

Message for Students (Part Two): Mentally Adapting to the New Environment as We Approach Summer

(From the Counseling Team of the Health Support Center)

Under Tokyo Tech Level 2.5- Alert (from late June through early August, 2020 (expected))

◎ Introduction

Many of you may be feeling frustrated or unsettled as you have been forced to stay at home, taking lectures and conducting your research activities remotely. You probably did not imagine that the stay-home period would last this long and feel that your university life is ruined. The reality is that we have to remain alert to the spread of COVID-19 for the time being and accept that the lifting of self-isolation and other restrictions should be carefully decided in stages. In this message, we aim to provide Tokyo Tech students with useful advice, based on our knowledge and experience as counselors, about how to stay the course with restrictions on daily life and gradually shift the study and research environment back to campus during the level 2.5- alert.

◎ Basic recognition and message from us

In our message in April, we described the current situation as “a disaster that slowly develops worldwide for a long term,” and presented tips to help maintain your mental health. The initial surge of infections seems to have abated somewhat, but there are still certain indications that we need to maintain a high level of alert. Our basic recognition remains that the crisis is not over yet. At the same time, we are gradually getting used to new social behavior. Our counseling team knows that Tokyo Tech students view the situation through a scientific lens and are seeking their own ways of developing and maturing as young people in this challenging time. This experience is worthwhile and is helpful when contemplating university life going forward.

1) For those in their first-year, second-year, or third-year undergraduate studies and other students who continue to study at home remotely:

The next stage is just around the corner.

All of us are getting fed up with self-isolating, but things will change.

- It is not unusual to feel depressed in this situation. Try not to dwell on the same emotion or idea for too long. Your efforts will eventually pay off.
- ➔ Clearing your mind will be more important than ever. Try to relax and don't give yourself a hard time. Work hard when you are able to do so.
- We as individuals, Tokyo Tech, and society as a whole have made efforts to self-support and cope with restrictions in this time of pandemic. The signs of improvement we now see are the result of our efforts and we duly deserve praise.
- ➔ Be reminded that a scientific approach and self-control remain vital.
- For new students: Tokyo Tech faculty and staff are looking forward to meeting you soon and developing close relationships.

<Tips for making everyday life easier>

- When you feel frustrated or unsettled, try to change your mood by doing something different or

talking to someone. Look after yourself.

- ➔ It is natural to feel anxious or depressed when having to stay at home for an extended period of time under a state of emergency.
- Do not overly compare yourself to others and how they are handling things, or what you would be doing if the pandemic had not occurred.
- ➔ Do not stick to your previous plans. Accept yourself and do not be hesitant to find new interests.
- Don't forget to have fun even while restrictions are in place, while continuing to collect relevant information and helping to prevent infections.
- Understand that lecturers are also experiencing hardship, preparing for lectures under the same restrictions that affect you.
- You may start to feel tired or lose motivation after several months of taking online lectures. Relax and find your own rhythm. Be active and participate enthusiastically whenever you can.

2) For those in their fourth-year undergraduate studies or master's and doctoral studies, and those who need to come to campus for research purposes:

How to ensure a "soft landing" when returning to campus

Students who must carry out experiments at laboratories are now allowed to come to campus. But after a time away from campus, you may feel hesitant or awkward just like after returning from the summer break.

- Cherish the feeling of returning to campus, but be reminded that stepping into a new environment can be surprisingly energy consuming.
- ➔ Although expectations for learning new things and meeting new people will be your key motivational driver, be aware that new stimuli can cause mental stress.
- For those who have just joined Tokyo Tech for graduate studies: You must be excited and can't wait to start your research. Be careful not to rush into everything. Ease yourself into new activities just as an athlete takes the time to warm up.

