

****The Emotional State of Hikikomori (Recluses)****

****Starting Point:****

Hikikomori begins from a state of depleted energy and a lack of will to live.

****Future Anxiety:****

- Acknowledging understanding but being unable to act (anxiety)
- Feeling worthless (self-denial)
- Lack of motivation (lethargy)
- Feeling that life is pointless (despair)
- Wanting to avoid past painful experiences (rejection)
- Feeling that everything is futile (resignation)
- Fear of thinking about the future (fear)

****Anxiety Toward Surroundings and Family:****

The exhaustion from holding onto these emotions needs to be recognized by those around them (people involved).

- Fear of what others think and fear of being hurt (anxiety, shame)
- Belief that one's existence is only a burden to others (self-blame)
- Blaming others for their situation (blame)
- Feeling that no one understands or accepts them (loneliness, isolation)

****Understanding the Emotional Exhaustion of Hikikomori:****

- Inability to explain one's state: During the peak of reclusiveness, it's hard to articulate the suffering. Past trauma and future anxiety often overlap, causing overwhelming feelings.
- Feelings of inferiority and tension towards family: Communication with family breaks down, and one loses a sense of belonging both inside and outside the home. While harboring resentment towards the family, there is also a sense of inferiority and guilt.
- Intensifying inner conflict despite wanting to change: There is anxiety about the future, but taking the first step is difficult, leading to further conflict and exhaustion. Feelings of inferiority compared to peers increase isolation. The inability to live as desired can manifest in anger or frustration towards close family members (violence or harsh words).

****Regaining the Energy to Live:****

****Family Support:****

The family serves as a foundation for helping the individual regain their energy in daily life.

1. **Confusion Phase:**

"Do not bear it alone; find a place where you can talk."

When the recluse cannot move, the family must act first. Parents often remain silent, causing the child to become wary and distrustful.

2. ****Charging and Observing Phase:****

"Make the home a safe base and create an environment for the person to regain their energy."

This is the period when the parents' anxiety and impatience are at their peak, and their relationship with the child may be strained. First, parents should find a place or person where they can talk openly. It's important to understand the efforts they've made so far and their current worries, and to find companions and supporters to recover their mental space. Learning continuously about the state of hikikomori and how to interact with their child can help parents organize their anxieties and see a way forward.

- [Necessary Support] Family counseling and family associations (sibling associations): "It's okay, let's think together" is the principle of family associations (detailed information on page 15).

Hikikomori is a state of depleted energy. This period requires reducing the tension at home and gradually accumulating energy (like filling a cup with water). Energy is consumed by anxiety and recharged by a sense of safety. It's a time when distancing from society is necessary. First, create an environment at home where they can feel they "belong." Time spent at their own pace is essential.

When they feel safe, they start to have the mental space to think, "I want to do something." Even if there is no conversation with the child, they can sense the parents' feelings. Changing to a positive understanding alone can make the home environment feel safe.

- The parent's attitude and feelings alone can create a big change in the environment.

3. ****Challenge Phase:****

"Building new trust relationships with supporters and peers (self-selection and self-determination)."

During this time, the individual starts to actively seek places to interact with others, participate in various events, and consult with support institutions. The family's role remains as a safe base, continuing to support the individual's progress without interference, respecting their pace.

- It's not uncommon for individuals to struggle to maintain a job due to rushing into employment and feeling defeated, leading to reclusiveness again. The state fluctuates, so timing should be left to the individual. Families should maintain a relaxed supportive stance and connect with supporters and resources (family associations, support meetings, etc.) to be ready for when the individual is ready to move forward (detailed information on family associations on page 15).

****Understanding and Responding to Hikikomori:****

- **Family Experience and Coping Strategies:**

The Q&A section includes insights and experiential knowledge from family learning and consultation sessions conducted by family associations.

