

English

# MENTAL HEALTH GROWING TOGETHER



**Asian American Health Initiative**  
**Montgomery County**  
**Department of Health and Human Services**



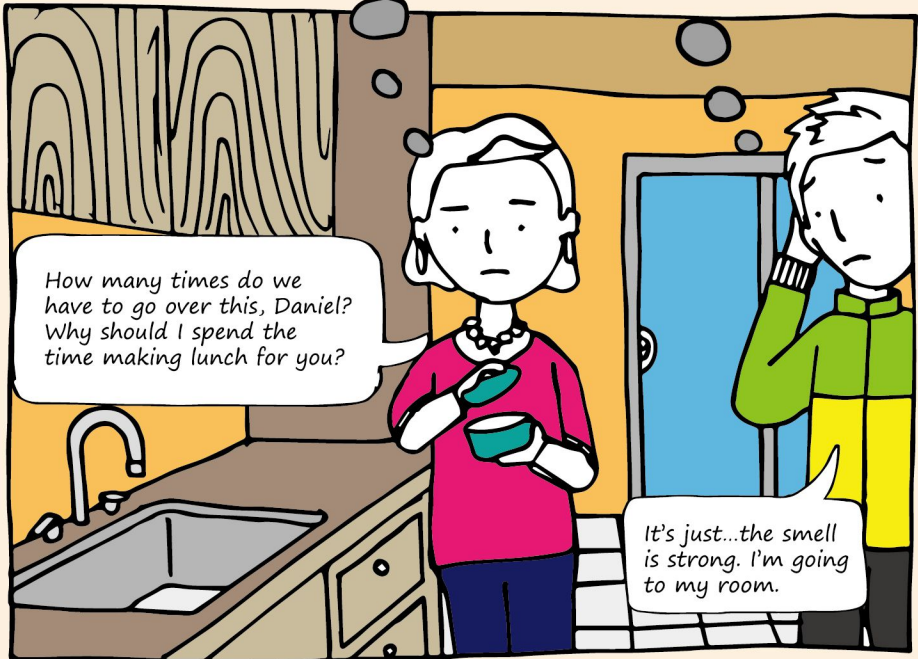
Daniel has been feeling stressed and sad for several months. He has been hiding these feelings from his friends and family, but recently it seems like everything has been building up and he feels overwhelmed. Classes have just finished on Friday afternoon, and Daniel is waiting for his mom to pick him up from school. He is dreading going home because he knows he'll fight with his parents again. Daniel just wants to spend time with his friends.



After returning home, Daniel puts his lunch bag on the kitchen counter. His mom opens the bag and notices that he barely ate anything.

Why won't he eat the food I prepare just for him, the food from our culture? I spend so much time cooking and packing it.

If I eat that food during lunch, everyone will smell it and make dumb jokes about the food I'm eating. Why can't my mom just pack me a sandwich like all the other kids?





Daniel goes to his room and takes a nap. He wakes up in time to join his parents for dinner. He is dreading dinner because he knows he and his parents will get into an argument over attending cultural school the next day.

Why do they force me to go to this EXTRA school that I didn't even ask to go to in the first place? I'm the only one of my friends that has to go to this extra school.

We left our home country and endured stress to learn the lifestyle of this new country. We came here to give him a good education, but he doesn't even want that!

I don't feel like going to cultural school tomorrow.

