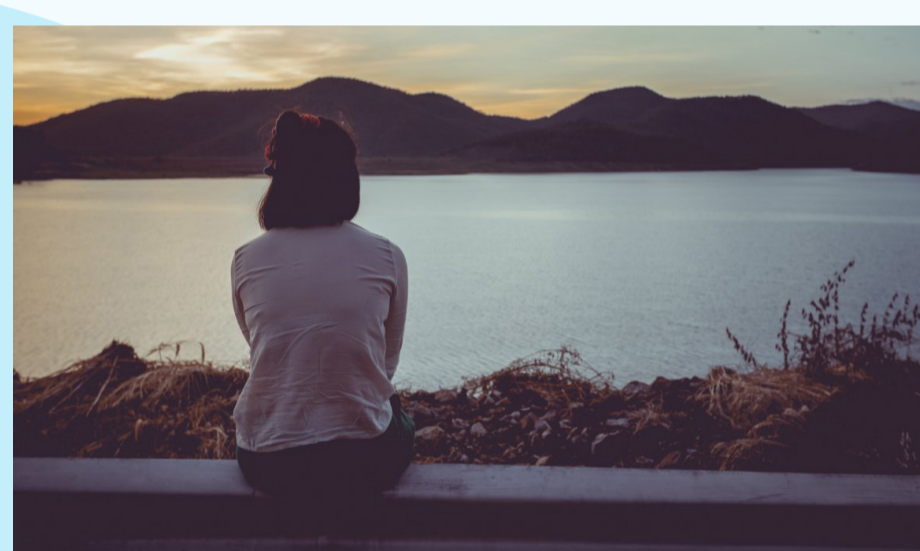
Increasingly more and more employees are returning to workplaces these days (with safety measures in place) and the issues associated with working from home won't last forever for most of us. It is likely that some of us will encounter readjustment issues as we return to our previous posts. Remember, however, that we often are more resilient than we think in facing unexpected challenges as long as we support each other and deal with problems one at a time.

Scott Shen, LSW

CCS Counselor

DEALING WITH SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

Although for some of us in Shanghai the worst of the isolation relating to the novel coronavirus may be over, many of us are still confined to our homes or disconnected from friends and family. So, it's worth taking a look at how isolation affects our mental health and ways we can maintain our mental health in times of social isolation.



Indeed, no small amount of research and experience has shown that social isolation and loneliness have a noticeable and profound effect on both our mental and physical health.

First of all, it's important to understand the difference between isolation and loneliness. Some types of social isolation can be positive, considered, "comfortable solitude." We all need our alone time, right? Of course, what amount of solitude is comfortable will be different for different people. What is certain, though, is that complete solitude is not comfortable for anyone—far from it—and fulfilling personal relationships and meaningful human contact are essential for one's overall wellbeing.

Loneliness can be understood as that state when solitude no longer is comfortable or desirable and tends to be accompanied by feelings of sadness and/or depression. Of course, nothing can replace the real presence of a loved one. So if you are waiting to be reunited with family members, waiting to reconnect with friends, just waiting for things get back to normal and have normal everyday human interactions, or ALL OF THE ABOVE—what can we do in the mean time?

The following are some ideas and tips of ways to cope with isolation and loneliness during this unique time:

1. Connect with friends and family online. Of course, we don't want to live our lives online, but those of us who

live abroad know the internet can really help us stay connected with friends and loved ones afar until the next time we can be together.

2. Write emails or letters. Writing a letter to loved one can be a therapeutic tool in itself. You may not even choose to send the letter, but it might help you get out some of the feelings of missing and loneliness that you are experiencing.

3. Realize that loneliness is a subjective state of mind. Realizing that loneliness is a feeling, not a fact, can help us to reframe how we see our condition. How much is it possible for you to take pleasure in the time you have to yourself, enjoy some of the things you do while by yourself, and appreciate our relationships all the more when you are more able to reconnect?

4. Be aware of the potential benefits of solitude. Despite moments of loneliness, sadness, or discomfort, this is inevitably an opportunity for learning and growth. I have had many conversations with friends and family (in-person and online) about what this situation has taught us. Try doing some reflection in your time, or perhaps journaling in a journal or diary to think about what positive things you may have learned through this process.

5. Small interactions can be meaningful. Especially during this time, when many people are confined to their homes or unsure about socializing, we can make a conscious effort to still maintain some basic social interactions. Whether it's out buying groceries, walking nearby your home, or going out to pick up a courier package, just saying "Nihao", greeting neighbors or engaging in small conversation can brighten up one's day—yours and others'!

6. Be grateful for what you have. As always, it's helpful to remind ourselves and feel the gratitude for what we have.

What have been your experiences with isolation in Shanghai or elsewhere? Have you learned anything about yourself or your mental health in relation to isolation? Please free to share your thoughts and experiences with us.

Bryce Dann,

Canadian Certified Counselor

CCS Counselor

FINDING WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

We've all been touched and moved by the heroics of doctors who have dedicated themselves to caring for those with the virus. Perhaps you too have wished there was a way you could contribute to fighting the battle against Coronavirus, but have assumed there isn't much of significance you can do. While we may not all have the opportunity to contribute on the scale of these medical professionals, there are things we each can do. Taking constructive action helps us restore a sense of control and can help counteract the feeling of helplessness that many of us have felt in recent times. Don't fall into the trap of thinking there is nothing meaningful you can do. As Ellen McGirth beautifully summarized in an article in Psychology Today entitled Recovering From Trauma, "You do whatever you can and never assume that any gesture is too small. In a situation that is overwhelming, you don't go for the big picture. You go for what is closest to you and where you can make a difference."¹

Your seemingly little bit can go a long way. In fact, with somewhat ironic wording, another article written before the COVID-19 outbreak describes the benefits of acts of kindness and states that even small acts of kindness "can infect a community like a positive virus."² This is exactly what we need right now!



So, here are some ideas to get you started thinking about how you can take constructive action:

- Donate your professional skills. For example, many of my Chinese counselor colleagues are offering free counseling to those in quarantine in Wuhan.
- Offer to help stressed out parents by homeschooling/tutoring their children online in subjects you excel in.
- Offer to babysit for kids in families who no longer have regular childcare with schools out and with many aya unable to return to their homes and/or jobs.
- Find creative ways to express appreciation to sanitation workers, security guards, aya, store clerks, and others who have worked continually to keep our daily lives running as smoothly as possible.
- Donate blood. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, there has been a drastic reduction in blood donors and current blood supply is severely lacking.
- Volunteer to help care for pets whose owners are in quarantine or who are prevented from returning home by travel restrictions. Organizations such as the Second Chance Animal Aid can help you get connected with those who need this help.
- Write a love letter to China or compose a song of encouragement. Love Letters can be shared and published through Community Center Shanghai.³

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200111/recovering-trauma>

² <https://www.upworthy.com/irish-school-ditches-homework-for-december-assigns-students-acts-of-kindness-instead>

³ <https://www.communitycentershanghai.com/publications/>

Carrie Jones, LCSW

Director of Counseling, CCS