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Message for Students: Coping with Stress, Fear, and Anxiety  
- How to Manage Your Mental Health  
(From the Counseling Team of the Health Support Center)

◎ **Introduction**

Tokyo Tech cares about its students and how they are passing the days in this time of crisis. Many of you may be saying, “I couldn’t go out to see cherry blossoms or attend the welcome party for new students this spring” or “Graduation and entrance ceremonies were scaled down, and because we are encouraged to self-isolate I cannot do anything for a refreshing change.” Today, a sense of insecurity and fear are pervasive not only in Japan but all over the world because of COVID-19. In this article, we would like to offer advice from psychological counselors for making everyday life easier under the current situation.

◎ **Basic recognition and message from us**

The current situation could be a disaster that slowly develops worldwide for a long term. What is worse, this disaster is extremely difficult to see because the situation is unclear, there is a possibility of a surge in cases, and most of us have never experienced it before. Therefore, every one of us must learn how to cope with it and develop new habits. As we have been offering counseling services for you on a daily basis, we would like to offer specific advice from counselors based on two major points: “maintaining a scientific approach” and “developing and maturing as young people.”

**1) Fear COVID-19 appropriately, but not too much: protect yourself and others**

There are still many unknown factors about COVID-19, but there are things we do know.

- ◇ Avoid “Three C” situations (crowded places with many people, close-contact settings and interactions, and confined spaces with poor ventilation), pay attention to contacts with people and things in your surroundings, and wash your hands!
  - Scientific approach based on epidemiological data fully enables you to protect yourself and prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- ◇ Learn from history and literature – conflicted feelings held by people and how they lived during plague-stricken times in all countries are described.
  - Try to focus on how to establish a sense of self as a young person living in times of major change in which a set of values shared by members of society may waver.

<Tips for making everyday life easier>

- It is essential to consider what is responsible action as a young person and student (minimize the risk of infection!)
- Make handwashing a habit, do not consider it as a pain in the neck. You can significantly reduce the presence of viruses on your hands by washing your hands for at least 30 seconds.
- Separate information from credible sources (Tokyo Tech webpage, public broadcasting, etc.) and those from less credible sources (information on SNS), and recognize the difference
- When you handle information unknown to be true or false or that seems to be biased, review the information calmly from a scientific and logical point of view.
- Learn scientific knowledge and literature on infectious diseases from time to time and think about the essence of the problem and the impact it may have on the future (i.e., active involvement).
  - ⇔ Practice measures that you can do by yourself, such as avoiding nonessential outings (keeping a safe distance)

## **2) Distancing yourself from information and changing the mood: free yourself from stagnation**

People tend to get depressed as every news source releases information mainly on COVID-19. It is sometimes difficult to make appropriate decisions.

- ◇ It is necessary to collect information and check the latest news. However, be careful not to be exposed to media coverage of the virus all the time.
  - Decide on a time to check the news and proactively collect information from reliable sources. Do not stay in a negative emotional state for too long.

<Tips for making everyday life easier>

- It is essential that you check emails from Tokyo Tech and the Institute website. Check them at least once in the morning and once in the afternoon.
- Limit the amount of time spent online or watching TV to collect information. For example, make it a rule to shut down your PC after 15 minutes.
- Tell yourself to “Change the mood!” and do physical exercise when you get caught up in your thoughts and start feeling depressed.
- Engage in your favorite activity that is not related to COVID-19 at least once a day, and try not to be sluggish.

Examples: walking, light exercise, yoga, cooking, taking a bath, listening to music, playing a game with a time limit

- Stay home in a positive mindset (change in cognitive structure): you are contributing to society by staying at home as it helps prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Learn from others, but do not compare yourself to them beyond necessity (E.g., Friends are showing you accomplishments one after another, whereas you have not done anything yet, etc.).

<Tips for virtually connecting with others using Zoom, etc.>

You will engage in all kinds of activities including attending class using videophone, etc. Keep in mind the following.

