

WELLNESS NEWSLETTER

Counseling Department
Community Center Shanghai

Issue No.5



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.

WHEN IT FEELS TOO HARD TO GO ON

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, many suicide crisis hotlines around the world are reporting increased numbers of calls. The stress, anxiety, uncertainty, social isolation, and other challenges that have resulted from the outbreak may cause emotional distress for any of us and some groups of people may be particularly vulnerable to thoughts of ending their life:

- Individuals with preexisting mental health issues
- Those who have lost their jobs or who are worried about job security - unemployment is a well-established risk factor for suicide.
- Those for whom home is not a safe place – those who are forced by circumstances to stay at home with an abusive partner, parent, or other perpetrator.

These are particularly challenging and risky times as many of the coping strategies that mental health professionals would typically recommend or that people would generally turn to on their own – going out and making social connections, keeping busy and engaged in normal life activities, going to the gym, etc. – may not be current options.

Coping Strategies

Circumstances and situations are grim, but please know there is still hope and there is support out there if you are struggling. If you and/or loved ones are experiencing emotional distress, here are some basic actions you can take:

- Limit media consumption and get accurate information from reputable sources.
- Practice good self-care – stay active, keep a schedule, engage in pleasurable or calming activities, stay hydrated, eat healthily, and be sure to get adequate sleep and rest.
- Connect with others, even if it has to be virtually. Talk about your feelings, but also be sure to enjoy conversations unrelated to the outbreak.
- Consider professional support. Many places are expanding telehealth and making virtual services more easily accessible.

Making a Safer Home

If you are worried about your safety or the safety of a loved one, you might consider the following actions to make your home safer:

- Lock up firearms separate from ammunition.
- Avoid stockpiling lethal doses of medication.
- Lock up medications away from youth or those at risk.
- Dispose of unused or unnecessary medications.
- Know the warning signs (showing despair, a focus on death, making plans, etc.) and if you are concerned a loved one is considering suicide, ask about it.
- Don't dismiss talk of suicide as just a threat. Take people seriously when they talk about ending their life.
- Find help and support promptly.

Getting Help

Seeking help is a bit different depending where you are. Many countries have suicide crisis hotlines or emergency numbers you can call. If you are currently outside of China or are worried about a loved one outside of China, it will be important to find out what resources are currently available locally.

If you are in China, unfortunately there is not a well-established crisis system for cases of immediate emergency for expats. **If you or a loved one are in immediate crisis, please go to a hospital emergency room.** If an individual needs to be hospitalized to be kept safe, the **Shanghai Mental Health Center (64387250, www.smhc.org.cn)** may be an option.



If you are not in immediate danger, but are having thoughts of suicide, feeling it would be easier just not to be alive, or wishing for an escape, reach out for help.

You can call **Lifeline Shanghai (400 821 1215)** for free confidential anonymous listening support and for referrals for where to get additional help if needed. Lifeline also offers valuable trainings and workshops to help you learn how to recognize warning signs and know how to respond if you are concerned about the mental health of someone you care about. You can learn more at www.lifeline-shanghai.com. Mental health professionals are available through our **Counseling Department here at Community Center Shanghai (136 3631 7474, counseling@communitycenter.cn)** as well as through many of the hospitals and medical clinics here in Shanghai.

No matter how dark things may feel right now, please know that there is hope, things can change and get better, and your life is precious and valuable even if it doesn't feel that way in the moment. Reach out and let others help you through this difficult time.

Carrie Jones, LCSW
Director of Counseling, CCS

RESILIENCE

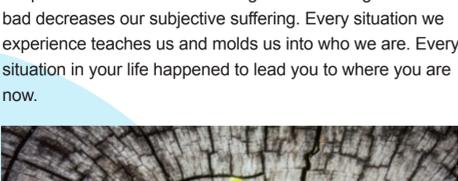
OUR NATURAL ABILITY TO MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY
COPE WITH HARD SITUATION OR ADVERSITY

It has been difficult times for everyone lately and an end to this crisis sometimes seems to be very far away. The last three months have been extremely painful in many different ways - some are struggling with isolation, with the grief of losing loved ones, with fear about health, and with sadness and uncertainty about what is happening right now. Fortunately, we humans have a natural capability to bounce back and find our way to move forward with stronger and wiser and with joy – this is RESILIENCE.

