

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 DEFUSE PANDEMIC PANIC: TIPS FOR REORGANIZING YOUR LIFE

When the COVID-19 outbreak first started here in China, naturally many of us felt concerned for our own health and wellbeing as well as the health and wellbeing of our immediate family and friends who also live here and for China in general. Even though the situation here in China has improved tremendously, now that COVID-19 has spread around the world and become a pandemic, we still feel anxious, but perhaps in slightly different ways.

Now many of us worry about our extended family and friends back home. Many of us find ourselves feeling frustrated with our aging parents who do not seem to take coronavirus and/or quarantine and protection measures seriously. For those of us who left China earlier this year, we find ourselves stuck in countries where the current situation is dire and possibly even separated from our spouse and/or child(ren) with no clear idea of when we can return to China.



On a more macro-scale, we worry as government officials are test positive, and some even die from the virus. People are hoarding medical supplies, including masks and surgical gloves, depriving frontline health workers of necessary protective wear. In many ways, panic seems to be spreading faster than the disease itself.

Psychologists, doctors, nurses, scientists, and other specialists are all working together to defuse this panic, and we are grateful for their contributions and the sacrifices they are making for us. They unite behind a common purpose as they try to help us to cope, to stay safe and healthy both physically and emotionally, and to continue with our lives. These professionals recommend the following ways to cope with stress and anxiety during this pandemic:

- **Understand the facts of the situation** - When we hear alarming news, while our instinct may be to panic and react immediately, it is extremely important not to further spread this information if you are unsure of the accuracy of it. In the case of any health emergency, facts are paramount. Poor communication can cause confusion and breed fear and misinformation, both of which exacerbate crises. Also, please remember
- **Know you are not alone** - Fear and uncertainty are a normal response to things that we do not understand and that we feel threaten our safety and the safety of our loved ones. When you feel anxious or fearful, remember you are not alone, regardless of whether you are currently here in China or overseas elsewhere waiting for borders to reopen. We are in this together and when we join together, strength and hope arise.
- **Manage your media diet** - There is a fine line between staying informed and feeling overwhelmed by the news. In times like these, the tendency is to drown in the news. Researches has shown that in natural disasters or terrorist events, as people's media exposure increases, so too does their level of distress. While we should not avoid the news entirely, it is important to dial down our exposure to media content. This is because media can be vague or sensationalized. Rely on trusted forms of communication, such as the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization and give yourself a break from the news and social media from time to time.
- **Stick to a routine** - Your usual commute and normal schedule might be shaken, especially if you're now working from home or living away from home, but creating a new routine can be very calming,

especially when it feels like everything around you is changing rapidly and drastically. Set a schedule that allows you to take proper breaks for meals and get enough sleep. It is also important to continue to exercise and eat healthy foods. Try to avoid caffeine and alcohol, which can increase your anxiety. If you usually relax on the weekend with books or movies, continue to do that in this new normal.

- **Look out for others** - It might feel like your life is out of control right now, so focus your mind and efforts on the things that are within your control, such as washing your hands, avoiding close physical contact with others, and keeping loved ones near you safe. To that end, looking out for your neighbors, family, friends, and coworkers can also provide some relief. When we support others, it gives us a sense of purpose. It is a reminder that we are all in this together, and there are people who support you during difficult times. Do anything you can to stay connected emotionally with others as the pandemic can be incredibly isolating.
- **Give mindfulness a try** - Not knowing what the future holds is one of the main reasons we feel anxious about COVID-19, so it is important to focus on the present. A great way to do this is to use meditation or other mindfulness exercises, which encourage you to notice what's happening with your feelings in the moment in a nonjudgmental way. Your instinct might be to seek out ways to distract yourself or escape your anxiety, but these will not make you feel better in the long run. Find a way or a tool that can guide you in this process. You might consider a calming app, a guided meditation app, or other relevant video and audio channels.
- **Find other things to talk about** - In anxious times such as this, utilizing your support network can be very helpful. Just be sure that you reach out to people who give you support and who do not needlessly amplify your stress. Keep in touch with your friends and talk about various topics not related to the pandemic so that you are not just exchanging and amplifying each other's worries. If you find that your anxiety is interfering with your work, school, or interpersonal relationships, consider reaching out to a mental health professional, such as a therapist or psychologist. And if you are already in treatment for an anxiety disorder, be sure to continue your treatment process during this especially trying time.