1. ****Understanding Hikikomori:****

- ****Q:** Are there any solutions or miracle cures for hikikomori?**

- ****A:**** A father who attended numerous lectures and read many books seeking answers found that there are no quick fixes or shortcuts. He learned that pushing societal values onto the child only strained the parent-child relationship. The solution was to shift from demanding effort from the child to understanding the child's perspective. By abandoning the "must" mindset, he could finally listen to his child's words. The family's role is to support and accompany the child as they find their own path (Father in his 60s).

2. ****Relationship with the Child:****

- ****Q:** There's no conversation, the child avoids us, and refuses to see anyone.**

- ****A:**** Many who attend family associations start from a lack of conversation. A mother who was avoided for about two years learned through study sessions that the child isn't refusing to talk but is unable to. Understanding this made it easier for her to bear. The child's silence is a sign of their own struggle. Even a simple response, like a one-word reply to a question, can be a significant step forward (Mother in her 60s).

3. ****Parent's Enjoyment and Guilt:****

- ****Q:** Is it wrong for parents to enjoy themselves while their child is reclusive?**

- ****A:**** Parents often start to look at their child's mood and refrain from going out, but this can lead to a darker home atmosphere and increased parental depression. Participating in family associations, parents learn the importance of self-care. By finding their own hobbies and social activities, they can bring positive energy back into the home. This, in turn, can encourage the child to engage in activities they enjoy (Mother in her 50s).

4. ****Child's Obsession with Gaming:****

- ****Q:** My child is always gaming and only does what they like.**

- ****A:**** The child engages in activities they are good at or enjoy as a way to cope with real-world anxieties. This behavior is part of their traits. Gaming allows them to escape their worries and connect with others online. Enjoyable activities are crucial for recharging their energy (Mother in her 50s).

5. ****Lack of Self-awareness as Hikikomori:****

- ****Q:** My son doesn't see himself as a hikikomori.**

- ****A:**** Denying the label of "hikikomori" is common. One mother acknowledges her son's perspective and avoids using the term. She continues to attend family meetings for her own education, which helps in understanding her son's feelings without conflict (Mother in her 60s).

6. ****Handling Domestic Violence:****

- ****Q:** How should I handle domestic violence (hitting, breaking things)?**

- ****A:**** Violence often stems from unexpressed frustration and crisis signals. Repeated violence requires immediate action, like temporarily leaving the home or involving the police and supporters. Always communicate that violence is unacceptable and causes mutual pain. Do not contract with "independent support businesses" that forcibly remove the person from the home without consent, as it leads to severe lifelong trauma (Mother in her 50s).

7. **Dealing with Anger:**

- **Q:** How should I handle my child's anger? They often blame me for past events.

- **A:** Anger can be a sign of beginning to assert oneself. Listening and validating the child's feelings is crucial, even if it contradicts the parent's intentions. Apologizing and acknowledging the child's emotions helps. Parents should also take care of themselves by talking to others and attending family support meetings to better handle their child's emotions (Mother in her 60s).

Daily Life Keywords:

- **Reversed Day-Night Cycle:** Preferring nighttime due to fewer disturbances and a sense of calm.

- **Sensory Sensitivity:** Increased sensitivity to sound and light, which can be managed through environmental adjustments.

- **Compulsive Behavior:** Acts that alleviate extreme anxiety, understood as necessary for the person at the moment.

- **Lack of Energy:** Struggling with basic tasks like cleaning or bathing, indicating a deep sense of meaninglessness.

- **Expressing Frustration:** Breaking things or making noise as an outlet for overwhelming emotions.

Conclusion:

Understanding hikikomori requires recognizing the emotional exhaustion and specific needs of the individual. Family support, creating a safe environment, and gradual re-engagement with the outside world are key steps in the recovery process.

Q. How should I handle my child's anger? They have started blaming me more often (regarding my current attitude, things my parents did to me in the past, past events, etc.).

