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## Tips for Mental Health During the Shanghai Lockdown

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The lockdown has now been underway for 11 days for the Puxi side and even longer for Pudong. Many people feel exhausted by the overwhelming anxiety during this time, not knowing when they can go out, or how to get food supplies, and managing work in the same time. All these compounded random PCR test, no wonder we are worried and stressed.

People with strong emotion resilience tend to cope better under such pressure. By using some Emotion Regulation Skills to reduce your emotional vulnerability, you can train yourself to be more resilient.

Below tips are from the theoretical principles of DBT (Dialectical Behavioural Therapy).

### **A. Give yourself permission to feel, and keep doing the things that work.**

One of the most common misconceptions among people is that “It’s not normal to have a bad feeling”. “I woke up feeling bad! There must be something wrong with me.” Well, under the lockdown, it is perfectly normal to feel bad. You may feel a full range of bad feelings from anger to sadness to fear. However, how you feel and how you actually behave are different. How you feel and who you are are also different. It’s important for us to notice that while we may feel anxious or sad, but we can still do well - we have the capacity to make life easier for ourselves even in the current circumstance.

Being under lockdown doesn’t have to mean the loss of all our capacity to manage life fairly well.

When you feel upset, sad or anxious during the lockdown, ask yourself:

- Did I do some work today?
- Did I take care of myself or others today?
- Did I do some basic exercise today?
- Did I read today?
- Did I connect with another person by talking today?

If the answer to most of these questions is yes, it means you are doing well enough even though you are not feeling well. This way, you pay attention to how much agency you have and you can be resilient and having difficult emotions in the same time.

### **B. Limit access to news and social media.**

Prolonged exposure to news and social media can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and pain. Studies on the psychological aftermath of the 9/11 attacks show that mental health impairment is correlated with long term exposure to distressing media.



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We cannot really choose what we receive from the media, but we can choose how much we are exposed and from which channel we get information. It is crucial to limit your exposure to disturbing images and videos, so that you can protect yourself from sensory overload.

### **C. The “PLEASE” Skill**

Evaluating these factors on a daily basis, to help regulate unhelpful emotions:

PL - Physical: how is my physical health? Am I taking good care of my physical health? Following my doctor’s instructions and good health habits?

E - Eating: Eat a balanced diet. This can be tough now that some people have limited access to a variety of foods. But we can still try to eat as healthy as possible. Eat regularly, mindfully and slowly, allowing enough time to taste all the ingredients. If you tend to have anxious eating, be mindful about the emotions by accepting them.

A - Avoiding: Avoid mood-alternating substances not prescribed by a doctor. Both alcohol and drugs damage the brain and may lead to more negative emotions in the long run.

S - Sleep: No matter what happens that day and how you feel that day, go to bed at your usual time and stick to your schedule. When you are anxious during the day, you feel more fatigued and you might sleep longer than before. That is okay! That is your body’s sign that it needs to recover.

E - Exercise: Yoga, weight-lifting, HIIT, or even just jumping ropes on your balcony can change your body chemicals in a very short time and give you a fresh dose of energy. Also try your best to soak in the sun even for just 15 minutes.

### **D. Radical Acceptance**

Acceptance does not have to mean agreeing or liking. Acceptance simply means that we stop negotiating with the reality that we cannot change. Acceptance is not giving up either. Only after we accept that we are in lockdown can we move the energy of negotiating to doing something within our control for ourselves, for example, making a meal plan for the next week or reading a book that you haven’t found time to read.

The key DBT offers in acceptance is to resolve ourselves to life as it is: even if it’s painful, it can be meaningful. Hopefully, we can all go through this experience becoming even stronger and more resilient.