

WELLNESS NEWSLETTER

Counseling Department
Community Center Shanghai

Issue No.4



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.

THERE IS LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL! HOW OUR MOOD AND MOTIVATION HAVE FLUCTUATED DURING THESE UNCERTAIN TIMES

It has been a couple of months since the COVID-19 outbreak started changing people's daily lives with the implementation of numerous health prevention measures. This has meant for those in good health staying at home in China or returning to their home countries or other places and beginning a new routine of teleworking and online e-learning for our children. We have experienced various moods that have taken us through extreme emotional stages at times. In the context of this article, it is important to notice the difference between mood and emotions. *Mood* refers to underlying ill-defined reasons and oftentimes unknown feeling present in the background of our consciousness, *emotions* however are short-lived events that arise from specific life situations that stay in the foreground of our consciousness. Mood affects directly our levels of motivation; the latter is defined as an energized and persistent goal-directed behavior.

As we initially learned about the health prevention measures at the beginning of February, for many of us, our mood turned negative and we were anxious and annoyed as we realized the impact and as disruptions to our work, school, relations, and social life occurred. However, a few weeks later, after coping with this initial stage of anger, we reached a more positive state of mind with feelings of excitement and gratefulness as we recognized the new opportunities opened up to us for working from home and taking advantage of this time exploring new activities and family time interactions. It was almost like a honeymoon period where hopes and dreams were keeping us excited and motivated moving forward into this new adventure. As time passed, and as routine settled, many of us moved from this stage to feeling frustrated and hopeless again at the thought of the continued school closures coupled with the never-ending sense of uncertainty. In this stage, our motivation levels dropped again, shown by our limited interest in meeting deadlines, excess sleep, binge watching movies and shows, and not caring about eating well. While reading personal reflections on group chats, listening to adolescents and adult clients, and observing those around me, it appeared that some have remained stuck with this troubled mood, while others are starting to slowly move into accepting this "new normal", with, as a result, an increase in motivation to continue working towards feeling better by working, studying, exercising, and improving sleep hygiene and eating habits.

In brief, our mood and consequent motivation in this time filled with uncertainty, has marked swings from a low mood when facing the *new*, to a mood of *honeymoon*-like excitement, and then back to a negative mood during a *shock* state. This process, which most of us have experienced from the start of the virus outbreak, is called *adjustment*. Does this process remind you of previous experiences as an expat? If we look carefully, could you trace a parallel of what we are living through currently with your experience as a newcomer to the city with the consequent "cultural shock adjustment stages"? During the CCS Shanghai123 Managing Culture Shock introductory sessions for new expats that I have the chance to present on several occasions, we use a graph called *The Human to New Reality Adjustment Curve*. For those of you who

took part in one of these presentations, you may recall that the curve shows the relationship between psychological satisfaction and the passing of time when confronted with new unfamiliar external stimuli.

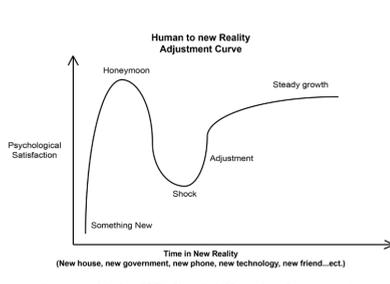
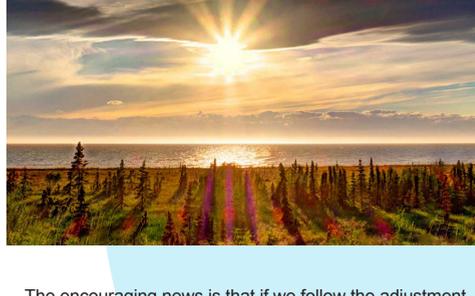


Image used during CCS's Shanghai123 sessions for new expats

While culture shock refers to the new home, friends, government system, etc that we are confronted with in a new location, the COVID-19 crisis has made us face with new unfamiliar home routines, depending on online shopping, dealing with poor internet connection, sharing devices for work and school, living back home with our aged parents, having to share our time between supporting children's e-learning while helping our parents and teleworking, staying in hotel rooms with the family and living out of just a few suitcases, and I am sure the list goes on...