A. "Most people who become reclusive are said to have no rebellious phase, being quiet and well-behaved," and my son is no exception. He has a strong ability to endure and tends to suppress his feelings. When he suddenly started asserting himself with phrases like "Shut up!" or "I don't need you," I was surprised. In a learning session, I learned that a child's "NO" to their parent is the beginning of self-assertion and a sign of recovery. It became clear that if the family or those around them have an accepting attitude, the child's emotions can begin to surface. I also realized that the willingness of parents to listen is crucial for the child to open up. Although there are many instances where my actions, done with good intentions, conflicted with my child's feelings, I try to acknowledge their feelings by saying, "I see, I'm sorry I didn't notice it back then."

If you find it hard to accept your child's emotions, please talk to someone about it. Our family meetings are designed to listen fully. Self-care for parents is also essential to handle the child's emotions effectively. (Mother in her 60s)

****Keywords for Understanding the Child's Daily Life:****

- ****There is always a reason for their behavior:**** There are times when what they are doing is all they can manage.

- ****Reversed sleep schedule:**** They might feel more comfortable at night because there's no interference or prying eyes, and it's quieter and less stimulating.

- "During the day, most people are at school or work, making it hard to forgive myself for doing nothing. It's also painful to be seen by my family" (Child's comment).

- ****Sensitivity to stimuli:**** People with hypersensitivity can become more sensitive to sounds and lights when they are anxious, so adjusting their environment can help (e.g., ear muffs for noise, blackout curtains for light).

- ****Obsessive behaviors:**** These can be actions to alleviate intense anxiety. Understanding that these behaviors might be necessary for them at the moment is sometimes crucial, while ensuring that you do not get caught up in their anxiety.

- ****Lack of energy:**** They may feel that life is meaningless or hopeless, making it hard to tidy their room or even take a bath. Support them with the thought that "just being alive is enough."

- ****Reduced appetite:**** They might only eat one meal a day.

- ****Destructive behavior:**** This can be an outlet for unbearable emotions or a way to express pain that cannot be put into words (not necessarily with an intent to attack).

- ****Inability to act:**** They might not know what to do, so try making small requests or giving them simple tasks.

****Future Prospects****

****Q.** Things seem stable but unchanging. Is it okay to just watch over them like this?******

****A. **** It takes patience and is tough to silently watch, especially with no clear answer as to when things will change. When no visible changes are occurring, I organize my feelings at family meetings. However, changes are happening in less noticeable ways (internally). Sometimes, small changes can be seen, like hearing laughter from behind a closed door. A year ago, my child couldn't leave their room, but now they can come down to the living room and spend time there as they like. It feels like their energy for living is gradually recharging.

Thinking about the future can be worrying, so we focus on accumulating small changes. Meeting people who have recovered and hearing their stories also gives us encouragement. (Mother in her 50s)

****Q.** I don't know the right time to encourage my child. Is it okay to talk about money?******

****A.**** We have learned through many failures. If pushed and met with resistance, "pull back quickly." Timing is when they have some energy (when they've been doing well for a while). When encouraging them, do it lightly, like saying, "I got this information," and leave flyers or notices in a designated box (avoid making suggestions like "Why don't you try going?").

Discussing money is hard unless you usually have a relationship where you can chat casually. In our family, we talk about various insurances and pensions, letting them know we are supportive of their future. (Mother in her 60s)

****Understanding How to Handle Violence and Verbal Abuse****

~There are two types of violence and verbal abuse. Families should stay calm and respond appropriately.~

1. ****Sudden incidents:**** There is a clear factor that triggered the violence. Questions like "What are you going to do now?" can often trigger violence. It might involve breaking walls in their room as a way to release painful emotions. It's important for the surroundings not to overreact.

2. ****Violence/verbal abuse as a sign or message:**** Past resentments can manifest as words blaming family members. They might break things at home or show direct violence towards parents. When breaking something important to the parent, it might be a message about past pains or wanting to be understood. Properly acknowledging their feelings can calm the violence. Do not handle it alone; consult family meetings or certified psychologists.

