"Difficulty of living in Japan"

Health Support Center Counseling Team

Regardless of the degree, it can be very challenging to live in different countries. Those who are reading this, might just landed in Tokyo or have lived here for few years already. But coming to Japan alone, try to keep up with the curriculum, master one of the most difficult languages, and be a good (if not the best) researcher seems like impossible mission to achieve. I have been working as a counsellor here for some years, and one of the most common issues students face is the LONELINESS. "It is soooo difficult to make close friends in my laboratory. Do not know what Japanese are truly thinking" "On weekends, I get extremely lonely and feel isolated", "Want to have a company whom I can have lunch or go out on weekends". These are the struggles that I hear often in the counseling room.

Feelings of loneliness and hopelessness are completely understandable in such situation. Bowlby, a British psychologist and psychiatrist, said that we have an innate need to feel attached and comforted by significant others (Bolwlby, 1979). So in the middle of struggle, adjusting to different culture, or feeling homesick, we do strive to look for stronger connection or want to feel safe and comfort. However, I do absolutely understand that it is easier said than done to find that significant others or even a friend, particularly in a foreign county.

Having said that, to have a closer or loving relationship, these are some tips that might be helpful when you try to strengthen the relationship or have a closer bond. Veronica and Jennifer, psychologist who are expert in relationship therapy, come up with a way to approach conversations which is called LOVE conversations.

> *L:Listen:* with an
> *O:Open:* heart and mind
> *V:Validate:* and acknowledge each other
> *E:Express:* our thoughts and feelings softly, simply and slowly
> (Veronica & Jennifer, 2021)

Listening without interruptions conveys respect and willingness to understand your point of view.

Open mind is trying to be humble and less judgmental.

Validate: Make an effort to acknowledge what they are saying and understand their reality and point of view.

Express: Satisfying relationship typically involve conversations about feeling, hope, dreams and disappointments etc.

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These tips may seem cheesy and some people might find it very difficult (including myself). So I would advise you to just practice one thing at a time with your loved one or someone you feel very safe. Please be noted that It can be risky to do this with just anybody (for instance, you might get your feelings hurt if you express your emotions to random str angers or people who you do not know that well).

Almost all the students that I met (an honor to have met them) in the counseling room are already trying their best in such challenging situation. I hope you can acknowledge that once in a while and give yourself a credit (it is already hard enough to live in different culture and you are doing it already!).

If you need any help with academic issues, trouble with relationship (lab mates, professor, friends, family, romantic etc), mental health issues, anything that we can help you in order to continue your academic life, please feel free to make an appointment with us at the health support center. We have 3 English speaking counselors in both Ookayama & Suzukakedai campus. Or you can talk with Japanese speaking counselors if you would like to practice your Japanese. Either way, it can be a nerve-racking thing to reveal your personal matter to a complete stranger, but we would like to welcome you with warm heart and look forward to seeing you.

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For further information about the health support center and counseling services, please check the below.
https://www.titech.ac.jp/english/student-support/students/counseling/counseling

Reference
Bowlby, J (1979). The making and breaking of affectional bonds. London: Tavistock.
Veronica Kallos-Lilly & Jennifer Fitzgerlad (2021) An Emotionally Focused Workbook for Couples: Routledge