I'd like to share with you some simple steps to help foster resilience to your life. Here are 5 ideas from Dr. Sri Kumar Rao, a speaker, author and former business school professor, to help nurture true resilience. Let's put them into action and maximize the amazing capability we all have to face difficult times more positively.

1, GOOD THINGS, BAD THINGS... WHO KNOWS?

If you take this perspective, it alters your emotional response and allows you to transform a situation into something that you can value as positive. For example, "These difficult days have helped me realize how much I value being healthy and with those I love most." Dr. Sri Kumar shares his own experience of missing a flight for a work trip but realizing how wonderful it was to unexpectedly be able to spend two more days with his family without the pressure of work. Not labeling situations as good or bad decreases our subjective suffering. Every situation we experience teaches us and molds us into who we are. Every situation in your life happened to lead you to where you are now.



2, THE BENEVOLENT UNIVERSE

Albert Einstein once said, "The most important question you'll ask in your life is "Is the universe friendly?" Most of us believe the universe is indifferent to us. When we kids and always wanted ice cream and sweet treats, instead our parents gave us fruits and vegetables most of the time. At the time it wasn't what we wanted, but now looking back, we realize how important it was that our parents or caregivers didn't always give us what we wanted, and we are grateful for this. To apply this principle in the current situation, we can say, "I don't like what is going on," but also understand that what we are experiencing is precisely what we need in this very moment. Regardless of whether we really believe that the universe is benevolent or good to us, simply just considering this can change our expectations. Dr. Sri Kumar encourages us to view the universe as our boss, to stop seeing that we do things for our own goals, and to think that we are an instrument of the universe, and to believe that the universe provides in a sane way what we need today. He proposes that even if we don't fully believe this, if we try adopting this view, we can

A) Imagine that the universe is benevolent to us. B) Believe that the benevolent universe will provide all that we need

when we need it, and C) Trust that the universe has our backs and take care of us. This will relieve some of our pressure and stress.

3, INVEST IN THE PROCESS, NOT IN THE OUTCOME

When we contemplate how we have lived our lives, most of us evaluate ourselves according to accomplished goals or achievements. "I set a goal in my life – if I succeed, life is great, but if I fail, life sucks." We live on a roller coaster of continuous highs and lows based on our achievements and goals met. We tend to focus on what we are doing wrong and devote more energy to this instead of investing our energy on the process. We should focus less on what we are doing wrong and instead consider the goal simply as guidance. As we focus on the process instead, goals give us direction. Once we set the direction, we should focus on the tasks and activities necessary to reach the goal. Our efforts, our emotions, and energy should be put into these activity and actions. When you invest in the process, you enjoy the journey. The less we think about the goal, the more we enjoy the process. You are doing what you're doing because the universe put it there for you, regardless of whether you're successful or not. When you stop believing that success is most important, the chances of success increase. *Focus on the process, not on the outcome.*

4, BE GRATEFUL

We spend a lot of time complaining about a few things that are wrong in our lives, things that we have arbitrarily defined as bad. We invest a lot of time and energy in these things that we categorize as negative and we do not pay attention to what is right in our lives because we have invested so much energy on what is wrong. Though, most likely, the things that are right in our lives outnumber the wrong. Our task is to change our tendency and to count our blessings. Thinking and talking more about the positive things in our lives rather than the negative allows us to experience the gratitude of having these blessings, however simple they may be. The important thing is to feel truly grateful every day, even if for something as simple as enjoying a cup of coffee on a rainy morning.

