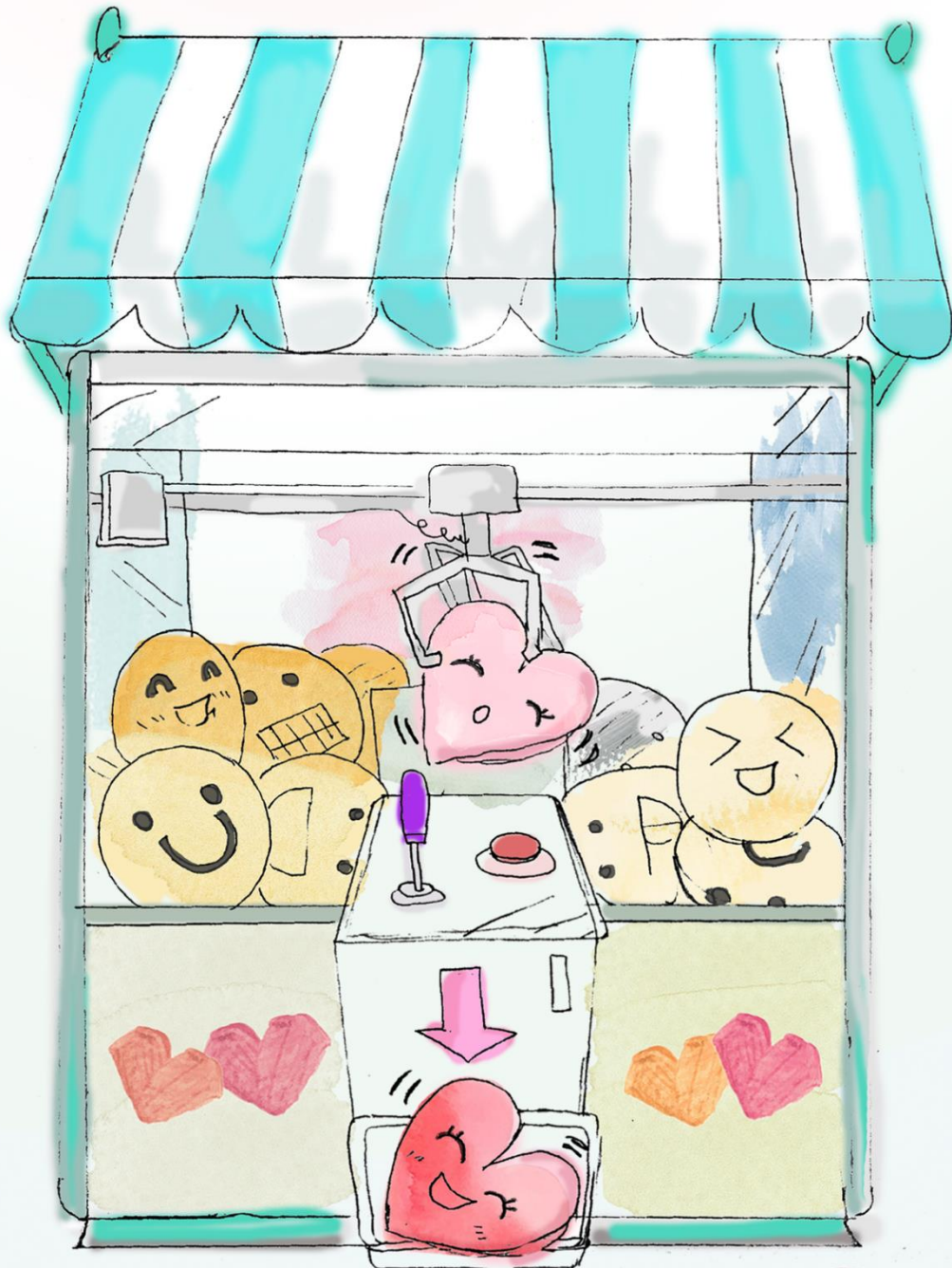




香港教育大學  
The Education University  
of Hong Kong

# Tips for University Students on Promoting Positive Well-Being



Faculty of Education  
and Human Development  
教育及人類發展學院



Centre for Child and  
Family Science  
兒童與家庭科學中心

## PREFACE

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has brought many challenges to the lives of Hong Kong citizens. In the face of epidemic information overload, increasing infection cases, resources shortages, and economic downturn, citizens may feel general anxiety, unease, or even panic. For many university students, the concern may be more serious: as a result of the suspension of in-person academic activities, they must adapt to online courses, which require self-discipline and self-learning skills. Furthermore, they may have further worries, such as internship postponements affecting their grades and path to graduation or the economic recession negatively affecting their job prospects.

