

Vitae Tip Sheet: Managing Stress and Emotional Responses During Covid-19 Transitions



Anxiety is a normal emotional reaction to a stressful event and we need a certain level of anxiety to perform at our best. When anxiety becomes a daily event or begins to affect work or home life, some management strategies might be needed. As we transition through the COVID-19 protection framework or 'traffic light' system, it is normal to experience some anxiety around the change and its impact on working and living.

It's very common and in fact quite *normal*, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have experienced life changing situations.

Emotional Responses

Emotional reactions are normal and to be expected. It can be reassuring to know that even though these reactions may be unpleasant, they are normal responses in anyone responding to an abnormal event or situation. You are not 'losing your mind' or 'going crazy' if you experience reactions to COVID-19 and all that this has meant personally. Remind yourself that you are a normal person having a normal response to an abnormal situation.

COVID-19 : Stress Responses or After Shocks

Sometimes emotional after-shocks (or stress reactions) can appear immediately after the event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. In some situations weeks or months may pass before the stress reaction appears. With understanding, support and good self-care the stress reaction can pass more quickly.

Some typical short term reactions

- Disbelief
- Emotional numbness
- Sleep disturbances
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Recurring mental images of the event
- Social withdrawal

Longer term reactions can include:

- Depression
- Recurring nightmares
- Hypervigilance
- Uncharacteristic irritability
- Memory problems
- General agitation
- Anger
- Fear that did not exist before the event

Most of these responses are part of the normal process of psychological recovery and they will help you adapt to the event. If you find your responses are continuing longer than you expected it may be time to seek professional support:

- Call your GP if you are experiencing physical symptoms.
- Call Vitae if your symptoms are emotional, behavioural or psychological

Transitioning through the COVID-19 Changes

As we transition to a sense of normality in our daily lives, we may still carry concerns about the effects of COVID-19 and the various variants of the virus and the long term impact. These are normal thoughts to have – thoughts that seek to protect us from potential danger. However, we know that sometimes our thoughts can run away on us when left unchecked, so here are some ideas to consider as you make the transitions affecting work, school or whatever the normal day looks like.

For the workplace/school

- Mentally prepare for work/school as the messages change – am I taking the train, bus or car? – do I need to top up my Snapper or organise to pay for the car park? Think about making your lunch and organising your clothes the night before, so you have less to do and think about in the morning
- Communicate with those in your household about what everyone’s needs are in order get where you need to be. Maybe develop a timetable for the fridge for everyone to see.
- Know what the plan is from your workplace about how your workspace will look/what you may need to do on arrival in order to get your day started and what any new expectations might be.
- It is ideal if you can communicate to your supervisor or manager if you have any concerns or anxiety about changes affecting work, so that he/she can support you at this time. All workplaces have responsibilities to look after their staff’s wellbeing

For yourself

- Be aware of your own level of anxiety and concern as you transition. Scale it 1 – 10 (1= no worries or concerns, 10 = being very, very concerned). If you are sitting between 7 – 10, it could be helpful to have some strategies that can help you manage the anxiety. These could be things such as deep breathing, stretching, meditation or mindfulness, prayer, or exercise and nominating someone (in your head) who you might get support from if needed.
- Develop a relaxation activity in the morning and evening as part of your daily routine. You could have a trigger such as your transport into work and leaving work, or a certain landmark near your house that you use to mentally ‘turn off and on’ for work.
- Be aware of what you can and can’t control in this environment. For example, you can’t control the weather, but you can prepare by taking a raincoat with you. You can’t control other peoples’ behaviour, but you can control your own. This can really help reduce anxiety as making choices that are in your control is very empowering.
- Seek professional help if you are needing help with physical or psychological issues
 - Call your GP if you are experiencing physical symptoms.
 - Call Vitae if your symptoms are emotional, behavioural or psychological