5, REFRAMING

You can reframe any reality you are facing. Dr. Sri Kumar gives an example of how his oldest daughter was upset that her younger sister got all new things, from the crib up to the dishes, while she herself had received only hand-me-downs from others. Dr. Sri Kumar's response was "Your sister had everything new but 'used' parents, because you were our first child." The point here is that we can shift the focus of any situation we are experiencing. This is a choice. We are free to choose how we want to face a certain circumstance and how we view and evaluate what is happening to us. We can choose to see the situation as a gift from the universe. Let's be intentional about looking at things from new and fresh perspectives, as often we can solve a problem simply by changing the way we see it.

I hope that these steps bring you hope that things can be better and that we can be resilient in the midst of all happening today.

Dominique Lavin, Psychologist
CCS Counselor

BACK TO SCHOOL!

It feels very strange to be writing a back to school article in the middle of April when we would usually start anticipating the school year winding down, but if there is one thing this year has been so far, it's just that – strange! Even without an exact start date, the news of schools looking towards reopening in the relatively near future is a welcome relief for many people. Online learning has been a lifesaver, but also has been tremendously challenging for teachers, parents, and students alike, and many kids (and teachers!) have deeply missed their friends and normal school life.

So now that the end appears to be in sight, how do we effectively use whatever remaining time we have to best prepare for the resumption of school? A good friend of mine shared a quote with me this week by Dave Hollis of Peaceful Mind Peaceful Life, "In the rush to return to normal, use this time to consider which parts of normal are worth rushing back to." There is tremendous wisdom in this. Obviously, none of us would have wished for this pandemic and the turmoil it has caused, but we can use it as an opportunity to pause and reflect on what our lives have looked like and what we would like them to look like. Often, life is so busy we just go through the motions on autopilot without stopping to really think about what we are doing or why we are doing it; we simply accept things as just part of the routine.



Online schooling and working from home have disrupted our routines. Hopefully this disruption has helped us both realize the aspects of our daily lives that we tend to take for-granted but actually are grateful for as well as having highlighted aspects of our lives that perhaps were worth being disrupted and changed. Spend some time thinking about if there are certain routines from before that you want to change up or things you want to do differently even when life goes back to a more normal state. Now that we've seen how very different a life can look, it's a good time to make some significant changes.

While many parents understandably are rejoicing at the prospect of school reopening, many also are expressing some sadness as they have enjoyed the more leisurely pace of life and time of bonding with their children. There is something to be said for not necessarily having to wake up

to an alarm clock and rush through the morning routines, having the luxury of more shared meals and conversations together, and maybe even extra snuggles with little ones during naptime in the afternoon. In the time remaining before school resumes, be sure to cherish these moments as much as possible. When kids go back to school, hopefully they will be able to look back on this unique time period, not just completely as one full of fear, uncertainty, anxiety, and stress, but more so as one full of meaningful connection, laughter, bonding, and special memories.

Just as many parents have mixed feelings about school restarting, kids also may have mixed feelings. Kids are likely excited about getting to see their friends again on a regular basis and getting back to events and activities they enjoy. They may also have some anxiety though about what things will be like. Allow kids to express their fears and concerns. For kids who worry about the virus, help remind them of all the precautions that the nation and the schools are taking to ensure safety and the actions they can take to help keep safe and healthy – washing hands, wearing a mask, etc.

Help kids anticipate and prepare for ways that school will be different than it was prior to the outbreak. There will be strict health checks and regulations. Schools will likely limit group activities and restrict movement around campus. With some teachers and peers still overseas, some familiar faces will be missing. Class arrangements and daily structures and schedules likely will be different than before. Let kids know it is normal if they feel some stress and disorientation at first as they adjust to yet another "new normal" and encourage them to talk openly about how they are doing and how they feel about things, both the positive and the negative.

For kids who are still overseas, it may be painful to see classmates and friends here be able to go back to school and may create a sense of disconnection or feeling left out. It will be important to make sure these children are offered ways to still feel connected, involved, and part of the community, even from afar.

Schools reopening seems to be one the biggest indicators that we are approaching a period of normalcy here. There will be challenges and obstacles to overcome, but it is reason for optimism. As with everything else we've experienced, we will get through this together as a community. May you enjoy these final few weeks of online schooling and may your family's transition back to school be as positive as possible.

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