

WELLNESS NEWSLETTER

Counseling Department
Community Center Shanghai

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To arrange an appointment,
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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.

HOW TO CREATE A NEW NORMAL BEFORE THINGS GET BACK TO THE OLD NORMAL

It has been almost two months since many of us started to voluntarily self-quarantine in our homes. By now you might be able to navigate your home blindfolded and have a pretty good grasp on creative indoor living. But still we deeply long for life to get back to the old normal when we could freely be out and about. Although we don't know how long it will take for this day to come and how exactly things will play out, let's not allow the current limitations to prevent us from enjoying what we still have.

Here are some tips to help you to create a new normal before things return to the old normal:

1. Make a list of things you used to enjoy doing before the epidemic. The list can be very routine (making my favorite cup of coffee before going to work, etc) or more large-scale (going on an annual family vacation, etc). Focus on things that brought you joy back in the "normal" days. Try to be as thorough as possible; this will give you a good foundation to work on.
2. Go through the list and circle or underline the items that you are still able to enjoy during the quarantine period. There may be things you still do the same way as before and there may be other things that you do in an adapted form. As long as you are satisfied with the outcome now, circle or underline them.
3. This is the important step. Go through the remaining items one-by-one and see if you can come up with creative ways to do these things even if in modified form. For example, if you enjoyed meeting up with friends for coffee on a regular basis, maybe you can proactively schedule a video call with a friend for coffee at each of your own homes. Or if you miss hitting the gym after work, try to schedule a regular time for

exercise and discover a workout routine that you can do at home.

4. For items that are impossible to modify, try to replace them with something that you always thought of doing but never got around to. E.g., replace going out for movie with catching up on unfinished books or learning a new language; replace visiting new restaurants in town with learning or mastering new recipes.



After you finish going through the list, there might still be items that can't be modified or replaced. Set them aside for now and try not to be too bothered by them. Things are changing very quickly, and we are gaining new levels of "freedom" daily or weekly. Revisit the list in a few weeks and see if you can return more items to the new norm. Before you know it, you may even enjoy this new list more than the old one!

Sharon Lui, M.A.

CCS Counselor

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

As school closures have extended without a known return date from days into weeks and now nearly two months, anxiety and frustrations easily run high. Family relationships unfortunately are not immune to the challenges of COVID-19 and having such extended proximity in living spaces can be testing, sometimes to the boiling point. The challenge of not knowing how long this newly crowned global pandemic will be with us, extends the uncertainty and frustrations.

Fortunately, as numbers of infected cases have continued to decrease in the epicenter of Hubei and Wuhan, it has permitted a slow but steady return to the opening of businesses in our beloved Shanghai. Yet, families are still in a wait-and-see game about the opening of school. There is hope that schools will be able to resume the beginning of



April and international schools are taking great measures to ensure health and safety to be ready whenever the government gives the green light of approval. Yet, even with these efforts, families often hear mixed news reports and are left unsure exactly of what the future holds.

What might sometimes get lost in this shuffle is ensuring the emotional wellbeing of our family relationships and providing healthy living routines, opportunities of healthy connection with our children, moments of personal growth, and social connection with others beyond social media – which in the days of e-learning and WeChat seem to have no end. It is important to disconnect and find time for those we care about most. Even as I write, my small family is on 5 different devices, so I'm preaching to the choir!

Being housebound with such dependency on technology can result in several seen and unforeseen living disruptions that can impact us negatively. A lack of restorative sleep and a depleted reservoir of patience and comfort can cause an unending sense of restlessness. All of this can be detrimental to our family's emotional health as it peaks stress and the frustrations in our current living situations.

While each family is different in their response to the challenges presented, there are some specific ideas that can help ground families in healthy patterns of living and being. These include:

1. Setting up healthy routines – bed and wake time, physical exercise, mealtimes together as a family and ensuring a healthy work/play balance. The amount of time provided to a balanced life when we are offline and away from tech and screens is particularly important.
2. Continue to emphasize what is important - providing effective workstations for our children to maximize their e-learning and offering the help and time they need to feel cared for. Parental checks on e-learning every day is important to show a child that education is still as valuable as ever. Finding time as a family to decompress and find humor and laughter in our daily routines also is vital. This over-abundance of time at home may also present new opportunities to discover, explore, and improve hobbies and personal interests that we may not have had time for at other times.
3. Personal self-care - allow personal time away from your children for self-preservation. Enjoy the beauty of nature, yoga, meditation, reading, or the like. Recharging your own batteries and allowing time for yourself is vital. Placing this as a priority and keeping it within a schedule could be the greatest gift you give your family.