To help university students relieve their anxiety and to mitigate the impact of the epidemic, this leaflet introduces some exercises for students to practice at home. These exercises foster a positive learning environment; they relieve stress and help establish good psychological diathesis. More importantly, each exercise is supported by theories and empirical evidence in psychology. These exercises can improve emotion regulation and improve the mood of students, enabling them to better deal with upcoming challenges.



This leaflet is produced by the project team “**EASP**: Early Advancement in Social-Emotional Health and Positivity” from the Centre for Child and Family Science of The Education University of Hong Kong. Funded by the Faculty of Education and Human Development, this project aims to strengthen teachers’ and parents’ skills in self-management and in coping with their children’s emotions through the provision of evidence-based training courses and mobile apps. Furthermore, this project aims to support children’s positive learning and foster their physical and psychological development through the formation of educational partnerships between families, schools, and communities.

March 2020



# 1. Emotional Responses

In the face of the outbreak and various social issues, it is natural to experience feelings of unease or other negative emotions. You may feel the following:

Fear:

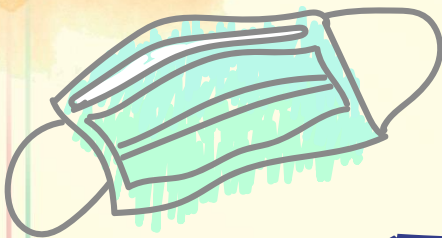
My throat itches and I have a cough: am I infected?

Confusion:

I wash and sanitize my hands every time I return home, will that guarantee my protection?

Anxiety:

I keep track of how many face masks I have every day. I am so worried of running out of masks.



Anger:

Why are face masks sold out everywhere?

Exhaustion:

I have read a lot about the epidemic, but I still feel utterly helpless.



## 2. Effective Methods for Coping with Stress

Positive and effective methods for coping with stress can be broadly categorized into two types (Cheng et al., 2014).

### (1) Emotion-focused strategies



Emotion-focused strategies include all efforts to regulate and minimize negative emotions associated with stressful events. When stressful events are out of our control, we inevitably feel worried, nervous, fearful, or frustrated. In such moments, emotion-focused strategies can help us effectively manage negative emotions and stress.

### (2) Problem-focused strategies

Problem-focused strategies involve managing a stressful situation by employing practical methods to target the source of stress. When the stressful event is controllable or not as dire as expected, we can actively use available resources to generate potential solutions.

In the following sections, we introduce **seven** effective strategies that can be practiced through simple activities at home. These strategies include four emotion-focused practices (cultivating mindfulness, engaging in positive reappraisal, expressing gratitude, and envisioning strength-based life stories) as well as three problem-focused strategies (engaging in plan-based problem solving, seeking emotional support, and seeking instrumental support).

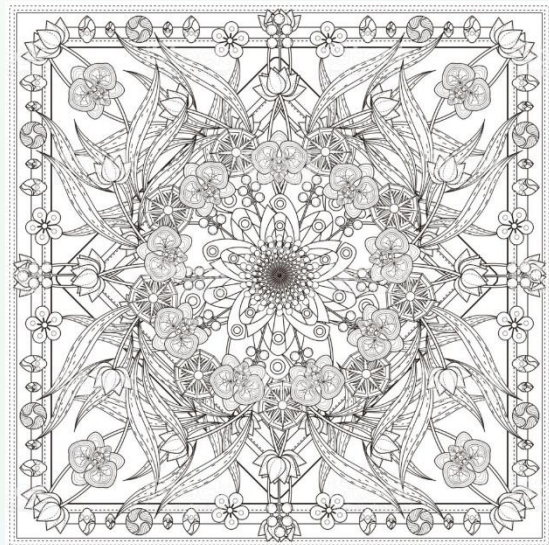
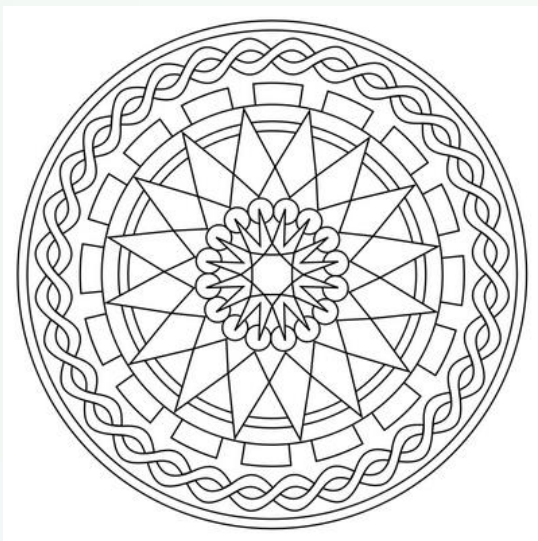
# Emotion-Focused Strategies