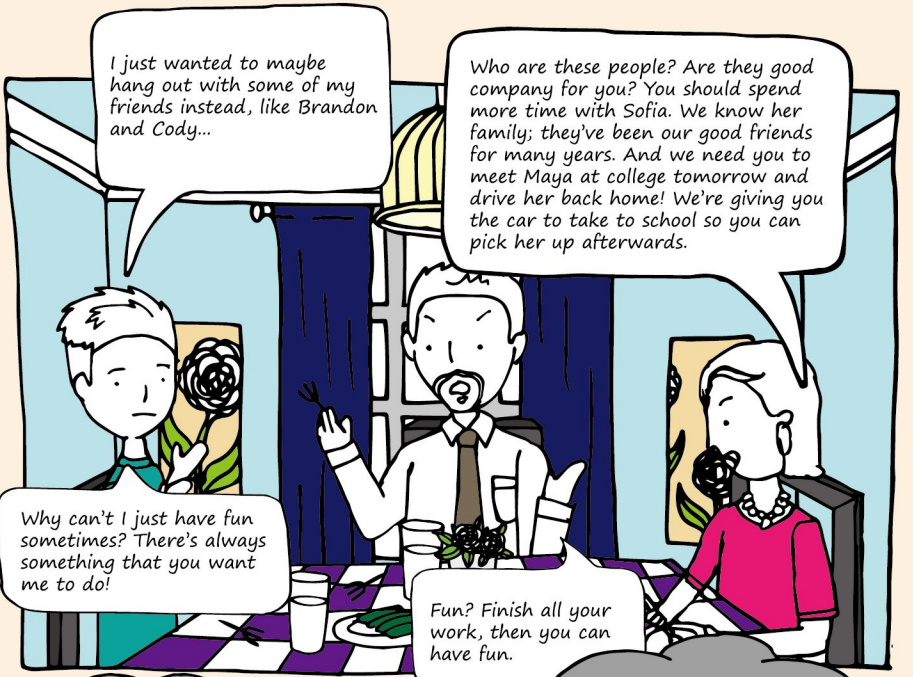
How can you say such a thing? What would people think if we have the only son who does not go? Your sister went every single weekend.

Do you know how much money we pay so that you can go to that school? Even when Maya was sick she wanted to go!

## DID YOU KNOW?

Acculturation gap is when children of immigrant parents adapt to the new culture faster and in a different way than the parents. Tension, stress, and conflict can arise between the generations in the household because of this gap.

Source: American Psychological Association



I just wanted to maybe hang out with some of my friends instead, like Brandon and Cody...

Who are these people? Are they good company for you? You should spend more time with Sofia. We know her family; they've been our good friends for many years. And we need you to meet Maya at college tomorrow and drive her back home! We're giving you the car to take to school so you can pick her up afterwards.

Why can't I just have fun sometimes? There's always something that you want me to do!

Fun? Finish all your work, then you can have fun.

I want to see Maya but I want to just relax and have fun like all my other friends for once. Why don't they understand me?

Why doesn't he respect our family wishes and traditions? Everything we do is for his own good! Yet, he rejects our food and our culture and wants to throw away the money we spend on cultural school. He doesn't even want to pick up his sister. We never acted like this as kids.

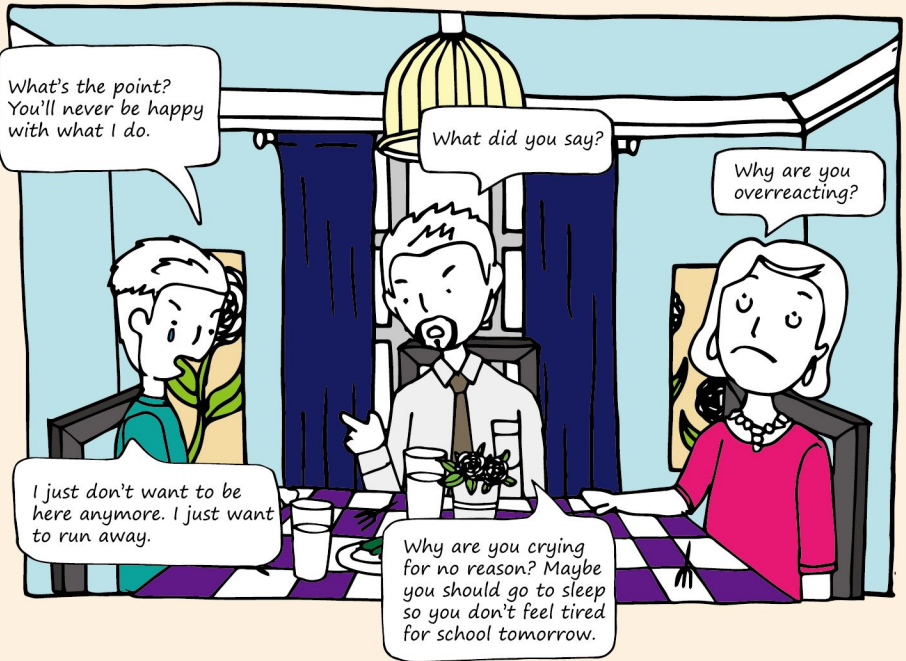
We have sacrificed a lot for you, Daniel. This is helping you build your future.

