

## Ep.2 (1/2) Adolescent Mental Health Part 1

In my home, my sister play the violin and she always thinks that I'm better than her and my mom is like always talking to my sister, showing how good I am. But I'm afraid that one day if she be better than me and she trying to laugh at me and it makes me feel a little anxious. It's from some comparing.

One time our Chinese teacher gave us a writing on a weekday, that is quite unusual and I really hate writing, you can imagine, I was just very surprised, just felt a bit overwhelmed. And I just thought, well maybe I have to get stay up pretty late and so I'm kind of worried.

I feel that my life is boring and even meaningless. For a long time. I couldn't help myself but compete with everyone. That lead me to the darkest hole of unhappiness. I was exhausted.

I felt that it was hard to overcome myself and I feel overwhelmed but I'm still scared of confiding in with someone or telling, for example, teachers or counselors or my mom about the situation because I feel like I had to deal with the situation all by myself.

My parents, my teachers are always expecting me to do better and better. These are very heavy for me. I want to to take a break and maybe to relax myself and I study again.

I couldn't get out of the school and I was like a prisoner. I became very angry and I really wanted to smash something.

Sometimes I even feel very strange or surprised that I have such a strong feeling and was a little bit anxious and I don't know how to deal with it.

When teacher gave us a lot of homework to do, I will feel I hate her and I hate my life. I just don't want to stand there. I want to disappear.

The third year of high school. It was a kind of pressure that I now find ridiculous. I could not finish my homework or I did not want to do my homework. I don't care what I do when I have a holiday, but I have no interest in my homework. Although I now or others at that time may think this student is very strange and extreme, but the panic in my heart was not fake. Maybe because I disobeyed my teacher for the first time, I even panicked to the point of self-abuse.

I really feel very anxious when I know that I'm going to take a test and I feel very tired. I really, really hate this. Hate all those tests. Sometimes I really don't want to go to school. I feel very anxious at the same time too because I don't want to get some bad grades. Basically, I just don't want to lose my face in front of others. It does give me a little pressure.

And we don't want feel nervous every time.

Maybe it's like I'm always doubting something. Like where am I going to and where, what will the future be like and this kind of worries. And like why my great can't be very well or like thinking about how others feel about me These kind of things.

What you just heard is adolescents talking about those overwhelming, stressful, anxious and depressing moments in their lives. Have you ever been constantly and excessively worried, sad or irritable? Have you ever felt a lack of motivation and energy, lost interest in a hobby or been teary all the time? Sometimes you feel hopeless, and other times you tell yourself to hang on a little longer until things get better. Those are typical mental health symptoms that are becoming more and more common among adolescents. Most recently, the closing of the case of the disappearing youth named Hu Xinyu has sparked tremendous public anger. Tragedies like this should be an exigent alarm for the adolescent mental health crisis in China.

So today I invited some adolescents together with parents and school teachers to join us to dive into this topic together. We've known some of them who are Killer Sage, Terrine, Lily, Gustavas and Sally from Episode 1. We also have some new voices.

My name is Phoebe. I'm 12 years old and I live in Singapore right now. I go to an international school here.

My name is Kent, I'm a junior in college.

My name is Alice. I'm a mom of a 14-year-old kid.

I'm Dino, the father of a 15-year-old girl.

Hi I'm Minmin. I'm a mother of a 13 year old and a high school teacher.

I'm Laura. I'm an English teacher in high school. My students vary from 15 to 18 years old.

Hi, I'm the mother of a 14 year old boy.

My name is Alex, a public middle school teacher from China.

My name is Norrie. I'm a junior high school teacher in China. I'm now teaching a group of students in grade seven.

Hi, I'm Frank. I'm a father of a girl in teenage.

Hello, everyone. My name is Ardis, Phoebe's mom.

I hope these real, detailed insights and different perspectives will inspire and awaken some new thoughts and emotions within us.

Compared with students in the past, today's students have fewer holidays. They have a busy schedule every day from early in the morning to late at night. Each day is divided into several parts and for each part they are arranged to accomplish a certain task with little time left for them to do what they want, day in and day out. They may get tired of such a boring life.

Like my daughter, when she was in primary school, she had to be in school at 8a.m. each day. In my high school, those teenagers have to sit in the classroom before 7:15 and I can't go home until 9:30 p.m. In both primary and secondary school students arrive at the school earlier than adults arrive at work.

When I was 15, after I finished my homework, I had time to play TV games, go roller skating and play basketball with my friends. Now my daughter has to finish her homework until at least 11 p.m. every day.

They will get to school early in the morning to start early self study. In this case, he will get up at six in the morning. After a day of classes Back home more than 8 in the evening. And then there are a lot of reception homework and after class, the teacher issued paper as practice. We have almost a year to do our homework until midnight. These assignments required participation of parents because parents must assign to tell the teacher that he has complete two assignments

In China. Only 50% of middle school students can go to high school and the remaining 50% have to go to vocational school. And in the same time, the high school entrance examination needs to take seven courses. Since last year, the Ministry of Education China added Politics as a compulsory course. This course needs students to spend a lot of time memorizing. Children have to do homework until midnight every day since seventh grade or even until one or two o'clock in the last year when the school entrance examination is approaching.