- Having to focus on specific topics on camera for a certain period of time may lead to mental exhaustion.
  - Limit the length of time (specify the end time in advance), and finish your online activities within class or working hours.
  - Avoid having multiple sessions on the same topic or in the same group in one day if possible. Have time to rest and change the mood.
- Tone of voice, mood, subtleties of emotion or facial expression may not transmit accurately online. Sometimes, people put logic first and easily become offended.
  - Check your attitude and see whether your way of speaking is one-sided or not, or whether you cut others short or not. Also, pay attention to those who speak infrequently.
- Having technical problems and getting disconnected causes stress. Exchange information on how to solve such problems (social support).
  - Utilize technology for convenience but do not seek perfection. If something goes wrong, just accept it and do not take it too seriously.
- Make good use of online social gathering platforms such as Zoom from time to time: First of all, prepare your environment (and pay attention to your background).
  - Change your state of mind from studying or discussion, clearly show the end time, never force others to participate and/or drink alcohol, and do not record sound or video without permission

### **3) Social distancing and psychological distance: Dilemma of “Two meters” and “Stay home”**

Social distancing is very important for preventing the spread of the virus, but sometimes it becomes a cause of stress.

- ✧ Humans are social animals. Always keeping a two-meter distance from other people and reducing social contact by 80% is a contradiction to human nature
- ✧ The pros and cons of staying with the same people and/or in a small group all the time (E.g., family, dormitory, room-sharing, etc.)
  - Pros: you can strengthen your bonds of trust with them and reconcile with them
  - Cons: people may have displeasure with one another and may unexpectedly become offended

<Tips for making everyday life easier>

- If you live by yourself: have a conversation with someone from time to time and interact with that person by sharing emotions and ideas (by telephone or on the internet). It is good for a change.
- If you live with your family: have some time and space where you can be by yourself, separate yourself from others for some time if you feel you are developing a negative attitude.
- If you feel like criticizing someone: first, cool down, and avoid criticizing that person directly and in the moment.
- To protect yourself, leave any place in which you feel yourself being bullied or harassed in conversation (avoidance/escape).
- It may be a good idea to contact old friends from elementary, junior-high, or high school (by telephone or online) but respect their schedules and interest in communicating.
- Although you are having a difficult time, understand the difficulty of others and offer each other assistance to get through this crisis together.

**4) Build a self-controlled lifestyle: self-control is the basis for independent young people**

It is surprisingly difficult to regulate your life when you can spend a day freely.

- ✧ Life without daily routines such as going to school at a fixed time tends to make one sluggish (do not get caught in a negative spiral!)
  - Thoughts such as “Is it already evening? I haven’t done anything today” may lead to a decreased sense of self-efficacy and to further losing one’s drive.

<Tips for making everyday life easier>

- Daily routine is important. Have breakfast in the morning and sleep at night.
  - When you wake up, take a shower and groom yourself even if you have no

plans for the day. Do not spend the whole day in your pajamas.

- Persistence pays off: even if you feel that your efforts yield low results, their accumulation will have made it worthwhile.
- Do not hesitate to turn down invitations to telephone calls, meetings, playing a game late at night (or outside of school hours and off-duty hours).
- During this period, you can take plenty of time to do what you have been interested in but had no time to try.
  - ✧ Take something that you are not good at and improve upon it, study books and thoughts you have been interested in, try to cook, keep a diary, create a work of art. It may help you to establish a sense of self.
  - ✧ Make daily life stable by concentrating on particular tasks (and shut off anxiety), and it may lead to new interactions with those who share the same interests as you.
- Do not be so strict with yourself. It is OK to slack off from time to time and do not blame yourself so much. Record your activities and praise yourself for what you have achieved.

(Reference: "Stress Management for Students" by Kenji Saito and others, Yuhikaku Publishing Co., Ltd., 2020)

### © **Concluding remarks**

Because everyone feels anxious and fear in the current situation, it is all the more important to be able to talk about hope. To do so, you need to have confidence in yourself that you can control yourself. We believe that the power of young people's dreams will change the world. We are looking forward to having a conversation with you in the near future. Until then, stay home, stay safe, and take care of yourself.

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