Daniel, why do you complain so much? You are so ungrateful. And you don't have enough food on your plate! Aren't you hungry? You didn't even eat the lunch I packed you!

# HOW DOES ACCULTURATION GAP AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH?

The conflict around acculturation gap can influence both physical and mental health. When it comes to mental health, the tension coming from acculturation gap can influence substance dependence, anxiety disorders, and depressive symptoms.

Source: American Psychological Association



## DID YOU KNOW?

A study of Asian American young adults living in Montgomery County identified barriers to seeking mental health care. This included a gap between parents' and children's understanding of mental health problems and what warranted the attention of a mental health professional.

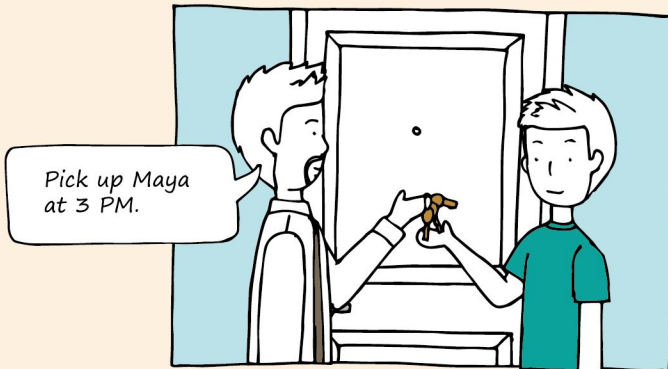
Source: Lee et al., 2009



Feeling really upset after dinner, Daniel goes to his bedroom, slams the door, and cries. He decides to skip cultural school tomorrow. Daniel texts his friends, Brandon and Cody, to tell them his news and to vent his frustrations.



The next day, Daniel skips cultural school and goes to his friend Brandon's house. That afternoon, Daniel behaves in a way he never has before. This alarms both his family and his good friend of many years, Sofia.





3:15 p.m.



4:00 p.m.





7:30 p.m.



8:00 p.m.



The next morning, after being grounded, Daniel is sitting in his bedroom. Suddenly, his good friend Sofia, who always understands what he's going through, calls him.





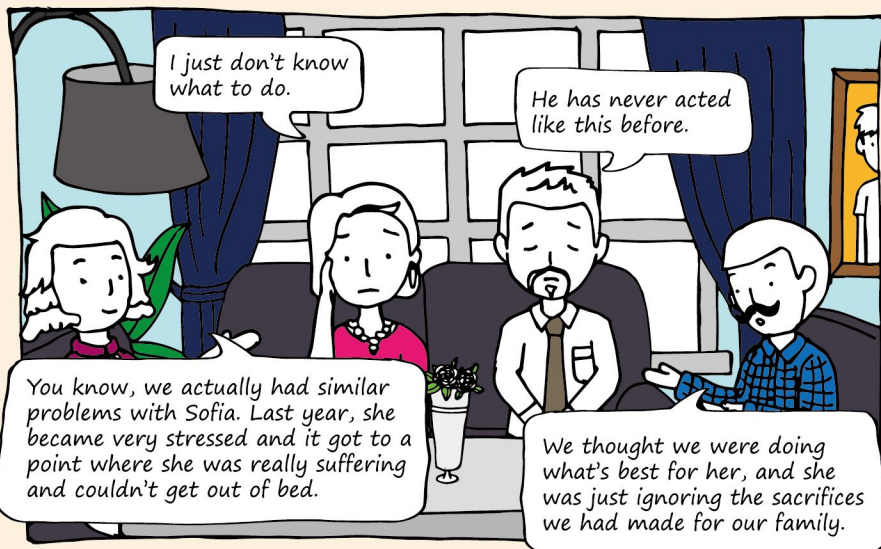
Daniel, you shouldn't joke about that type of stuff. This is serious—



I just got so sick of doing what they wanted me to do. I just want to be a normal kid for once. Like, it's not that big of a deal to hang out with friends! And school on a weekend?! It's just too much sometimes. Maybe it would be easier if I weren't around.

