

UTokyo Faculty and Staff members

- Understanding Psychological Responses to Stress-

【Guidelines for Student Guidance and Management】

1) Understand various responses to the current situation

When people are ordered to stay home or forced into isolation, they may react in a number of ways. This can happen to anyone, including faculty and staff.

People may:

- Worry about their health, job, or future
- Feel angry or anxious about the restrictions on their personal freedom
- Worry about someone around them potentially being infected
- Become very negative and unrealistic, assume the situation will turn into a worst-case scenario, and live in fear
- Blame themselves for the spread of the virus
- Feeling lonely and isolated from limited interactions with others
- Easily get frustrated or angry

[You can learn more about possible reactions to stress on following pages

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) *Emergency Preparedness and Response*

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/responders.asp>

Japan Red Cross Society

http://www.jrc.or.jp/activity/saigai/news/200327_006138.html (in Japanese)]

You may be surprised or confused by a change of behavior in some of your students. However, these kinds of reactions are perfectly normal given the current situation. Knowledge of various psychological responses, including the ones described above, may occur among students, will enable the faculty and the staff members to remain calm and provide appropriate support when necessary.

2) Help students maintain their rhythm of life

Some students may find it difficult to maintain their sleep cycles. Sleeping all day long or even undergoing a day-night reversal can lead to a lower quality of sleep and damage their mental and physical health.

For this reason, we would appreciate it if faculty/staff members could make announcements to their students so that they can maintain a regular sleep-wake schedule. Having remote meetings following usual laboratory schedule will also help students maintain their healthy routine.

3) Keep students from falling into a state of total isolation

Preventing students from becoming isolated is also important to secure their mental and physical well-being.

Please try to keep in contact with students. Even when face-to face meeting and supervision is difficult, keeping in touch with students on a regular basis by email and video calls would be very helpful for their psychological well-being. Exchanging your thoughts about the current situation with your students may also be useful for you and the students for maintaining physical and psychological health.

4) Assess carefully before advising students to return home or remain in

Tokyo area

Some students may come from an area with a high number of infected people and be exposed to a higher risk of infection if they returned home. It may even be impossible for them to return home under current circumstances. Some may have family members who are elderly or with underlying disease that makes them at higher risk of suffering severe complications if infected. Some students may jeopardize their own physical and mental health if they returned home, due to strained family relationships.

Therefore, please carefully assess the individual circumstances of each student when discussing whether they should stay in the greater Tokyo area or return to their hometown.

5) Pay particular attention to international students

Many international students spend their days feeling anxious about the situation in their home countries, the possibility of becoming seriously ill in Japan, various restrictions on travel, or other situations related to current events. Also, they may be subjected to severe social scrutiny as foreign nationals. In addition, it is sometimes difficult to obtain reliable information that they can understand in a timely manner. Students will feel more secure if you frequently check on their condition, ask if they have any problems, and provide information if they need it.

【Managing Your Own Stress】

1) Understand and accept that stress is natural

As mentioned above, it is normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry during a crisis. However, people tend to get stressed and then blame themselves for not being as productive as usual and become overwhelmed by the feeling of being unwell, which can further damage their mental balance and sense of self-worth. Accepting that feeling uneasy is natural and unavoidable in a crisis like this would help maintain one's mental balance.

2) Try to stay connected

It is important to not only to check in regularly with your colleagues and superiors but also try and keep in touch with your friends and family. At times of stress, we work better in company and with support. Also, communication provides an opportunity for sharing and validating information about the current situation. Of course, talking to a friend, a trusted colleague, a family member, or a professional can also help maintain a positive attitude.

3) Be aware of the signs of burnout and secondary traumatic stress

You may feel overwhelmed and burned out. Hearing about the suffering of COVID-19 patients may cause what is known as secondary traumatic stress.

Please learn more about burnout and secondary traumatic stress from the CDC website:

During a Response: Understand and Identify Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress
<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/responders.asp>

4) Tips for reducing stress

Coping techniques such as taking breaks, eating healthy foods, exercising, and talking to someone you can trust help prevent and reduce burnout and secondary traumatic stress.

Going out for a walk for about 30 minutes per day is also recommended, with proper social distance.

You can find more information on how to manage these stressful times from the following American Psychological Association webpage:

Keeping Your Distance to Stay Safe

<https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/research-information/social-distancing>

5) Be psychologically prepared for out-of-the-ordinary teaching conditions, including conducting classes online

Following the prevention measures against COVID-19, most classes will be conducted online this semester. Many university members may feel psychologically unprepared and stressed by the new guidelines. Following is a list of tips that may help reduce the stress of online teaching and get you psychologically prepared.

- Don't try to be perfect. Allow plenty of margin for accidents and unexpected glitches when designing your course.
- In preparation for unexpected circumstances, notify your students of a back-up plan before the class, such as "if I cannot get online, we will do XXX instead", etc.
- Do not attempt to transfer everything online.

The priority is to make it possible for your students to have a meaningful experience within the limited resources you have.

【To those who are undergoing psychological treatment】

If you are currently undergoing psychological treatment and/or counseling, we recommend contacting your psychologist or therapist on a regular basis. It would be a good idea to discuss with them how to prepare for the current situation.

【References】

- American Psychological Association (2020). Keeping Your Distance to Stay Safe. <https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/research-information/social-distancing>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020). Emergency Preparedness and Response <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/responders.asp>
- Japanese Red Cross Society (2020) Keeping your mental health during an outbreak of infectious diseases http://www.jrc.or.jp/activity/saigai/news/200327_006138.html
- The University of Tokyo (2020). Online class/Web conference portal site <https://utelecon.github.io>