~Violence tends to escalate (maintain appropriate distance)~

- Continuing to accept violence can lead to chronic (escalating) issues. It's important to be acquainted with the local community safety section (police) for contact in emergencies. Plan for temporary evacuation places for the family. Do not sign up for businesses claiming immediate effectiveness in supporting independence.

~When leaving home for a while after violence (2-3 days to 1 week)~

- Leave a message (letter, email, SNS) for the person.
- "Violence is scary. It makes both of us unhappy, so I'm leaving home for now. I will contact you once things settle down," etc.

****Child's Wish:**** They want their family to truly listen and understand their feelings.

****Consultations and Medical Visits****

****Q.** They don't want to consult or visit a doctor. I'm not sure if it's a disease but want to take them to the hospital...******

****A.**** Our family experienced the same thing. "It's not a disease, so seeing a doctor won't fix it," which caused friction. Even if conversations happen, they mostly refuse

initially, so we have the family consult first. When the child is open to reducing their own distress (pain, etc.), it might reach them (e.g., dental, ophthalmological, internal medicine).

When they express anxiety or say they want to die, it is a sign of extreme distress. Respond by acknowledging their feelings: "Thank you for telling me," and suggesting, "If it's that tough, let's consult together."

Even if immediate action isn't taken, informing them about available places is important. In our family, we talk about how the shelter (refer to page 17) felt. (Mother in her 50s)

****Q.** What does recovery from being reclusive mean? As a parent, I'm worried if they remain reclusive.******

****A.**** From listening to many reclusive individuals and those who have recovered at family meetings, I sense they are struggling, questioning why they are alive and what they value. Recovery isn't just about enduring and doing something; it's about rediscovering what they want to do and what excites them. I believe they are trying to find shoes that fit them after being forced to wear ill-fitting ones by society or school. Connecting with third parties and making decisions independently, feeling in control of their lives, is vital. As parents, it's also important to broaden our perspectives and understanding of society. This is a theme I want to continue pondering. (Father in his 70s)

**Family Tips: Understanding Common Pitfalls and Essential Points**

****Common Difficulties within the Family or Relatives:****

- ****Blaming and finding causes:****

- It's painful when someone says, "They are reclusive because of how they were raised." Many parents have been hurt by comments like, "You're spoiling them too much." Relatives should support and acknowledge the hard work of the parents, saying, "You're doing great," instead of criticizing. (Mother in her 50s)

****Common Parental Anxieties and Mistakes:****

- ****NG (No Good) Words about the Future and Work:****

- "What are you going to do from now on?" "What will you do when your parents die?" (pressing questions)

- "Everyone is working, you know. Are you okay with this?" (logical but hurtful)

- "Normally..." "Your cousin is..." (comparisons)

- "You're at home, so why don't you do some housework?" (criticism/sarcasm)

- "You won't be like this forever" (parents won't always be healthy) (raising anxiety)

****Important Ways to Listen:****

- ****Listen with interest and acceptance**** (without interrupting, denying, or seeking a conclusion).

- ****Acknowledge their perspective**** even if it differs from the parents' view ("I see,

that's how you felt").

- **Reflect back feelings** ("That was tough," "You were scared," "You were sad").
- **Value silence** (don't rush them).
- **Admit your lack of knowledge** ("I don't know, please tell me").

Important Ways to Talk, Communicate, and Apologize:

- **Speak concisely and simply:** "Thank you for always helping," "Let me know if there's anything you need."
- **Communicate important matters both verbally and in writing:** (for both hearing and seeing).
- **Apologize for the facts:** "My way of speaking then wasn't good. I'm sorry for hurting your feelings."

Why Is a Place Outside the Home Necessary? (Voices of Those Directly Involved)

Voices of Those Directly Involved:

- I found places to go other than home or the library. I had plans, and it was a place where I wasn't judged for my age. Hearing from people with similar experiences made me feel better.
- Thinking I was the only one feeling this way made me more and more distressed. Having a place where I could talk freely reduced my anxiety and gave me the space to think about the future.
- When there were topics I was interested in, it sparked conversations, which I enjoyed.
- I met people with diverse life experiences. It helped me let go of my fixed ideas, making me feel more at ease.
- Through volunteer experiences, I was happy to be recognized for my existence.