What to do after a crisis?

Begin strategizing how to return to normal after the crisis passes. Just as companies and governments plan for how to rebuild their systems and their output, while taking precautions to prevent the virus from reemerging in the process, we as individuals should do the same thing with our lives. Start to reorganize your life, make plans, and set goals for the time when you will be able to put everything to practice. It is both helpful and healthy to look ahead and plan for this transition from lockdown to moving forward and resuming your normal life.

Once you do resume normal life and are able to put this plan into place, be intentional about periodically looking back and reflecting on how you are doing – did you make the changes you hoped to make or did you just fall back into old habits and routines that actually could have used some change?

We can learn from every experience that comes our way and this crisis is no exception. Let us use this pandemic as a teachable moment to learn what really matters to us, how to take better care of ourselves and our world, and to improve our lives and the lives of those around us. There will be an end to this, just as there is with every crisis. The ability for you to reorganize, move forward in a healthy way, and make significant progress is within your power!

**Eunice Lazar, Psychologist
CCS Counselor**

COVID-19 AND DRINKING

As COVID-19 has spread to countries all around the world, we have all heard of and perhaps even engaged in panic buying of various items, from masks to hand sanitizer to goggles to toilet paper to pork. Some of us can probably add booze to this list. However, when consumed too quickly or in excess, this item can be a bit more problematic than the others. During this pandemic, we already have so many health guidelines and concerns - is drinking something we really need to be careful about too?

Yes, and this should be a priority for some people right now. Stress levels are high and we have no shortage of things to worry about - health, family relationships, job security, finances - and any of these worries can serve as a trigger for binge drinking as a way to 'take a break' or 'get away' from all the pressure for a bit. A little treat for oneself in the face of mounting anxiety can slowly turn in to a daily habit beyond healthy limits, especially so for those who are drinking in isolation.



How do we recognize when our drinking has become a problem? Sometimes we can find some clues in our drinking habits – the amount, frequency, time of day we drink, our choice of drink, our tolerance level, and even our reason to drink. We should take note if there is a

significant difference from our previous drinking habits. Other symptoms may be more obvious and alarming - physical manifestations (shaking, sweating, nausea) and emotional states (stressed, raging, anxious, depressed, etc.).

Fortunately, there are many things we can do if we are worried about our drinking or the drinking of a loved one. Here are some practical ideas:

- Calculate, record, and plan drinking. When work and social life are put on pause, increased alcohol consumption can sneak up on us, just as time has a way of slipping away from us unaware. Do not let it catch you off guard!
 - Decide when to drink, a decision we need to make intentionally and stick to – have others help hold you accountable if needed.
 - Stockpile less alcohol and find substitutes to fill your shopping list and your daily routine. This is getting easier as more companies, shops, markets, and attractions are back in business.
 - Dilute drinks with a mixer or opt for lower alcohol drinks. Drink enough water to stay hydrated.
 - Find help. Family and friends can keep us in check, so we do not have to walk this path alone. An AA program or professional also can be helpful.
- This pandemic comes with unprecedented challenges on a global scale. It is important for us to know there will be an end to this and, in the meantime, together we can find healthy ways to cope. One step at a time!

**Scott Shen, LSW
CCS Counselor**

LIFELINE CHINA – TALKING HELPS!