The encouraging news is that if we follow the adjustment curve, we should soon be getting into the *Adjustment Stage* where our motivation and mood moves back into a positive mindset. We now live our "new normal" without constant questioning and begin functioning without so much emotional stress. Our mood improves and our motivation to be productive, exercise, set goals, and connect with others takes a turn that positively impacts our overall mood. With the adjustment curve moving up and getting into a steady growth we can foresee our mood stabilizing and find motivation to continue through the current situation in a positive light. We can even imagine ourselves thriving in the midst of this experience and looking back at it as a positive time in our lives where challenge turned into opportunity for internal growth for us and our families.

Dr. Laura Ruesjas-Lukasik, PsyD
CCS Counselor

When Home is Not a Safe Place

Recently, I was reading through news about how COVID-19 is affecting life in my home country and state (USA, Texas). Unfortunately, I ran across a very disturbing article about a North Texas hospital that has seen an increase in severe child abuse cases that appear to be linked to stress from the pandemic. Jayme Coffman, MD, medical director of the Cook Children's Center for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect summarizes how these unprecedented times have simply overwhelmed some parents, "People have so much increased stress now. They've got financial stress. Some people lost their job or worried about keeping their current job. They lost their income. You've got stress from being overcrowded. Everyone's cooped up together. They feel like they can't get away from each other. These stressors can lead to abuse."



Children abuse cases are not the only form of violence that has increased during the stressful times. Here in China, a surge in domestic violence cases has been reported as millions of people have been quarantined and control over victims. Sadly, countries around the world are reporting similar increases both in the number of and intensity of cases of child abuse and domestic violence. This spike is not completely surprising. Research demonstrates that incidences of domestic violence rises after natural disasters. Stress levels are exceptionally high, perpetrators often have increased access to their victims in isolation, and normal support services and systems may be limited or overwhelmed.

What can we do to prevent these kinds of cases of abuse and protect those who may be vulnerable? First, it is important to take a good look at ourselves. It isn't always easy to be a parent or a partner even in the best of times. In times of crisis like the current pandemic, the challenge is magnified. It is crucial that we learn to **recognize our own signs of stress, frustration, and anger before they reach a boiling point**. Let's say you are worrying about the impact of COVID-19 on your job and income and then you get into a conflict with your child or spouse. What do you notice? Do

your thoughts start to spiral? Does your heart race? Maybe you notice heat rising in your face or your fists clenching. The warning signs are a bit different for each of us, so we need to have good self-awareness and **take action when we notice we are moving towards an explosion** that could result in us lashing out at our loved ones. Take time out. Let your child or partner know you need some time and space to cool down and collect yourself and then go do just that. Self-soothing looks a bit different for each person. Maybe you need some time to reflect and analyze your thoughts and feelings, maybe you need to call a friend to talk through how you're feeling, maybe you need to go for a long walk or run, write in a journal, listen to music. Figure out what works for you and do it. Don't allow your emotions to manifest in ways that are physically dangerous and hurt your loved ones. If you recognize that you have a tendency towards this, it is okay to admit it and seek professional help.

What if you are on the receiving end of violence? How can you protect yourself? Talk to someone. Let someone you trust know you do not feel safe. Whether you choose to confide in a friend, a family member, or a professional, do reach out someone. It also can be helpful to create a safety plan that outlines what you will do when you sense you are in danger. If you can't quarantine or stay in a separate place from the perpetrator, consider physical arrangements and precautions you can take at home to protect yourself. If possible, keep a phone, charger, and important documents readily available.

