

Together Again: Supporting Each Other and Taking Care of Ourselves

For many of the employees who have been working from home this past year, August marks the beginning of the transition back to working on campus. This is a huge change for those employees. And with so many more people on campus now, it's a huge transition even for those who have remained on campus throughout this crisis.

So Why Is This So Much Harder than I Thought It Would Be?

Transitions are Always Challenging

Among those returning to campus, some of us are feeling really excited about the return. Many of us are also feeling overwhelmed. Remember that even positive transitions are often exhausting and we should treat ourselves with a lot of grace and patience. In "normal times" only some of us are going through transitions at a given time. But right now, everyone is managing change. If we are kind to ourselves, we will be better able to be kind to those around us.

We Got Used to the Shut-Down Way of Doing Things

As difficult as the pandemic shut-down was, many of us, frankly, got used to it. We built whole lives around the new reality. We got into new routines, we took on different responsibilities at home, and we patched together lives for ourselves. So pat yourself on the back because you adapted to a crazy situation! But that means we don't slide right back together so easily. Some of us may feel like we are practically starting over in figuring out how life works for us now.

Each One of Us Experienced the Pandemic Differently

A lot of employees are returning to work this month. But don't forget that a large number of employees have been on campus. Even among those who were home, our experiences have been different in many ways. Some people felt shut in with families. Others have spent a large amount of time alone. For many of us, a heightened focus on racism and racialized violence was a primary feature of this past year – but this heightened focus may have a different effect on our colleagues of color than on white folks. Remember that some of your colleagues may have faced risks you didn't have to face, dealt with stressors you avoided, or managed situations you hadn't thought about. Be respectful of these different experiences as you process this transition together.

Some of Us Are Managing Major Mental Health Issues

This transition is difficult for everyone. But some people may have found that the pandemic brought on or exacerbated a number of mental health struggles. This pandemic just wasn't good for a lot of us. This means that managers may have to check in with their staff in a different way. In some cases, employees may be eligible for workplace accommodations under the ADA or may be eligible for FMLA time. Encourage employees to reach out to the [Faculty and Staff Assistance Program](#) and the [Accessible Workplace office](#) to get support and practical information.

People Have Different Levels of Risk Tolerance

Many of us are feeling safer than we did a year ago. Nevertheless, each of us is going to react to ongoing COVID-19 news differently. Based on different life circumstances, different understanding about tolerable risk levels and different approaches to risk, some of us are going to be more or less concerned about our personal safety in a range of situations. Don't be dismissive of other people's concerns or your own. We will have to find ways to share our concerns with managers and co-workers while remaining respectful of our different views.

Uncertainty is Stressful

There is a lot of evidence that uncertainty causes a great deal of stress. In fact, laboratory studies have shown that people have more of a stress response when a negative event **might** happen than when we know it will happen. In the coming months, as circumstances change and new information comes out, we are going to have to operate with a lot of unknowns. Taking care of ourselves will help, but we also have to expect that this level of uncertainty will take a toll on us.

Make Space for Grief and Exhaustion AND Tune into Joy and Gratitude

We have been through a lot this year and many of us may find ourselves grieving for people we loved, experiences we missed out on, or expectations we had for ourselves or our families. Some of us may experience more intense feelings of grief and exhaustion once we truly see the crisis as over. Turning your attention to what you are grateful for and finding joyful moments for yourself can have a huge positive impact on your mental wellbeing. But make sure you use gratitude and joy in a gentle way – joy and gratitude are emotions you can turn your attention to but they are not emotions you can demand of yourself. Sometimes, you must allow yourself to feel the negative emotions if you want to feel the positive ones.

Our Main Advice: Kindness, Kindness, Kindness

We have all been through a lot. You, your supervisees, your supervisor and your supervisor's supervisor have all been through a lot. The coming months will be a long adjustment period. There will be times when you must advocate for yourself in order to take care of yourself. But remember to be kind to yourself and to those around you.

The [Faculty and Staff Assistance Program](#) offers free and confidential counseling and referral for all employees and their families. We also offer consultations for supervisors and workshops for teams.

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