## Mindfulness Practices

Mindfulness is characterized by two core features: focused attention to and awareness of the present, and a purposeful attitude regarding such attention and awareness (Shapiro et al., 2006). Research has demonstrated the efficacy of home-based daily mindfulness practices on reducing stress among university students (Berghoff et al., 2017). Some mindfulness activities are as follows.

### I. Coloring activity (Carsley et al., 2015)

Take a coloring book (such as a mandala coloring book, as shown below) and quietly and intently apply your favorite colors. This activity only takes 10 to 15 minutes to relieve stress.



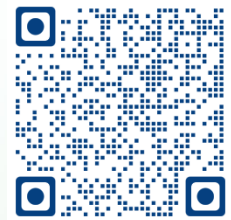
## II. Ten-minute mindfulness body scan exercise

- Choose a quiet place and let your body get comfortable.
- Focus on the sensations in your feet and then slowly bring your attention to your calves and knees.
- Accept all of your feelings with an open and uncritical attitude.
- Gradually widen your attention to all parts of the body and pay attention to your feelings.
- Finally, bring your attention to your surrounding environment and slowly open your eyes.



Please refer to the following demonstration of the practice steps:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnn5Xjp0fp0>



## II. Mindfulness practices in everyday activities (Pal et al., 2018)

- Mindful wakeup: start your day with an intention
- Mindful eating: enjoy every mouthful
- Mindful pause: rewire your brain
- Mindful workout: activate your mind and your muscles
- Mindful driving: drive with a feeling of calmness

Please refer to the following demonstration of the practice steps:

<https://www.mindful.org/take-a-mindful-moment-5-simple-practices-for-daily-life/>



## Positive Reappraisal

Positive reappraisal refers to the reconstrual of the stressor in positive terms. Studies have linked positive reappraisal to less negative emotions and improved psychological well-being (Jamieson et al., 2013; Li et al., 2019).

You can reappraise three aspects of events:

- **Your feelings toward events.** For example, you may feel anxious and stressed during the virus outbreak. However, you may also feel vigilant, which helps you to take precautionary measures.
- **The progression of events.** For example, the epidemic impedes your progress in school or at work. However, it also allows you to become acquainted with new learning methods, such as the use of online learning platforms.
- **The outcome of events.** For example, you can focus on how to better equip yourself during the epidemic and be prepared for similar challenges in the future.



### Home exercise: Benefit finding

Discuss the stressful event (for example, the outbreak of coronavirus) with family or friends and allow everyone to freely express relevant feelings and thoughts. Later, focus on the benefits of this experience. For example: "What have we learned from this experience?" and "Although (the coronavirus outbreak) has made our lives chaotic, how has it better equipped us to face similar challenges in the future?"

# Expression of Gratitude

Gratitude exercises are beneficial for promoting individual and relational well-being and in reducing psychological symptoms (Wood et al., 2010). The following are some ways you can express gratitude.



- I. Gratitude Diary: Every day, write down three things that you are grateful for, such as chatting with friends, eating your favorite snacks, or being able to submit homework online.
- II. Thank You Card: Write a Thank You card or send an online message to your friends and family members to express your gratitude.

## Gratitude Diary

Date:

Today, I am grateful for...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.





## Envisioning Strength-Based Life Stories

Psychological research shows that individuals who have an optimistic outlook on their career are more likely to use problem-focused strategies and manage stress effectively (Ho & Yeung, 2016). Conversely, individuals who believe that their future job opportunities are limited are more likely to have poor physical and mental health (Zacher & Frese, 2009). Therefore, to reduce stress, you can optimistically envision your future.



You can be creative, but most importantly, focus on your strengths. For example, ask yourself:

- What is your ideal future?
- How will your life be different from how it is now?
- How will you use your strengths to realize this ideal future?
- How will you improve on your strengths?
- What kind of person do you want to become?
- How will you become a different person from who you are now?
- What do you want to accomplish?

Finally, how can you achieve these goals? After envisioning your future story, you can share it with your friends or family.