Voices of Family Members:

- Family members can participate together. It had a very good atmosphere, so I came with my daughter.
- Listening to the voices of those who are participating is very informative.

Personal Account: What a Place of Belonging Means to Me: A Place That Taught Me Security

To me, a place of belonging is somewhere I feel I want to be, and where others around me also feel it's okay for me to be there.

I stopped attending school in middle school. There was a time when I attended the school nurse's office, but even then, I didn't feel like I wanted to be there. This was because the nurse subtly encouraged me to return to the classroom quickly. Lacking peace of mind, I interpreted this as a message that I shouldn't be there and began to withdraw in earnest.

Surprisingly, my family accepted my decision very easily. They said, "You don't have

to go to school if you don't want to. If you want to go later, there are correspondence courses, and there are also jobs you can do from home." This was the first "place of belonging" I felt comfortable in while being withdrawn – my family.

It is often thought that the first step for a withdrawn person is to move them to an "external place" and that this must be done urgently. However, I feel that focusing only on the 'goal' of "just getting out of the room or house" makes the 'purpose' of "for whom and for what" blurry. Needless to say, the purpose should be for the "happiness of the person and their family and everyone around them." Denying the present state of withdrawal as entirely wrong is not beneficial.

From my experience, when I lacked peace of mind, my 'state' of being withdrawn and my 'existence' were intertwined. When my withdrawal was denied, I felt as if my very existence was denied, and I resisted with all my might. When you have no energy, no matter how logical the arguments presented to you are or how much you are encouraged to act, if your energy tank is empty, you can't execute anything. Instead, the desire to protect yourself kicks in, and you want to shut your ears.

I don't necessarily think that a place of belonging must be outside. Initially, it is more important for it to be a place where one feels secure. If that place is your own room, then it should be your room. When you feel a bit greedy and think, "I'd like to communicate with someone I can relate to," I think that's the 'time.'

Of course, I also had unpleasant or painful experiences at my place of belonging, but because I was accepted and made to feel useful, little by little, I started thinking, "Maybe I can try again."

This place of belonging taught me the joy of being able to help someone else.

A Family Member's Account: "Praising from the Heart Changes Yourself"

****My Child Stopped Talking****

I always valued parent-child communication and had a relationship where my child and I could talk about anything freely. However, when I started to intervene to change my child's reclusive state, our relationship deteriorated. My child stopped talking to me, became irritable when I spoke, and began to glare at me. The situation kept worsening.

Eventually, I couldn't understand what my child was thinking because we couldn't talk. I tried to change things, but even when I stopped being critical, the situation remained the same.

After some thought, since I couldn't communicate with my child verbally, I decided to express myself through my attitude instead. First, I worked on changing my mindset to convey a positive atmosphere. I silently praised my child, saying things in my heart like, "You're doing great," "You're amazing," etc. As I continued to silently praise my child, I noticed my own feelings becoming gentler. This allowed me to naturally adopt an attitude of accepting my child as they were. The important thing was not to wish for my child to change but to change myself to accept them.

****My Child Started Talking to Me****

After a while, while watching TV, my child suddenly started talking to me. My child probably felt it was safe to talk and initiated the conversation. It had been six months since we last talked, and I wasn't prepared, so instead of listening to my child's opinion, I expressed my own. Subsequently, my child began to voice their dissatisfaction. However, articulating unpleasant feelings is an important step forward. When a parent listens to their child's thoughts, the child feels validated and gains confidence. Conversely, if the parent dismisses the child's thoughts, the child struggles to accept themselves.

I wanted to acknowledge my child's hurt feelings, so I listened calmly even when they complained. Although I sometimes felt it was just a misunderstanding, I did not deny my child's feelings. I accepted their perceptions as they were and listened to what they felt.

