



Finding Your Social Support

Student Healthcare Center, Counseling Team

This is a story when I was studying abroad as a graduate student some decades ago. After I finished shopping and tried to get into the car, I could not find the car key. It was not in my pocket or in my purse. Then I peeked in the car through the window and found the key lying on my seat. Somehow it had fallen out of my jeans pocket and landed there. After feeling relieved that the key was found, my mind went blank. "What should I do next?"

Strangely, my friend's face came across. We were not that close, but my Japanese community would gather at his place from time to time. He was the kind of person you could rely on not only because he was a long-time resident but also because of his caring character. What if I call him? Will I ask him to drive me home? What will happen to the car with the keys in it? Will I ask the salesman to let me use the phone (I did not have a cell phone at the time)?

After the whirlwind of self-talk in the midst of the panic, I came to the conclusion to take a 45-minute walk home, grab the spare key, and walk another 45 minutes back to the car. It may seem like I solved the problem right away all by myself, but it was definitely a crisis for me. Besides, I still remember the episode

after all these years. When I met the friend later on and explained that his face had popped into my head, he told me that I should have called him and that I could always count on him. It was a heartwarming moment after the chaos.

If I lock the keys in the car again? Other than asking my family and friends for support, I will just call JAF. They handle over 100,000 cases a year for people locked out of their cars in Japan. It's as simple as that. I am much more relaxed because I have resources in my home country.

I imagine similar "crisis" occur elsewhere in Science Tokyo, especially when you come from different parts of the world or outside the Tokyo area. There is definitely a lack of support for people leaving their families and friends behind. Since you have to make new friends and communities from scratch, life can be difficult just for that. And on top of this vulnerability, you may face new challenges. This is when the social support can help you survive, like me, who thought of a friend when I lost my car keys. Even though you do not get the actual support, the perceived support, or a general expectation of being supported, is known to give people strength.

The research addressing the



association between social support and health were laid in the 1970s. Studies suggest that the lack of social relationships constitute a major risk factor for health. Today, it is recognized that supportive relationships with family, friends, coworkers (or lab mates), and community members can help improve our ability to manage stress, anxiety, and depression. As a result, the social connection leads to longer life, better health, and well-being. People are social creatures by nature, and relationships give us the support we need to cope.

The bottom line is that we need social

support, not only to get us through difficult times but to maintain our psychological and physiological functioning. So put away your laptop for a while and take some time to think about how you can connect with the people around you. It may be a good chance for you to consider building a new community as well. And remember, you can always count on us! To make an appointment with a counselor at the Student Healthcare Center, please visit our website or stop by the center.

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For more information about the Student Healthcare Center, please visit the website below.

<https://www.titech.ac.jp/english/student-support/students/counseling/counseling>

References

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