

# MENTAL HEALTH FOR JETS




Chelsea Robinson  
(they/them)

Ishikawa Prefecture  
2010-2013

Majored in Asian Studies

New Hobby: Letterpress



A woman with short brown hair, wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt, a patterned scarf, and a white skirt, stands in a grassy field. She is pointing her right index finger towards a cluster of traditional Japanese houses with thatched roofs in the background. The houses are nestled in a valley surrounded by lush green mountains. The sky is overcast.

Leah Zoller  
(ze/zir or they/them)

Ishikawa Prefecture  
2009-2011

MA in Japan Studies

Danced yosakoi for two years.  
Isn't actually very good at dancing.

# Disclaimers

- I am not a mental health professional. Neither I, nor CLAIR or other representatives of the JET Program are qualified to advise you on medical matters.
- The following information is based on a combination of personal experience, online research, and materials provided by CLAIR and AJET for JET Program participants. It is not a comprehensive guide.
- This presentation touches on topics that may be emotional or triggering, including suicide.



# Why talk about mental health?

- Attitudes toward mental illness and mental health treatments in Japan are different from those in the United States.
- Many JETs are at an age when mental illness can surface or first be diagnosed.
- The stress of living and working in another country can trigger emotional and psychological distress. It can also cause well-managed conditions to resurface.
- Some of the signs and symptoms of mental illness can also look like, or be exacerbated by culture shock.



# Culture Shock and Mental Health

- A certain amount of discomfort, frustration and sadness/homesickness is completely natural when you're experiencing culture shock.
- However, culture shock can lead to feelings of depression, anxiety and helplessness.
- You know yourself best. If you are feeling overwhelmed, depressed or anxious for a prolonged period of time, please reach out for help.

Let's talk about  
**STRESS**



# Sources of Stress

You might already experience these:

- Moving to a new place
- New job
- Finances
- Major life changes
- New friends

Moving to Japan might add:

- Language barrier
- Cultural differences
- Dietary changes
- Culture shock

# Signs of Depression and Anxiety Include (but are not limited to):

- Excessive worrying or fear
- Feeling excessively sad or low
- Confused thinking or problems concentrating and learning
- Extreme mood changes, including uncontrollable “highs” or feelings of euphoria
- Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability or anger
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Changes in sleeping habits or feeling tired and low energy
- Changes in eating habits such as increased hunger or lack of appetite
- Difficulty perceiving reality
- Inability to perceive changes in one’s own feelings, behavior or personality
- Abuse of substances like alcohol or drugs
- Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes
- Thinking about suicide
- Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress

Many of these things are a normal part of culture shock.

If it doesn’t get better, seek help.





# Mental Healthcare in Japan

- ❑ Psychiatry is usually covered by NHI.
- ❑ Consultations are short, usually about 30 minutes.
- ❑ Clinical psychology is not covered by NHI. There is no central licensing system, so the quality of care may vary. Prices range from about 5,000 to 10,000 yen.
- ❑ Hospitalization may be more common in Japan than in the U.S.
- ❑ Psychiatrists rely heavily on medication; talk therapy and CBT/DBT are uncommon.
- ❑ Mental health stigma is very real.

# JET Resources

- There were some changes to the mental health care support system for JET Program participants in 2015.
- As of 2015, PAs are no longer trained in basic counseling.
- JETs have access to the JET Online Counseling Service (e-mail/Skype by appointment). You have to ask your CO for the access code.
- AJET Peer Support Group (phone/Skype) – their website also has a number of helpful resources.
- CLAIR also offers a 50% subsidy of counseling costs not covered by National Health Insurance (only up to 20,000 yen).

# Other Resources

- Skype therapy
- Talkspace
- Fellow JETs
- NAMI
- International Mental Health Professionals Japan
- TELL Japan Lifeline: 03-5774-0992 (9 AM – 11 PM)
- The Trevor Project/Trans Lifeline
- Suicide Prevention Lifeline (chat option available)



# Medication

- Some medications for anxiety and depression may be available with a prescription from your Japanese doctor (please note that dosages might be lower than what you are used to.)
- Others (such as some ADHD medications) are illegal in Japan.
- Kusuri no Shiori is a good resource for researching the availability of specific medications in Japan:  
<http://www.rad-ar.or.jp/siori/english/index.html>



# Supporting Fellow JETs

- Be aware of what resources are available.
- Be welcoming to your fellow JETs, and include them in your plans—continue to invite them without being overbearing, even if they say no regularly.
- Be an active listener.
- Communicate in a straightforward manner.
- Offer to help connect them with support.



# Questions to ask if someone you know is having a hard time:

- I've been worried about you. Can we talk about what's going on? If not, who are you comfortable talking to?
- What else can I help you with?
- Who or what has helped you deal with similar issues in the past?
- Are you thinking about suicide?



# Practicing Self-Care

- Brainstorm: what kind of self-care do you do already? What have you done in the past?
- If you've taken medication before, research whether or not that medication would be available in Japan, should you need it.
- Make sure to keep in touch with family and friends.
- Bring some comfort items with you from home: movies, books, snacks.
- Remember to take breaks when necessary, especially if you're the kind of person who needs alone time.
- It's easy to seclude yourself. Consider joining a gym, social group or club.
- Talk to your fellow JETs.

Bonus! Chelsea's favorite self-care guide:

You Feel Like Shit – An Interactive Self-Care Guide

([http://philome.la/jace\\_harr/you-feel-like-shit-an-interactive-self-care-guide/play](http://philome.la/jace_harr/you-feel-like-shit-an-interactive-self-care-guide/play))