****Speaking Honestly Changes the Relationship****

About six months later, after another instance of me interfering unnecessarily, which worsened our relationship, I decided to break the tense atmosphere by speaking honestly about myself. I told my child that I often unintentionally hurt them because of my insensitivity and that I would strive to understand their feelings better in the future. By sharing my own shortcomings, we established a more equal relationship, and I no longer felt the need to control my child.

By stepping away from directing my child's life, I felt my role as the parent of a reclusive child had ended. I was released from the feeling that I had to "do something about it." I became just a parent, not a parent of a recluse. Although our relationship worsened when I made my child angry, being honest about my feelings helped repair it, which ultimately was for the best.

It has been about a year and a half since the initial trouble. Trusting my child has led to mutual trust, improving our relationship. Both my child and I are now happier, enjoying the present, which has brightened my child's mood. They have started to express their thoughts and feelings more openly. Being able to talk about anything stems from having honest conversations, not from pushing my child to act, but from sharing my own experiences.

****Pen Name:** Primary Caregiver (60s)**

A Sibling's Account: "Thoughts Towards My Reclusive Brother"

****Pen Name: Younger Sister (50s)****

My Brother Eating Apologetically

My family is right in the midst of the "8050 problem," and as a sister living far away, I constantly search for ways to help. When my brother first became reclusive, I only wished for him to start working soon and ease our parents' worries. My mother would occasionally say, "He who does not work, shall not eat," pushing my brother further into isolation. He began spending most of his time in his room, almost invisible to us. One day, I saw him eating in the dark kitchen, looking incredibly apologetic. It broke

my heart to see him, a member of our family, feeling so ashamed and guilty despite having done nothing wrong.

Creating a Safe Environment at Home

After witnessing that, I deeply regretted pushing the work-first mindset and decided to wholeheartedly support my brother's feelings. I knew I had to repair our relationship, as he had shut himself off from us. I started leaving messages in the gap of his door, checking if they were moved to see if he read them. I also monitored his safety by the position of his dishes and toothbrush. The messages were simple greetings, avoiding any impression of concern to not seem overbearing. Although my visits home were limited, I discussed with our parents how to make our home a safer place for him. We even got a dog, hoping it would give him a reason to come out of his room and help mend our relationship.

Meanwhile, the feeling that we could only rely on ourselves grew stronger. My mother visited local offices multiple times but was always told, "There's no immediate urgency; let's wait and see." Desperate, she even sought help from support facilities in other prefectures, only to be told, "It's the parents' fault." My mother often said, "I just exposed our family's shame," and felt increasingly isolated from relying on public services.

Siblings Need a Place of Support Too

Amid all this, I began attending a "Siblings' Place" a few years ago. At my first meeting, I felt a huge weight lifted, realizing I didn't have to bear everything alone. Although everyone's situations were slightly different, hearing others' experiences and experts' comments often brought me to tears. We siblings needed a place to anchor our hearts, too. Until then, I had only distrust for public services and medical care, but learning that society's understanding of reclusiveness was broadening and that public attitudes were changing, my rigid determination to handle everything within the family began to soften.

Just Being Alive is Enough

Now, my brother is connected to medical and welfare services due to a certain illness and receives support. I see a significant improvement in societal understanding of reclusiveness. Knowing that help is available outside has lightened my heart and given me more emotional room in dealing with my brother. Once, he had no place even within our home and often spoke of wanting to die. Now, he joins us at the dining table with a smile and contributes to household chores as his condition allows. Building this trust took many years, but the small daily efforts weren't in vain. My brother isn't special because he's reclusive; by expressing gratitude, respecting his feelings, and listening to his thoughts, I reached a point where I'm just happy he's alive.

I don't know what the right answer is. Each family has its ways and thoughts, but there are things only family can do. We were in a dark tunnel, but we'll continue searching for various exits and supporting each other.

