

How Am I Able To Go Back To Work?

Transitioning back to work after the Stay At Home Order of COVID 19 is a difficult task to undergo. It was a shock to all of us to be ordered by the city and our workplaces to stay home. Many of us wandered around for a time, stunned by how surreal it was to be quarantined in our own homes. We may have had moments of frustration, fear or exasperation not knowing what the future would hold. But we also may have had some surreal moments of comfort and safety. It may have been like every day was a snow day, every night was another Netflix marathon and each week another Spring Break! Days rolled into weeks and before we knew it, we had two months of staying at home under our belts. How could this be?!

So how are we able to get ourselves ready and motivated to go back to work? How do we feel safe enough to leave the house now when it was not safe last week? How can we feel emotionally stable enough to enter back into the swing of a normal work week? Will we be able to do perform at the same level we have performed prior to being at home? What if we prefer working from home and doing everything online?

All of these questions remind me of the tweens I have at home! Tweenhood is the magical age between childhood and adolescence that brings with it a plethora of not so magical emotions like sadness, anxiety or regression. A tween is straddling childhood and adolescence and not feeling firmly planted in either. Transitioning back to work after COVID 19 may be a little like being a tween. On the one hand, you have gotten really used to the comfort and safety of home and on the other, you are being called back to work. Neither feels exactly right anymore, so how do you manage this transition?

First, it is important to recognize reality and to be gentle with yourself! No one could have known that we would be told to stay at home for this long. You could not prepare for this kind of change. COVID 19 has changed almost everything in our lives. Health crises can trigger past losses or current traumas. There may be loved ones whose health is compromised or past experiences that bring a weight of hard emotions. You may not even know that this pandemic has triggered an emotional reaction to a past wounding. This is why it is important to recognize reality and be gentle with yourself. See what is true about the current situation. Notice if part of you really wants to just stay home in the safety and comfort of your home. This is normal. It is okay that you feel this way. And note that you also may have a small part of you that really wants to go back to work and achieve a new yet normal routine. This ambivalence is understandable. Recognizing these two opposing experiences can reduce the confusion, allow for understanding and compassion and then open the door to find what might be a new and good normal.

Second, consider the new normal. Just as it has become normal to wear face masks and fist bump rather than shake hands, it has become normal to say thank you by clapping and to show love by staying home. It has been hard not to be able to visit

family or friends, go to restaurants or stores or to not carry on with important events like birthday parties, graduations or weddings. But the new normal has offered us many things to learn, as well. We have learned to slow down, rest more and to realize what really matters. We have learned more about ourselves and our loved ones. We have been productive and that has been good and we have been unproductive and realized it was okay. We have gotten creative with how to love and we have been clever about maintaining long distance connections. We have risen to the occasion and we are braver and stronger than we thought we could be. We get to take all of this and more into the new normal.

Third, you can trust yourself. We do not forget to ride a bike. What you learn and experience is imprinted into your heart and your mind. Though environments may be different and you may feel different, your skills and wisdom remain. It is normal to fear that atrophy has taken place. But the only way to find out what skills and strength your muscles contain is to trust your instincts and dive in. You can start in the shallow end if you need to. You should check in with your employer to determine if there are options for a slower entry. If possible, there could be shorter work weeks or work days during your first weeks back. You could schedule a lunch or check in call with a family member or friend during the first week. Starting slow and having support will allow you to find your rhythm, achieve equilibrium again and to regain the confidence that you can perform at your absolute best. The chances are high that you will be bringing an even stronger and better you to this new normal.

Fourth, schedule support. Transitions are times that we all need to access support. Many employers have learned a new compassion and understanding during this pandemic because of the additional stressors and burdens placed on their people. Most employers are therefore going to be aware that the transition back to the work place will be challenging. Scheduling support is a way to intentionally seek out conversations about possible emotional needs that have arisen, advantages and disadvantages of working from home and how the time online could inform any new ways the current job is performed. This global pandemic has shown all of us the vulnerability of people and our deep desire to care for humanity.

Lastly, embrace change. With every passing season of life, we continually grow and change. We never stay the same. COVID 19 has brought so many monumental changes to our lives that in some ways, we will never be the same. As we have become accustomed to knowing all too well after the 911 tragedy, everything changed after the planes hit the Twin Towers. Many years from now, we will still realize how life was never the same after the Corona Virus hit our world. But as we embrace the changes that come from persevering through these times, we find in us all a collective stamina, strength and creative love that goes beyond the trauma of these times. Though our humanity has been hit and we have been made aware of our fragility, we have also seen the heroic prowess of people and the endless ways people have found to love and serve and give. Embracing change can allow us to access our strength and courage to get back to work as an act of courage and hope for our world.

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Schedule Support. Embrace
Change.