

JUNE EAP NOTES

Post-COVID: Easing Back into Life



There's a lot of anticipation for the return of activities that people have gone without. But, with that hope, often comes the expectation that everything should feel comfortable; that returning to "normal" life will be simple.

When disruption goes on for an entire year, it becomes a form of "normal." We are used to a locked-down version of life just through behavioral conditioning alone. Ironically, this means that the return to normal itself becomes "a disruption." You may have been surprised by the amount of anxiety that has crept up as you return to doing things you've been wishing for. Some may have an unexpected panic attack after going to a crowded restaurant, have new trouble sleeping when they think about their kids' carpools starting up again or just worry about being able to fit in with people in-person.

Preparing psychologically to return to "normal" will be a process. Anxiety during transitions is natural. The transition back into "regular" life is just as big as the original transition that limited all of our lives in the first place. Not only are we out of practice with daily types of social interactions, but we've spent a year being conscious of the risk that those activities carried. So, you will likely experience some stress, and that's OK. Here are some tips!

- 1. Watch your pace.** No matter how excited you are, ease yourself into new activities. Build in time to process and adjust after every new boundary that you've pushed through.
- 2. Get rid of the "should."** Many people are beginning to feel anxiety about what life "should" look like. Some are vaccinated but still feel unready to go back to normal, in-person activities. Some have planned that first post-vaccination vacation. It is hard to predict how you will feel, but there is no right or wrong reaction. Don't add to your own pressures by believing that you "should" feel a certain way.
- 3. Communicate clearly.** Don't be afraid to say "no" to things you are not yet comfortable with; don't over-personalize differences of opinion about what is OK to do and what isn't; and listen and speak respectfully when it comes to negotiations with friends and family about what is reasonable for gatherings, celebrations, and trips. Be patient.
- 4. Increase your self-care.** It's easy to assume that your mind and body will automatically take care of themselves, and you won't need as much sleep, downtime, healthful eating, or attention to your mental health. The opposite is true, however. Any disruption to what you've grown accustomed to can take a toll on the body and mind.
- 5. Welcome your feelings.** Be compassionate, but realistic, with yourself about what you're feeling when you begin to transition toward the lifestyle that you used to have. Adopt the mindfulness techniques of being gentle and curious about your emotional experience.
- 6. Be patient.** As much fun as it may be to fantasize about the "first" thing we'd do in a post-COVID world, the truth is, the lines between before/during/after are anything but clear-cut. It is a gradual process, with different milestones and different levels of risk. So, be patient with yourself. The more we embrace this transition as a path to keep moving forward on, versus a switch that is flipped, the more ready we'll be for any bumps along the way.

Do you need help adjusting to this new normal? Call **(800) 801-4182** or **(402) 354-8000** to schedule a confidential appointment. You can also access our web site www.BestCareEAP.org.