I went to school in China before and mainly why there is like extra curriculum and other classes outside of school on the weekends is because parents mainly want

students exceed at what they are doing in school. And there's a lot of competition. So they are forced to work much longer just because their peers might be doing the same. I think so when it's comparing students in China to Singapore international schools, but Singapore local schools of a really similar system to schools in China. So I think local schools and Chinese schools, they have a similar amount of stress. But for international schools, we definitely have much less stress than schools in China.

students nowadays are under considerably greater academic pressure than in the past. With rapid socio-economic development in China, the competition in education has become fierce. Parents try every possible means to get access to key learning resources. Students have no choice but to learn way ahead of the curriculum. Education has become a rat race. You want to win? Then it's inevitable that you relinquish sleep, hobbies or even social life. In such an environment, given the name Education Involution(教育内卷), students get exhausted and even depressed.

Then, a pandemic hit at the start of 2020. Subsequently, repetitive lockdowns came and students were switched to online classes. The Education Ministry estimated in 2020 that some 220 million Chinese children and young people have been confined for prolonged periods due to COVID restrictions. Being isolated at home, facing the screen for hours and continuously finishing piles of homework after the class, students were frequently insecure and concerned about their schooling without knowing when they could see their friends again. According to a national study of mental health in 2021, almost 25% of adolescents reported mild or severe depression. It is estimated that 30 million children and adolescents under 17 years of age in China struggle with emotional or behavioral problems. A June 6, 2022 article titled Teens more likely to get mental health issues from restrictions in the China Daily focused on the mental health in impact of COVID curbs on vulnerable groups including teenagers quoted Lu Lin, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences and president of Peking University's Sixth Hospital, as saying that "COVID-19's toll on

people's mental health could last over two decades". In particular, Lu said that he had received a number of teenage patients who reported gaming addiction and disrupted circadian rhythms during an outbreak and continued to be downcast and reluctant to go outdoors after the virus was brought under control. He urged that it is vital to devote attention and resources to such vulnerable groups to help them to return to normal lives.

In December 2019, the Chinese Health Commission, Ministry of Education, and ten other government departments launched a joint action plan with a specific focus on child and adolescent mental health. The action plan mandated that by 2022, all levels and types of school should set up psychological service platforms to provide mental health services to students, and 60% of mental health hospitals at or above the second level should set up outpatient services for children and adolescents. All regions of China are to set up or improve access to psychological assistance hotlines, and promote mental health awareness among children and adolescents, with the aim of reaching 80% of this population. Well, in our interviews, we do hear about these services or programs. But attitudes towards them kinda vary.

My Children's school never mentioned the holiday, although it is said that they have a mental health teachers. As far as I know, the teacher will have one or two counseling session at the beginning of each semester talking about how some teenagers setbacks. And the child came back to me and said, the teacher is very amiable. that's all.

We have these classes and it's sort of funny. So they teach you about friends. Well because in most class, in online classes, I just do homework a lot. So I just never really listen to it carefully. We just had about two or three mental health classes offline. So it didn't leave it a very different deep impression on me.

Our school have kind of teacher that is dealing with mental health, like they have an office, students are free to go there and ask them any question and we have

classes every two weeks. Our teacher will like just telling us how to make new plans for new term or how to be happy, how to set a dream for ourselves. Our teacher is always telling us to think something in detail. She wants us to think about what should we do next step? Like how to deal with today's homework or how to have a good class. And it makes me making many plans. I just find one problem with my mental health class. Teacher are always telling us how to be active and she uses many difficult words like it will confuse us and I can't actually understand it. Like those 人格 and 自我状态. I think there are some professional words in those mental health and it really plays an important role in this study but I think it should explain it very clearly. Also our teacher is always talking to us and let us be active and be happy and be good and find some hope, but it few really talk about how to deal with the bad mood, how to deal with the pressure to deal with the sadness, these kind of things.

As for the numbers, our school has about Uh 3500 students with two psychology teachers. And each class has a psychology course once a week which does nothing to help. Sometimes when the final exam is approaching, even this weekly course will be canceled. Therefore students rarely have the opportunity to contact the psychology teacher even if they feel that they have some issues and finally take that step to find a teacher, they usually be suggested to go outside to find a doctor in the hospital for treatment.

So in my school there is a place called the Wellness Center where if you have any issues or problems or just anything you want to chat with and adult or just a counselor. We can do so in that area. And in this service, we can book a session with a counselor and explain our problems or troubles to them. And from their experience, they might give us suggestions or comfort us. And also they can introduce other ways. For example, suggest us to visit a public like mental health centers or chat with students with similar situations to relieve our stress. And I think most of the times it is very helpful. And we also have facilities to relieve our stress. Like we have instrumental areas where we can play music, a mini library where we can read books and search for mental health related suggestions

online. And we also have just a space where everybody is free to do what they want. That is appropriate in the school. Unless we want it to be publicly shared. Everything will be confidential.