Community support and awareness also are crucial. Be educated and informed that public health crises like the domestic and informed that public health crises like the domestic abuse occurring. Keep an eye out for those around you. If you are concerned about someone's safety and wellbeing, gently check in with them. You can provide support by being a trusted listener and can help point victims to professional resources and support. Let's work together to keep each other safe not only from COVID-19 itself, but also from the dangers posed by the stress associated with it.

Here in Shanghai, at least for expats, unfortunately we do not have specific domestic violence resources like you might find in other countries (specific hotlines, shelters, and other services), but you can find help and support by calling Lifeline ([400 821 1215](tel:4008211215)) for free, confidential, anonymous support or by arranging to see a professional counselor through CCS or other organizations. If you are in immediate danger or emergency, call the police or go to a hospital emergency room. Don't suffer in silence and isolation – reach out for help.

Carrie Jones, LCSW
Director of Counseling, CCS

A SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE

I sat down Thursday evening to write an article for this newsletter about the difficult decisions those who are still abroad face as they try to decide when to return to Shanghai and the potential challenges they face once they arrive. I finished the article, closed the computer, and opened WeChat to find a deluge of messages about the temporary suspension of entry into China by foreign nationals. Well... so much for the article I had just finished writing!

Of course, I fully recognize the very minor inconvenience of having to scrap my article is nothing compared to the much larger inconveniences so many of our community now face. I know so many of you who are still overseas were eagerly anticipating returning to your life here, getting back to work, reuniting with friends and family who are already here, and even hoping schools might reopen soon.



I certainly understand the frustrations of this now being further delayed, the anxiety related to so many things still being unknown and uncertain, and the heartache for families who are separated. No matter where you are in the world right now – whether here in Shanghai going about your life, or waiting out your time of quarantine, or still abroad waiting and wondering when you might be able to return – please know that you are not alone. If I have learned one thing through this entire COVID-19 experience, it is **the power of community**. Time and time again, I have seen our community here pull together to support those who are struggling – parents have pulled together to share tips and encouragement as we all adapt to e-learning, quarantine information and support groups have formed, outpourings of love and care have been showered upon those who have children who have tested positive for the virus and have been hospitalized in isolation – the list could go on and on!

As much as possible, let's try to focus on the positive aspects of this new policy – and remember it is temporary, it won't last forever. Prior to the policy, feeling the pressure to get back to Shanghai for work and to be in place if schools reopen, many families were faced with having to make the overwhelming decision whether or not to travel in the midst of this pandemic, knowing that doing so could expose them to the virus and knowing that reality is if some family members test positive upon return, families will be separated. For now, we can set this worry aside and accept that the decision has been made for us for the time being. Let's use this time to focus on taking good care of ourselves, our loved ones, and the community around us wherever we may be. Currently so many things are out of our control. When and where we can travel, when schools reopen, what decisions governments make, how citizens around the world respond to the pandemic... these are all things we have no say over. What we can control is how we respond – are we kind and compassionate to ourselves and to others? Do we accept the things we cannot change and focus on the things we can influence?

May we keep these words of Craig D. Lounsbrough, M.Div., LPC in mind as we move forward into whatever the next few weeks bring us and as we work to focus on the things that really matter, learn and grow from these challenging times, and strengthen and deepen our bonds as a community:

"Sometimes we let the nature of the times feed fear and engender apprehension. We find ourselves swept away on the larger tide of some crisis within which we lose our balance and sacrifice our objectivity. We become part of the chaos rather than being an instrument to ascertain the gravity of the chaos and thereby bring an ascending calm to it. We forfeit our ability to bring a sense of moderation and balance so that others can avoid feeding a crisis rather than fixing it. And if we are not able to separate ourselves sufficiently to understand the true nature of the crisis aside from the panic caused by less informed sources and those who sensationalize it for profit, we will never have the time nor the space to grow from it."

Carrie Jones, LCSW
Director of Counseling, CCS