



@YourService during your RETURN TO THE OFFICE

Returning to the Workplace: MANAGING RE-ENTRY NERVOUSNESS

Nervousness around returning to the workplace may be inevitable for many of us, but the negative feelings can be managed. Here are 10 suggestions for easing your anxiety as we move forward.

1. **Normalize it.** It's important to remind yourself that your reactions and fears are totally normal and to respond with self-compassion. It's natural to feel worried about things that you haven't done in a long time. Telling ourselves that it's okay to feel this way, and that we're not alone, can be helpful.
2. **Reframe catastrophic thoughts.** If you feel yourself ruminating or escalating with thoughts of catastrophe, try to slow yourself down. Ask: Is this realistic? Is this an exaggeration? You can then try to modify your thoughts to be more fact-based so that you're not constantly producing more adrenaline.
3. **Get as much information as you can.** To further quell catastrophic thinking, it's important to get every bit of information you can from your company about what they're doing to prepare, what precautions they're taking, and what they're going to do to try to keep workers safe. Knowing that your company is taking return precautions seriously can provide some relief.
4. **Distinguish grief from anxiety.** A return to the office carries an extra layer of stress for the millions of people who are struggling with the grief of having lost family, friends or colleagues to COVID-19, are still traumatized from having watched someone fall seriously ill, or who have recovered from COVID-19 themselves. Grief cannot and should not be suppressed. The goal instead should be to reduce the mental strain to support daily functioning.
5. **Refocus on uplifting thoughts.** The office could be a reminder of a place where you had colleagues who are no longer there. In such cases, it can help to change the aspect of the situation you're concerned about. As you return to the office, that might mean focusing on the people you're excited to see and the office rituals you've missed, despite painful realities that are impossible to change.
6. **Draw on past experience.** The pandemic has been tough for many people. Lives have been uprooted and changed and now they are going to be uprooted and changed again. Ideally, this change will be easier because we have more resiliency than we did in March 2020. Think about the challenges we've endured that have given us new skills for coping and managing.





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- 7. Ease your way into it.** The prospect of breaking habits and routines formed to keep us safe during the past year might feel very daunting. One way to get over hurdles is to take them in small steps. Take the train for a few stops on the weekend before your first official commute. If possible, come in for a single morning meeting and then go home. With every small dip into your old environment, you ought to feel stronger.
- 8. Watch for signs that you need to speak to a professional.** If, after a two-week period, you're finding that you're not able to go into the workplace, your interactions with others are noticeably different, you're struggling to get work done, or you're not taking care of yourself or others, this could signal a problem and professional help may be indicated.
- 9. Practice what you'll say to protect your boundaries.** You may encounter colleagues who aren't taking the pandemic and safety guidelines seriously or who have little empathy for another person's fears or grief. One solution is to plan ahead and practice what you would say to own your boundaries and avoid triggering defensiveness in the other person. If the conversation doesn't go as planned, your next step could be to talk to a manager about arrangements that might help you feel safer.
- 10. Talk candidly about trauma and re-entry anxiety.** Those in leadership roles can help normalize re-entry anxiety by sharing their own feelings about it and asking employees what they need to help them cope with the reentry situation. They can also familiarize themselves with their organization's behavioral health benefits to ensure that employees have access to professionals and other tools to deal with stress when conversations at work aren't enough.

Please be reminded that our EAP—**CCA@YourService**—is FREE to access and available 24/7 to assist you and your family members with a variety of personal, work-related, and everyday living needs, including:

- Processing difficult emotions
- Managing change and transition
- Caregiving and daily living resources and referrals
- Stress management and work-life balance

ALWAYS AVAILABLE. ALWAYS CONFIDENTIAL.

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