# Problem-Focused Strategies

## Plan-Based Problem Solving

Research on undergraduate teacher trainees has demonstrated that approach coping strategies, such as active problem solving, combat depression, phobic anxiety, and overall psychological distress (Gustems et al., 2013). By contrast, cognitive and behavioral avoidance strategies are negatively associated with psychological well-being. Confronted with the epidemic, you may be better able to solve problems that you are dealing with by making a plan.

### Problem-Solving Worksheet (Ebrahimi et al., 2013)

You may focus on developing four skills in plan-based problem solving:

1. Problem definition
2. Generation of alternatives
3. Decision making
4. Implementation and evaluation of a solution



### Problem-Solving Worksheet

Date:

- What is the problem? (Appraise the general situation and clearly define the problem)
- What is your emotional response to the problem? (Note your initial emotions and their evolution)
- What can you do to solve the problem? (Brainstorm potential solutions)
- Which solution do you choose? (Select the best solution)
- What is the outcome? (Implement the selected solution and evaluate the results)



# Seeking Emotional/Instrumental Support

Making good use of social support, including emotional support (e.g., talking to friends and family) and instrumental support (e.g., using an employment service), has been linked to less psychological dysfunction among university students (Bernardon et al., 2011).

Some links to useful resources for university students are provided, including psychological counseling services, online learning resources, and employment information.

## Resources provided by The Education University of Hong Kong:

1. Counseling services  
<https://www.eduhk.hk/sao/?p=149>
2. Online learning resources  
<https://www.eduhk.hk/ocio/online-meeting-tool-zoom>  
<https://openedx.eduhk.hk/>
3. Employment information  
<https://edjobplus.eduhk.hk/EdJobPlus/>

## Other resources:

1. Counseling services
  - Suicide Prevention Services – Youth Link (2382 0777)  
<https://www.sps.org.hk/?a=doc&id=218>
  - Open up HK  
<https://www.openup.hk/index.htm>
  - uTouch – The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups  
<https://utouch.hk>
  - 輔負得正 – The Mental Health Association of Hong Kong  
[http://www.mhahk.org.hk/chi/sub2\\_1\\_service\\_1\\_4.htm](http://www.mhahk.org.hk/chi/sub2_1_service_1_4.htm)
  - Helpline and Community Resources – Education Bureau  
<https://www.edb.gov.hk/mobile/tc/student-parents/crisis-management/helpline-community-resources/index.html>

- Hong Kong Red Cross  
Health Chat WhatsApp: (+852) 9738 2934  
“Shall We Talk” WhatsApp: (+852) 51 64 5040

## 2. Online learning resources

- HKEdCity – Teacher TV  
[https://www.hkedcity.net/ttv/?lang=zh\\_tw](https://www.hkedcity.net/ttv/?lang=zh_tw)
- Child Development Central – Psychology Today  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/hk/blog/child-development-central>
- Special Education Resource Centre  
<https://www.edb.gov.hk/mobile/tc/edu-system/special/resources/serc/index.html>
- Positive Education Hong Kong  
<https://www.positiveeducation.org.hk/>
- Study.com  
<https://study.com>
- Ted.com  
<https://www.ted.com>

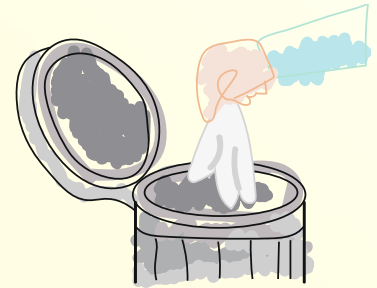
## 3. Employment information

- Hong Kong Professional Teachers’ Union – Recruitment  
<https://www2.hkptu.org/vacancy/find.php>
- Educational Profession Recruitment  
<https://recruit.hkfew.org.hk>
- Interactive Employment Service, Labour Department  
<https://www1.jobs.gov.hk/1/0/WebForm/Default.aspx>
- Ming Pao JUMP Educational Profession  
[https://jump.mingpao.com/career\\_news/listing/s00004](https://jump.mingpao.com/career_news/listing/s00004)



### 3. Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) – Daily Protection

- Wash your hands frequently; make sure to use soap or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- When coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. Throw the tissue into a closed bin immediately after use, and then wash or sanitize your hands.
- Avoid close contact with others: maintain a distance of at least 3 feet (1 m), especially from those who are coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your face, especially your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- If you have a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, seek medical assistance as soon as possible.
- Frequently wash your hands with soap and water after touching animals or animal products; avoid contact with sick animals or spoiled meat; and avoid contact with stray animals (or their fluids and waste) in the market, such as wild dogs, wild cats, birds, and bats—whether they be alive or cooked.
- Avoid eating raw animal products, and adopt appropriate measures to ensure food safety, such as the proper handling of raw meat, milk, or animal organs, to prevent cross-infection.