By taking stock of our family's emotional welfare and following these steps, we should be able to find joy in the journey until our desired lifestyle can resume with an added measure of appreciation of what is possible.

Tim Gartz, LCSW

CCS Counselor

COPING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS – FINDING HOPE

Grief, the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away, is a natural response to loss. We probably most often think of grief and loss as associated with the death of a loved one, but, we can grieve the loss of many things. When expats first move to Shanghai, it is common to grieve the loss of home, the support network there, possibly a former profession, and sense of identity. In situations like the current one with Coronavirus, many of us find ourselves grieving "normal life" and our sense of safety and security in the world. And of course, we grieve for those who have died from the disease.

We all felt a sense of a loss during this time. With a powerful worldwide impact on many levels, Coronavirus (COVID-19) has created some changes that move us out of our comfort zone and often it is easier for us to focus on the negative aspects of it than to experience and learn from it. Given all the negative news we received, sometimes it is hard to see the positive aspects of the situation, such as the increasing number of recovered cases.

During this time, my family and I, like you, have gone through many changes, obstacles, questions, and the difficulty of making decisions, but we decided to move forward steps by step. We focus on developing coping strategies within four main domains to help manage the grief we feel and to adjust, helping us to manage life as it is now. I would like to share these with you in the hopes that they may serve as a source of inspiration:

Health

- Eat regular, nourishing meals. Because it often is difficult to eat three regular meals, we try four or five small ones, but carefully choose quality and nourishing ingredients;



- Get rest. We try to stick to regular bedtime routines. If we have a hard time getting to sleep, we try a glass of warm milk or some soft easy-listening music to soothe our thoughts;
- Exercise. We continue our exercise program and have developed a manageable routine. Exercise reduces levels of the body's stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol. It also stimulates the production of endorphins, chemicals in the brain that are the body's natural painkillers and mood elevators;

- Meditate to calm and relax our body;
- Find outside support. We established a support network and we communicate more with our family and friends about our crisis.

Feelings

- We try to read only reliable sources about what is

happening and try to reduce media consumption on the subject as much as possible, as it often derails us from true and accurate information;

- We allow our feelings to be expressed appropriately without repressing them and without remorse for what we feel;
- We keep a journal to identify feelings and to see progress. Also, we make plans for holidays and anniversaries.
- Help our family, friends and people in crisis
- We are aware of the needs of each of our family members. Grief and crisis are different for each person.
- We avoid competition in who is hurting most. Each person has difficulty issues to cope with. Grief and crisis are hard for everybody;
- We try to lower our expectations during this crisis. People do not operate at 100 percent during periods of grief and crisis;
- We help others in this crisis as much as we can. We know that being in solidarity with others creates benefits for us as well and gives us a feeling of belonging and common purpose.

Self-kindness

- Having more time available for us is a huge advantage. This is special time that we can spend with our family to create better cohesion. We also can use it to pamper ourselves a bit with small treats such as a bubble bath or reading our favorite book with a cup of warm tea. Self-care is crucial;
- We look for new interests such as taking up a new hobby or trying an old one again;
- We enjoy the good days and don't feel guilty for doing so. We know that even before crisis we had good days and bad days. We have learned to embrace them all. This is life after all;
- We know that this WILL get better and there WILL be a time when we feel more joyful;
- And very important, we have learned to have patience with ourselves, remember that things take time.

We experience changes every day, therefore we must train our mind and body to be fit to overcome the challenges and obstacles. Crises come and go. After the rain, the sun comes out; after any crisis or loss, there is HOPE...

Coping with loss or facing crisis can be very challenging and, inevitably, the grieving process takes time. Healing happens gradually; it can't be forced or hurried—and there is no "normal" timeline for grieving.

I have embraced this powerful message in The Book of Awakening by Mark Nepo, "Like most people I know, I struggle with taking too much on, with doing too many things, with moving too fast, with overcommitting, overplaying. I've learned that I must move, quite simply, at the pace of what is real. While the sun, quite literally always seems vacant and diminished when I accelerate beyond my capacity to feel what is before me."

Eunice Lazar, Psychologist

CCS Counselor