It is probably a bit of an understatement to say this has been a difficult year so far for most of us. We have probably all had moments where we felt isolated, anxious, or overwhelmed. Thankfully, there have been helpful resources and tips from various experts and professionals to guide us as to how we can best protect and take care of ourselves and our loved ones. Sometimes what we need though is not advice, suggestions, or an action plan; in a moment of distress, sometimes what we need most is a listening ear - someone safe to listen to as patiently and compassionately, and without judgement. We are fortunate to have just such a service here— Lifeline China

Lifeline offers free, confidential, and anonymous listening support 365 days a year, 10 am – 10 pm. You can talk to someone at Lifeline by calling 400 821 1215 or you can send a text via WeChat (ID: LifelineConnect). I recently spent some time talking with Karli Rowland, the Interim Executive Director of Lifeline, about the impact COVID-19 has had on their services and callers. Although completely managed and run by trained volunteers, Lifeline was, incredibly enough, able to keep all shifts covered and services running smoothly and continuously despite having a reduced volunteer team during this challenging time period. This speaks volumes about the unwavering commitment and dedication of Lifeline to serving our community, especially when you consider that during the first five weeks of the outbreak, Lifeline's call volume tripled for many shifts. Karli notes that many of the volunteers who were away desperately wanted to return to offer their support but were not able to do due the border closing.

Describing the past few months, Karli summarized, "One of the most encouraging things is to have had people in our community contact Lifeline during this most stressful and critical time in our lives. To know the service has been able to help support those in need who may not have been able to make it to an appointment outside or have access to their usual support network and resources and to allow Lifeline to assist them in talking through how they may help themselves, has truly been an honor for our volunteers on shift."

Karli said that Lifeline continued to receive the usual calls about "normal" life stressors just as before the outbreak, and also received additional calls related to people being confined in the home and the strain the circumstances put on family relationships and couples as people adapted to not being able to engage in their usual routines, work, and recreational activities. Many callers expressed anxiety about when life will "return to normal," the challenges of being socially isolated, and the struggle to feel a sense of purpose or achievement during this time period. Karli also highlighted that for younger callers, not being able to have contact with their friends at school, having to adjust to the demands of online learning and related technological problems, and anxiety from not being able to have privacy when sharing their living environment with other family members day after day at a frequency and duration they are not accustomed to have been particularly stressful.

Karli further shared that now that the initial crisis situation and threat have somewhat lessened, the calls still reflect somewhat similar themes as many people are still at home much more than previously. Many people continue to, at least, partially work from home and must deal with the challenges of adjusting to a different way of working and/or coexisting with children at home each day for what as yet is still an unconfirmed time before all schools reopen to all age groups. Many current calls also reflect anxiety related to the possibility of a second wave of COVID-19 and how people can

best continue to reduce risk to themselves and their loved ones.

When asked why it is important for people to reach out for support not only during difficult days like we have experienced these past few months, but also in the midst of the more typical stresses of "normal" life, Karli responded, "Being able to reach out to seek support when we are challenged as human beings enables us to share the load of what we are carrying and experiencing. By saying how we feel, often the intensity of our feelings and the anxiety associated with these emotions can be reduced. At Lifeline, we see seeking support as a sign of strength as indeed, as human

beings, we are stronger together."

This is exactly the theme that will be reflected at Lifeline's upcoming R U OK? Day (stay tuned to Lifeline for the date and more details). R U OK? Day is an inspiring day of action for health and well-being that features interactive workshops, workouts, forums, and presentations from Shanghai's professional health and wellbeing specialists. In addition to R U OK? Day, Lifeline also hosts R U OK? workshops in schools, organizations, and businesses here. Based on the fact that meaningful conversations make a difference and reaching out to someone struggling could save a life, these 3-hour workshops teach participants how to ask R U OK? and equip them with valuable life skills and confidence in checking in on and supporting someone they are concerned about.

With a growing demand for their services and recognition of the fact that we all need support sometimes, Lifeline's goal is to be able to increase their operating hours to ensure that they can support each and every person who needs them. If you would like to contribute to Lifeline to help make this possible, you can donate via the QR code below. Just 60 RMB supports 1 person in emotional distress and 60 RMB supports 1 full day or 12 hours of critical support to many in need. Offering to hold an event in your workplace in support of Lifeline also is an option.

We at CCS would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to Lifeline for the invaluable services and support they offer our community. If you find yourself struggling at any point, whether related to COVID-19 or other life stressors, please do not hesitate to reach out and give Lifeline a call. Talking helps!



**Carrie Jones, LCSW
Director of Counseling, CCS**