## References

- Berghoff, C. R., Wheelless, L. E., Ritzert, T. R., Wooley, C. M., & Forsyth, J. P. (2017). Mindfulness meditation adherence in a college sample: Comparison of a 10-min versus 20-min 2-week daily practice. *Mindfulness, 8*, 1513-1521.
- Bernardon, S., Babb, K. A., Hakim-Larson, J., & Gragg, M. (2011). Loneliness, attachment, and the perception and use of social support in university students. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement, 43*, 40-51.
- Carsley, D., Heath, N. L., & Fajnerova, S. (2015). Effectiveness of a classroom mindfulness coloring activity for test anxiety in children. *Journal of Applied School Psychology, 31*, 239-255.
- Cheng, C., Lau, H. P. B., & Chan, M. P. S. (2014). Coping flexibility and psychological adjustment to stressful life changes: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 140*, 1582-1607.
- Ebrahimi, H., Atri, S. B., Ghavipankeh, S., Farnam, A., & Gholizadeh, L. (2013). The effect of training problem-solving skills on coping skills of depressed nursing and midwifery students. *Journal of Caring Sciences, 2*, 1-9.
- Gustems-Carnicer, J., & Calderón, C. (2013). Coping strategies and psychological well-being among teacher education students. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 28*, 1127-1140.
- Ho, H. C., & Yeung, D. Y. (2016). Effects of occupational future time perspective on managing stressful work situations. *International Journal of Psychology, 51*, 261-268.
- Jamieson, P. J., Mendes, W. B., & Nock, M. K. (2013). Improving acute stress responses: The power of reappraisal. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22*, 51-56.
- Li, X., Lam, C. B., & Chung, K. K. H. (2019). Linking maternal caregiving burden to maternal and child adjustment: Testing maternal coping strategies as mediators and moderators. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*. Advance online publication.
- Shapiro, S. L., Carlson, L. E., Astin, J. A., & Freedman, B. (2006). Mechanisms of mindfulness. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 62*, 373-386.
- Wood, A. M., Froh, J. J., & Geraghty, A. W. A. (2010). Gratitude and well-being: A review and theoretical integration. *Clinical Psychology Review, 30*, 890-905.
- Zacher, H., & Frese, M. (2009). Remaining time and opportunities at work: Relationships between age, work characteristics, and occupational future time perspective. *Psychology and Aging, 24*, 487-493.

# Acknowledgement

The **EASP: Early Advancement in Social-Emotional Health and Positivity** project is supported by the Faculty of Education and Human Development, and based at the Centre for Child and Family Science, The Education University of Hong Kong.



Special thanks also go to Ms. TANG Pui Man of CCFS, and Ms. SUN Yao of ECE, for their contribution to the production of this booklet.

## EASP Team:

Project Leader	Professor CHUNG Kevin Kien Hoa (ECE / CCFS)
Co-Leaders	Dr. CHAN King Chung Derwin (ECE) Dr. LAU Yi Hung Eva (ECE)
Members	Dr. CHENG Wing Yi Rebecca (PS) Dr. DATU Jesus Alfonso Daep (SEC) Dr. FUNG Wing Kai (ECE) Mr. LAU Chin Wai Eugene (ECE)
Postdoctoral Fellow	Dr. LI Xiaomin Nicky (CCFS)
Research Assistant	Ms. SHAM Ming Wai Ginny (CCFS)
Advisor	Mr. CHEUNG Yat Ming Ryan (CCFS)

Remarks: CCFS Centre for Child and Family Science  
ECE Department of Early Childhood Education  
PS Department of Psychology  
SEC Department of Special Education and Counselling

Copyright © 2020 Centre for Child and Family Science, The Education University of Hong Kong

Website: [www.eduhk.hk/ccfs](http://www.eduhk.hk/ccfs)

Email: [ccfs@eduhk.hk](mailto:ccfs@eduhk.hk)

Facebook: [eduhkccfs](https://www.facebook.com/eduhkccfs)

Please feel free to circulate this booklet for nonprofit purposes, and cite the source properly. Any party who wishes to reproduce or use the materials therein (including text and visuals) for publication or other purposes should furnish written application to the Centre of Child and Family Science of The Education University of Hong Kong.