Oh my god Sofia, I'm KIDDING! It's just my sense of humor. I have to go now, before my parents realize they should take away my phone too.

After talking to Daniel, Sofia is worried about him. She knows that when someone mentions thoughts about suicide, it's important to take them seriously. She tells her parents, who arrange to go to Daniel's home for lunch. While Sofia spends time with Maya and Daniel, the parents talk to each other about how stress has affected their families.




I just don't know what to do.

He has never acted like this before.

You know, we actually had similar problems with Sofia. Last year, she became very stressed and it got to a point where she was really suffering and couldn't get out of bed.

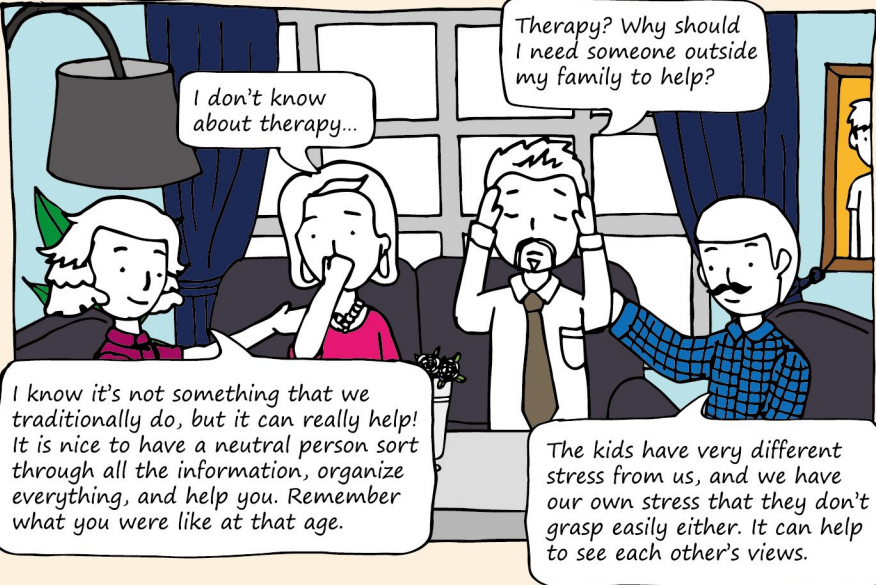
We thought we were doing what's best for her, and she was just ignoring the sacrifices we had made for our family.



Oh my goodness, I had no idea! She's such a good kid! What did you do?

We actually contacted a family therapist. It took a long time to accept the idea, but our son, Sam, was the first to mention it. And now Sofia is doing much better.

The therapist really helped. She taught us how to have family meetings. We have them once a week now and when Sam is not at home, we even video call him so it feels like he is there! It helps us talk through and solve problems.



I don't know about therapy...

Therapy? Why should I need someone outside my family to help?