<Tips for making everyday life easier>

- You may need a while to mentally and physically re-adjust to life outside your own four walls. Fatigue can accumulate like body blows, and our exhaustion could be much greater than we had imagined.
- ➔ You may feel dizzy in crowds. Be careful and watch your footing on stairs at stations, etc., and make sure to look left and right when using crosswalks.
- Plan your study and research so it can be undertaken at a moderate and steady pace. Take into account the number of days and hours you are allowed to come to campus, which will change incrementally as restrictions are gradually lifted. This will also help prevent infections.
- ➔ Take time to adjust yourself mentally, too. Sprinting at full speed from the outset may result in burnout.
- You may be thinking, "I should be doing better than this" in terms of both quantity and quality.
- ➔ With the added benefit of a fresh start, you'll find your rhythm again — it's just like riding a bicycle.
- If you feel that you are too far from your goal and will never get there at your current pace, remind yourself that there is no rush.
- ➔ Try to remember that concern over progress is itself evidence of having started to move forward.
- Young people tend to take on and exaggerate the burden of expectations and advice from faculty and seniors.

- Remember that your elders and seniors are also struggling while seeking the best way to impart knowledge and support you in these unusual circumstances. We encourage you to engage in frank and open discussion with them.

3) Between physical and psychological distance:

Even at a two-meter distance, people can retain a certain closeness.

The importance of social distancing in terms of infection prevention is now widely understood, but this practice is forcing us into an environment that is quite against our nature.

- Humans are social creatures. Even if people have to maintain a physical distance, socializing remains essential and should not be abandoned.
- We encourage you to expand and deepen your interpersonal network (old friends and teachers, in addition to new friends, lecturers, etc. through university life).
- What is an appropriate psychological distance? Even a close relationship may need distance sometimes.
- Be open to meeting new people and deepening existing relationships.
- An increasing number of students are experiencing serious difficulties with family and friends these days. On the other hand, young people can learn a lot from interactions with their peers.

<Tips for making everyday life easier>

- As we have gotten used to communicating online, let's make the most of it
- Become involved in get-togethers, sessions, study circles with friends, etc. online. (Don't forget to set a finish time, and do not to force others to participate.)
- Brainstorm ideas of how you can start or reopen club activities, meetings for people with the same hobbies or interests, etc.
- Many students are looking for opportunities to do something, and interactions can make a huge difference (from self-support to mutual support).
- Stay away from relationships that are uncomfortable and overbearing (make time for yourself, reduce frequency of contact, etc.).
- It may be an idea to seek advice from a reliable person so that you can gain perspective on the relationship.
- Even over a physical distance or online, it is possible to share feelings (laughing together about the same topic, etc.) and experiences (enjoying the same music, sports, etc.).
- Please keep in mind that some people may actually feel more comfortable interacting online.
- If you feel stressed about online communications (feeling scared by so many faces online at once, not comfortable with seeing lecturers or yourself onscreen, etc.), do not force yourself to look at the screen.

4) Thoughts on new social behavior:

You can develop and fine-tune the new standard for yourself.

Various precautions have been called for in an effort to prevent a possible second wave of infections, many of which you may have heard repeatedly.

- What each of you can do is adjust the new standard to match your own needs and lifestyle as a student, taking the social circumstances and Tokyo Tech policies into account.

→ Social values and systems may change over time, but you will be fine as long as you have your own standard.

<Advice for making everyday life easier>

- You have so far managed to adapt to the new standard, based on pre-pandemic common sense.
- Going forward, you can update and apply the standard as new information presents itself.
- The extent of difficulty in adjusting to new lifestyles can vary depending on an individual's generation and environment. Discord may arise from conflicting values.
- Conflict may occur between individuals or groups. Keep an unbiased view and do not be driven by emotion.
- A crisis can be a turning point for both individuals and society.
 - 1) Adolescence is regarded a moratorium before developing into an independent adult. You can take advantage of this time as an opportunity to establish your identity and become whomever you want to be.
 - 2) Living at this point in history, we can make it our commitment to ensure that society is directed toward a better future. We hope you will feel one day that your experience as a student in this difficult time has contributed to your development (richness of mind, thoughtfulness).

© Final thoughts

We imagine that your life has felt rather restricted for the past three months, compared to the normal expectations of student life, with limited opportunity to express your confusion and anxiety. Our counseling services will remain available, albeit on a limited basis for the time being, mainly by telephone. But we look forward to being able to listen to you in person in the not-too-distant future. To that end, let's maintain our mental and physical health, and develop a new lifestyle tailored to each of us, at our own pace.

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