COVID – Back to Work Anxiety

Source: Boston University [Employee Wellness**Home**](https://www.bu.edu/wellness/)

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**First Steps to Facing Your Return to Work Anxiety**

With the phased return to work right around the corner, you are not alone if you’re feeling anxious and stressed.  The change in routine and social interactions, as well as the fear of the unknown, are all major contributors to this feeling of anxiety. It can affect both those of us returning to work for the first time since last March, as well as those who remained working on campus and have adjusted to a less densely populated campus.

It’s important to stress that you are not alone and there are resources across campus to support you through this transition.  We encourage you to take some time to review the tips below, refer to the various resources, and reach out for help if needed.

**Tips for Facing Your Return to Work Anxiety**

* **Acknowledge your Feelings**.  With the unavoidable change and uncertainly associated with the return to work, it’s important to expect some level of anxiety and not be surprised by it.  Anxiety is normal when faced with these types of changes, and it’s not an indication that something is bad or unsafe for you.   Keep in mind that it will dissipate in time and there are resources to help you work through it.
* **Plan Ahead.**  While you can’t anticipate how everything will go when you return, there are many things within your control, and simple planning ahead can help regain a sense of control.  Is there a pre-pandemic routine that you envision changing, and if so, how will you plan ahead to adapt to this new routine? This could be a shift from eating lunch out most days to instead meal prepping each weekend so you have something to bring with you for lunch each day.
* **Focus on the Positive**.  While we’re hard-wired as humans to pay more attention to the negative, it’s important to take a step back and remember what we miss about working on campus.   Was it a quick lunchtime walk along the Charles, or maybe catching up with colleagues each morning?  Remembering what previously brought you joy each day can help make the transition easier.
* **Be Considerate and Aware of Others.**One thing we’ve learned from the pandemic is that everyone’s comfort and safety level is different, and the transition will affect us all in very different ways.  Furthermore, please be sensitive and aware of the unique stress of employees with marginalized identities. Many people with marginalized identities have enjoyed less of a need to conform to majority culture appearance standards and greater protection from the trauma of microaggressions. Returning to in-person work for many brings increased anxiety and exposure to microaggressions.
* **Reach out for Help.**  Despite best efforts, you might still need help, and that’s ok.  There are resources available on campus to help you through this transition.  We encourage you to keep an honest and open line of communication with your manager, as well as to reach out to the Faculty Staff Assistance Office for free and confidential counseling.

**Additional Resources and Events**

[Adapting to Post-Pandemic Reality When You Have Social Anxiety](https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-adapt-to-post-pandemic-reality-with-social-anxiety-5180281)

[After a Year of Isolation, Social Interaction May Cause Anxiety](https://www.healthline.com/health-news/after-a-year-of-isolation-social-interaction-may-cause-anxiety#Some-may-be-feeling-more-socially-anxious-than-others)

[Anxiety: Dealing with Uncertainty](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/dealing-with-uncertainty.htm)

[Anxious about returning to work? Psychologists offer insight and tips](https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/anxious-about-returning-work-psychologists-offer-insight-and-tips)

[How to deal with anxiety about returning to “normal”](https://www.fastcompany.com/90631989/how-to-deal-with-anxiety-about-returning-to-normal)

[Vaxxed But Not Relaxed](https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/05/29/opinion/vaxxed-not-relaxed/)