

2026 *Mental Health Awareness Month*

The Care You Deserve — Before, During, and Beyond the Crisis

May is Mental Health Awareness Month — and while that phrase can sometimes feel like a social media calendar note, for those of us who live and work in the mental health space, it is an invitation to have a more honest, and more useful, conversation about what psychological care actually is and who it is actually for.

Living in Japan adds a particular texture to that conversation. So let's have it — plainly, warmly, and without pretending the challenges are smaller than they are.

FINDING CARE IN JAPAN — REAL BARRIERS, REAL RESOURCES

If you have ever tried to find a mental health provider in Japan who speaks your language, understands your cultural context, and accepts your insurance, you already know that the search can be its own stressor. This is not your imagination. The structural barriers are real.

The pool of English-speaking licensed clinicians in Japan remains small relative to demand, and it is concentrated heavily in Tokyo. Those outside the major urban centers often find themselves navigating fully Japanese-language systems or relying on online options — which, to be clear, can be excellent, but should be a choice rather than a default imposed by geography. Insurance coverage adds another layer: Japanese National Health Insurance may partially cover psychiatric services at designated clinics, but private psychological counseling typically falls outside it, creating a cost barrier that is not trivial.

And then there is the cultural dimension — seeking care from within a system shaped by norms quite different from those you may have grown up with. All of this matters.

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The difficulty of finding care is not a sign that care is unavailable — it is a sign that we need better maps.

Here is a starting point. These resources are not exhaustive, but they are legitimate:

- **TELL Lifeline** Free, English-language crisis and emotional support. Telephone and online chat. telljp.com
- **TELL Counseling** Professional counseling in English; offices in Tokyo and Yokohama, plus distance options.
- **Yorisoi Hotline** Government-funded crisis line (0120-279-338); press 2 for English-language support.
- **IMHPJ** Directory Searchable database of mental health professionals across Japan, filterable by language and specialty. imhpj.org
- **Kintsugi Consulting** Licensed clinical psychological services in English for individuals, professionals, and organizations throughout Japan. kintsugiconsulting.net

If cost is a barrier, it is worth asking providers about sliding-scale fees — more offer them than advertise them publicly. And if you are unsure where to start, IMHPJ's directory is an excellent first stop for finding a provider who fits your specific needs and location.

ON STIGMA — AND WHY IT COSTS US MORE THAN WE THINK

Let's be direct: the stigma around mental health care is not just an inconvenience. It is a mechanism that keeps people suffering longer than they need to, that isolates individuals at precisely the moments when connection and support are most essential, and that carries a real human cost.

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Japan has made genuine progress on mental health awareness over the past decade — the conversation has opened, particularly among younger generations and within corporate wellness culture. But progress is not completion. Many people still describe a hesitation to seek care rooted not in whether they want help, but in what they fear that seeking help says about them. Words like “weak,” “unstable,” or “burdensome” come up. These are not personal failures of perception — they are the residue of cultural and institutional messaging that has, for too long, treated psychological struggle as something to be managed privately rather than supported communally.

Normalizing the conversation is not about oversharing or performing vulnerability. It is about making it possible for the person next to you — your colleague, your friend, your child — to say “I am not doing well” and to meet a response that is curious and warm rather than uncomfortable or dismissive.

You would not hesitate to see a cardiologist for chest pain. Mental health care is no different in its legitimacy — only in our collective comfort with asking for it.

This month, consider where you can lower the temperature on that discomfort. That might look like being more open about your own mental health experiences in your trusted relationships. It might look like responding to a struggling friend with “Are you getting support?” instead of nothing. Small normalizations compound.

MENTAL HEALTH CARE IS NOT ONLY FOR CRISIS

This is perhaps the most important reframe I can offer, and the one I return to most often in my own work: psychological care is not a last resort. It is not only for those in acute distress, or those who have received a diagnosis, or those who have “tried everything else.”

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High-functioning, resilient, thriving people also benefit from therapy. In fact, some of the most meaningful and impactful clinical work I do is with individuals who are, by every external measure, doing well — and who want to do better. To understand their relational patterns more clearly. To build a richer inner life. To make more intentional decisions. To lead with more integrity and less reactivity. This is optimization, not repair.

There is also the preventative dimension — what I think of as building the structure before the storm. Resilience is not a fixed trait you either have or you don't. It is cultivated. The people who navigate hardship most effectively are rarely those who have never struggled; they are those who have built psychological infrastructure, often through deliberate effort, sometimes with professional support. Therapy, coaching, and consultation can be part of that infrastructure long before you ever need it urgently.

Kintsugi is not only about the gold in the cracks. It is about the strength of the piece itself — built thoughtfully, tended carefully, honored fully.

This month is as good a time as any to ask yourself not “Do I need help?” — but “What would it look like to invest in my psychological wellbeing the way I invest in my physical health?” The answer to that question, wherever it leads you, is a good one.

With warmth,
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