Normal Reaction to an Abnormal Situation  
~ How to Maintain Our Mental Health ~

The spread of COVID-19 has put in danger not only our physical health but also our mental health. You may be experiencing increased anxiety regarding your academic work, relationship-building on campus, job hunting activities, part-time work, and so on.

For those who live by themselves, you may feel isolated during this period of social distancing. Those who live with their family may be stressed when all the family members stay home all the time.

It is a very normal human reaction to feel anxious, depressed, isolated, and stressed, in the face of this abnormal situation. Just like when people are victims of natural disaster or crime, we call those responses "normal reactions to abnormal situations."

Paying attention to your mental health is just as important as taking care of your physical health. Anxiety and the feeling of isolation will disappear over time, however, we can’t wait until they go away, as nobody can predict when the pandemic will end. I think a lot of you will talk to someone close when you feel anxious, or go outside for a change. But it is difficult now when social distancing is needed. Evidence shows that social isolation can increase the symptoms of mental illnesses. The wave of anxiety from the pandemic, plus the additional consequences of social isolation, can be a difficult combination.

Those who have had mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, substance use or obsessive-compulsive disorder may need professional help. Ritsumeikan Medical Service Center provides information on hospitals and clinics in Kyoto/Osaka/Shiga.

In order to maintain mental wellness:

1. Be aware of your media intake.
   
   You can access news media 24/7, but the more you read about the pandemic, the more likely you will feel anxious and depressed. Seek information only from trusted sources, and try to shut down your PC, phone, and TV when you start to feel anxious.

2. Keep your routine.
   
   In the time of uncertainty, it is a good idea to keep your normal routine. This regularity will bring you comfort.

3. Keep social relationships.

   Keeping social relationships will reduce the feeling of isolation during the social distancing period. Talking to your friends and family on the phone or Skype, or texting them will be a good way to feel connected.

   If you live with your family or roommate, staying home may create some tension with
them. To maintain a healthy relationship with your family or roommate, try to be kind and patient with them. It is a stressful time for everyone. If it is getting too overwhelming for you to be with them, keep a certain distance and maintain your mental health.

There is a saying “Every cloud has a silver lining,” which means every difficult situation has a positive aspect, even though this may not be immediately apparent. I wish you all the best in keeping your physical and mental wellbeing, and hope you find your silver lining in this chaotic time.