

the new normal

Protecting College Students' Mental Health



For more than a year now many students have longed to get back to normal social interactions—outings with friends, theme parks, birthday parties, concerts, and other large gatherings. However, some individuals, even those who eagerly anticipated returning to normal, may experience anxiety and stress as restrictions lift and their social calendars fill up. Below are some important reminders along with mental health tips as individuals transition into the new normal of social interactions.

ADDRESSING THE PAST. The isolation of remote learning and lock downs left many students depressed and longing for the “traditional” experience of their older peers. The upheaval of expected norms—living on campus, sports, plays, graduations—may result in feelings of resentment and anger at missed opportunities. The first step to moving forward is to acknowledge disappointment happens to everyone throughout life. Next, try to reframe the situation—note some positives that came out of the situation such as catching up on sleep or developing a new hobby. Shift your self-talk to something more positive and powerful. Instead of ruminating, “I cannot believe I did not get to walk across the stage at graduation,” try “I’m looking forward to landing my first job and meeting my co-workers.” Create attainable goals to move life forward.

BE MINDFUL FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS. While the virus may not seem like a major threat for healthy young students, it could be deadly for individuals with compromised immune systems. A January 2021 Harvard Business Review article noted nearly 400,000 COVID-19 cases were reported across more than 1,800 U.S. campuses. Tulane University reported roughly 90 percent of the school’s students who test positive for COVID-19 are asymptomatic — no fever, cough, fatigue, or any other sign they could be contagious. That means you could be spreading the potentially fatal virus without knowing it. Washing your hands often and wearing a mask when out in public are simple ways you can help prevent the spread, even as things return to normal and vaccinations increase.

If you need emotional support, mental health help or are struggling with urges to use alcohol and drugs, our Mobile Crisis Response Team is available 24 hours a day, by calling 863.519.3744 or toll free, 800.627.5906. For questions or to schedule a therapy appointment, call 863.248.3311 or toll-free 800.305.6780.



Caring for Your Mental Health While Transitioning to the New Normal

UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT COMFORT LEVELS VARY. As restrictions are lifted, be mindful not everyone will be comfortable attending large-scale events. Once vaccinated, some may continue wearing masks as recommended by the CDC while others will not. It is important to do our part in keeping others safe and healthy, but it's also advisable to avoid additional stress and confrontation by respecting others' choices. Focusing on what you can control, such as avoiding situations that make you uncomfortable or cause anxiety, is best.

POSITIVELY ANTICIPATE CHANGE. For those who struggled to adjust to remote learning as well as seeing friends and family virtually, another "pivot" may cause apprehension or annoyance. Try to identify the pros as you once again shift. While going back to campus may involve a longer commute, use the time to listen to your favorite podcast or an audiobook.

GET COMFORTABLE SAYING NO. Some may feel like declining social gatherings disappoints others, makes them seem boring, or is selfish. It may be especially challenging for some to justify the need for the alone time after spending so much time at home already. However, it's perfectly normal now that you have adjusted to the new way of life to either have no desire to jam-pack your social calendar or to want a balance between going out and staying in than you had before the pandemic began.

PACE YOURSELF. Extroverts may be tempted to say yes to every social opportunity once restrictions are lifted. Remember the importance of making time to rest and recharge too, especially if you've grown accustomed to "me" time. Additionally, some individuals used the pandemic restrictions to develop positive habits like saving money, eating healthier, and getting the recommended amount of sleep. Be mindful of maintaining those habits as we transition back to the new normal. Don't let the fear of another lockdown or disappointment from missing out on so much the past year, lead to burnout or financial challenges.

REMEMBER THE BASICS. You may have heard it said over and over again by now, but getting enough sleep, eating healthy, and exercising daily are also extremely important to your mental and physical health as you transition into the new normal. Be mindful not to let your schedule fill up with too many high calorie meals out, late night hang outs or missed exercise sessions. Your mind and body will thank you for prioritizing the basics.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IS ONE CALL AWAY. Whether you're experiencing lingering depression from missing out on milestone events like graduation or you feel anxious about the new normal, Peace River Center's Emotional Support and Crisis Line is a free service available 24-hours a day, 365 days a year. By calling 863.519.3744 individuals can receive mental health support or help if they are struggling with urges to use alcohol and drugs. If you would like to receive outpatient therapy services, you can call 863.248.3311 to get started.

