

June 22, 2020

# Managing Anxiety as we Emerge from Isolation

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact our day-to-day lives and yet we desperately want to get back to “normal.” Many of us are finding that coming out of isolation is much more difficult than it was going in.

## Why is this so hard?!

- ***Uncertainty*** – Back in March, when all of this was just starting, there was a bit more certainty. Although many things were completely new and uncertain the messaging was clear – “Go home and stay home.” There was certainty and clarity in those instructions. Now, things are opening up and we are getting a lot of different messages and the level of uncertainty is much higher. Do I go back to work or not, do I wear a mask or not, should I get tested or not, what about my kids, my elderly parents, my pets?
- ***Conflict between how things are and how we want them to be*** – We desperately want things to be back to normal, and they are not. It’s June and we want proms, BBQ’s, final recitals, and to look forward to a summer of cottaging, beaches and fun. Although we’ll sort of get some of these things the reality is that things are not “normal.” The conflict we experience between how we want things to be and how they are is difficult to manage and we can experience this as stressful and anxiety provoking.
- ***We’ve been in isolation for quite a while*** – We have all been out of our regular routines and practices since March. That’s a really long time! Many of us know what it’s like to get back to “real life” after a vacation or a break - we wonder if we can actually do our jobs, remember our schedules or routines, and deal with the pace of life. If this is how we feel after a short break no wonder we’re feeling concerned about getting back to “real life” after being away from it for 12+ weeks.

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## What Can we do?

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*Consider all of the information, including your values, when considering how and when to emerge from isolation.*

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- **Normalize** – Although it sounds simple it is really important to remember that we are all in this together and that you are not alone. All of us are feeling uncertain, all of us are figuring out how to navigate this and it is ok to feel a bit uncomfortable in this.
- **Acknowledge where you're at** – It can be useful to create a phrase or thought that you can use to remind yourself about where things are at for you. Some examples might include:
  - I am figuring out my new normal.
  - Things are not how they used to be and that's ok.
  - It is true that things aren't normal and it's also true that I can adapt.
- **Use all of the info. To make your choices** – When deciding how and when to emerge be sure to consider all of the information when making your choices. Listen to the experts and also consider your unique situation and your values.
- **Avoid Avoidance** – Sometimes anxiety and fear together with our discomfort of uncertainty can really impact us. This combination may cause us to avoid the things that we're scared of us, including emerging from isolation. In these times it is really important to face our fears so that we learn how things really are, including that we are often stronger than we think.

## The Typical People Challenge

If you are struggling with emerging from isolation and avoiding situations that make you uncomfortable it might be time to challenge yourself and do some experiments.

Use the **Typical People** rule and turn it into a challenge.

1. Think about what *typical people* are doing these days (e.g. going for walks, going to a store using appropriate precautions, visiting with friends in person at a reasonable distance etc.)
2. Make a list of these *typical* activities
3. Challenge yourself to engage in a couple of these activities every week.
4. Keep track of how these experiments make you feel and what you learn from them.