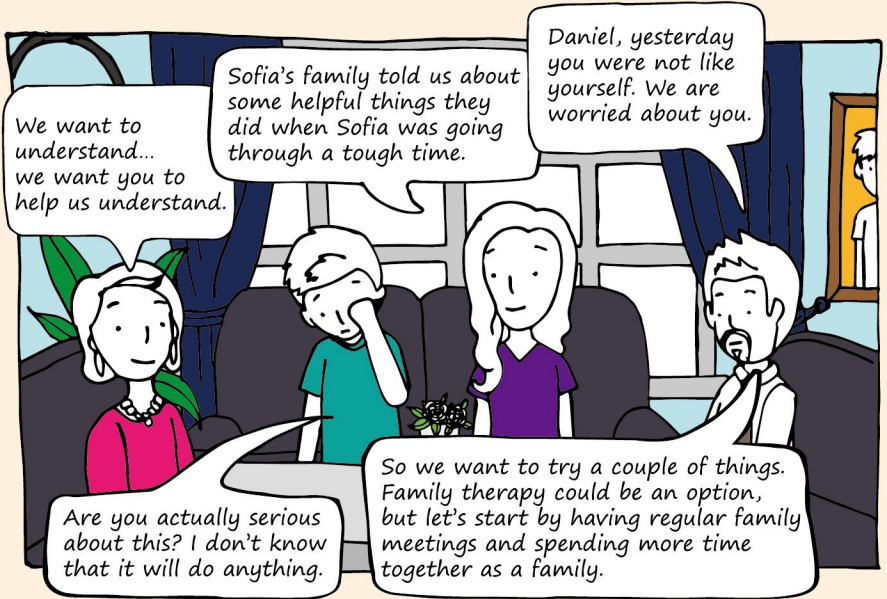
I know it's not something that we traditionally do, but it can really help! It is nice to have a neutral person sort through all the information, organize everything, and help you. Remember what you were like at that age.

The kids have very different stress from us, and we have our own stress that they don't grasp easily either. It can help to see each other's views.

Sofia's parents leave the information for their family therapist with Daniel's parents. They call Sofia to join them and as Sofia and her parents leave, Daniel's parents notice how happy Sofia's family looks.



Later that evening, Daniel's parents ask him to come to the living room, where the rest of the family is waiting.



## HOW COULD A LICENSED MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPIST HELP MY FAMILY?

- These are counselors with special education and training in marital and family relationships. They are trained to diagnose and provide individual or group counseling.
- When conducting family therapy, a marriage and family therapist can help families with such tasks as building empathy, constructive communication, and conflict management. Family therapy won't immediately remove unpleasant situations, but it can improve understanding for each other and help the family feel a sense of togetherness.

Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness, Mental Health America, Mayo Clinic

## WHAT IS A FAMILY MEETING?

This is a tool to strengthen the family bond.  
It involves these basic pieces:

- One family leader (the adults would be the leaders)
- A regular time to meet when everyone in the family is available
- Two or three topics to discuss, and each member of the family is free to bring up a topic
- Conversation on the topics, and if there is a problem, work together to find a solution to the problem

How might it help my family?

- Communication skills
- Respect for others
- Cooperation
- Motivation to solve problems
- This provides a nice structure where the adults in the family are still in charge, but everyone feels comfortable discussing and listening to a topic that is important for the family

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics

# MORE MENTAL WELLNESS STRATEGIES

## To Practice in the Home:

Listen with an open mind  
Discuss your specific experiences, heritage, and culture together:

- Include the younger generation's new culture as American
- What does it mean to be Asian American?

Clearly outline expectations for the family and the household, as well as consequences for when those expectations are not met.

Encourage healthy coping strategies, such as writing in a journal, drawing or coloring, listening to music, exercising, or spending time with a close friend.

Remember that learning and making time for new skills together as a family takes patience and persistence. Any existing tension or stress in the household due to acculturation and generational gaps will not disappear overnight, but with time and by practicing helpful strategies and/or reaching out to other resources together, the stress will be alleviated.

## Resources for Families:

### Child and Adolescent Mental Health Program

Provides family-focused outpatient mental health services to children, adolescents, and their families to help address severe emotional, behavioral, substance abuse, and victimization issues.

Information Number:  
240-777-1432

### Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) School Counseling Services

There are certified, professional school counselors available to all students within each MCPS elementary, middle, and high school.

Source: Mental Health America; Mayo Clinic; Do, 2017; Lee et al., 2005



There are linguistically and culturally sensitive mental health providers available to the Asian American community. For more information, please contact the **Asian American Health Initiative at 240-777-4517.**

## Acknowledgements

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Disclaimer: The characters, places, and incidents depicted in this photonovel are fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons or events is entirely coincidental.

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## Asian American Health Initiative



Together To Build A Healthy Community

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