

## Managing the Stress of Re-Entry

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There has been great angst for all of us during this time of isolation and social distancing. The rules of life have been changing for us all daily: what is safe, our plans, work responsibilities, homeschooling. For over 50 days now, we have been removed physically from our friends and relatives, as well as many of our favorite stress relievers like parks, trails, and support services. Now that Stay at Home orders are starting to lift, there is a new stress we are facing. We all feel pulled to get back to normal but keep asking: “What would happen if we end social distancing too soon?”

As we begin to think about re-entry steps for our families and our work teams, there are more questions than there are certainties. When can I safely go back to the gym to work out, send my kids to a friend’s house to play, go to church, go to a movie, or simply attend a face-to-face meeting? It’s not going to feel easy to jump right back into crowds after spending months trying to avoid them. Here are things you can do to help manage the stress of re-entry:

**Reflect.** When all is said and done, what will you take away from this quarantine time? What will you miss? Perhaps we need to all keep a less packed schedule or have less distraction and more quality time with family. Be intentional about how you ramp up your degree of busy-ness.

**Adjust expectations.** Things are going to feel different from before. Shopping, social events and meetings will not look or feel the same pre-COVID. Adjusting expectations will prevent letdown.

**Smile.** In a sea of people all wearing masks, it can sometimes feel lonely. Even when wearing a mask, a smile brightens your eyes and the world around you.

**Stay connected.** Keep talking to others about how you feel and check in with others regularly on how they are doing.

**Take small steps.** Don’t go too far too fast. You have to determine what feels best for you and your family. What is right for you may not be good for all.

**Dream.** Make plans that you look forward to and that will be restorative and nurturing. Having fun activities with family and friends scheduled will help relieve tension. Hope is stronger than fear!

**Limit Media.** Make sure you are informed and use trusted resources for valuable updates. But do not overload on information that will only fuel your anxiety and fear. One check-in per day is sufficient. The rest of the time be mindful of consuming media that is restorative and happy.

Just as we adjusted over 50 days ago to what we are doing today, we will make this transition together and on the other side we will all be stronger and more resilient.