

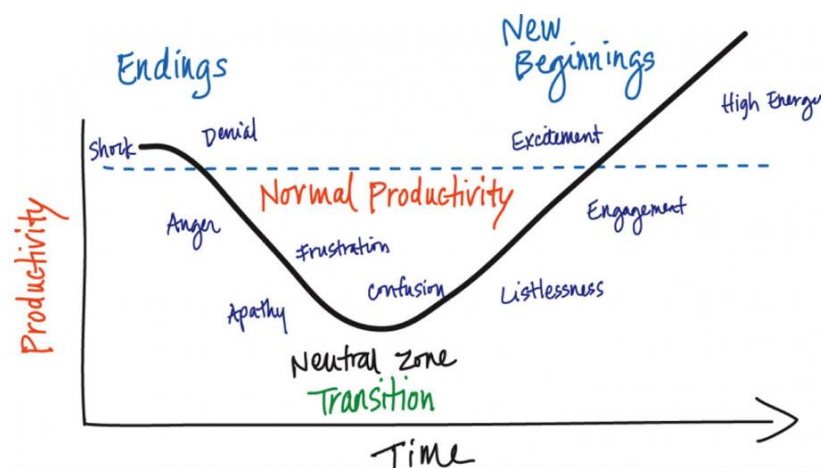
Navigating your transition to the New Normal

When Covid first hit our shores, many people hoped that we would “beat” it quickly and we could carry on with our normal way of life. It very quickly became apparent that those seeing it as an event or an interruption, rather than a long-term adjustment and transition to a new normal, would find it difficult to adjust.

Human beings have a built in need for homeostasis and so the arrival of Covid and the subsequent lockdown meant that people experienced a sense of loss, whether it be loss of freedom, loss of connection or even, in a more literal sense – loss of income or loved ones.

Understanding your sense of loss

The extraordinary times we are experiencing as a result of Covid elicits a grief response similar to the loss of a loved one. So, it is important to recognise that it is absolutely normal to feel all the emotions associated with loss and that these emotions may change over time as you transition to the new normal.



It is helpful to quantify and understand what it is you feel you have lost so that you can process that loss and ultimately go on to formulate a constructive action plan.

Pay close attention to your emotions and listen to the messages brought forward. Be aware of unhelpful cognitions like catastrophising (viewing the situation as considerably worse than it actually is), magnifying and minimizing (seeing the positive results of your actions as smaller than they really are and the negative results of your actions as bigger than they really are) and overgeneralizing (coming to a conclusion based on information that is too general and/or not specific enough).

For example, in the absence of rational, reasonable thought and information you may distort your cognitions, telling yourself you're definitely going to contract Covid-19 and will end up in ICU (catastrophizing), that you're a terrible person because you only donated 10% of your salary to the solidarity fund (minimizing) and believing you must invest in Zoom because everyone will always rely on it (generalization).

Check your thoughts for reasonableness, seek out truthful sources of information and avoid information overload.

Acceptance vs Action

Once you have a good understanding of your current emotional landscape, start to map out the level of autonomy you have to deal with your worries, fears and anxieties about the future. What is and what is not under your control? The quicker you can come to accept those things that you can't control, the quicker you can more constructively utilize that energy and emotion to focus on the things that are within your sphere of control and develop solutions and action plans.

Think about what you can do in service of your emotions e.g. finding ways to recharge, tending to connections, creating routines, taking care of your body, reaching out to others in need or trying something new, fun and energizing.

Model excellence

You may still be feeling a little lost on how to navigate your way through this transition to the new normal. If you think about it though, you have been through various transitions in your life before e.g. getting married, starting a new job or moving towns. It may not have been as drastic a transition or required conscious thought about how to transition but the fact that you emerged in one piece on the other side means that you have successfully managed that transition and can model this type of "excellence" in this new context.

Reflect on transitions you've been through before. What internal resources did you tap into to successfully navigate the transition? Which external resources did you reach out to? How did you manage your emotions and what did you do to reduce the uncertainty you were experiencing?

Be aware that some of the coping strategies you may have utilised in the past may not be available to you anymore, but this reflection process may allow you to tap into new found resources, learn new skills or master previously attained skills.

A new way of relating

An early draft of a study by researchers at The University of Manchester and Swansea University shows social distancing and isolation is having significant impacts on people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. They found that social distancing is contributing to heightened feelings of anxiety and depression amongst the general public. Some people are fearful they will experience health or social anxiety after the lockdown, while others plan to go back to normal levels of social activity as soon as possible.

Covid is going to be with us and continue to influence our daily lives for some time to come and as such, it calls for a new way of relating. The words "Social distancing" have become common parlance. One can wrap one's head around the need to maintain a degree of physical distance, but we are ultimately social beings and will find ways to maintain our sense of community and relatedness.

Where physical interaction is limited, we can tap into technology like social media and various communication platforms to help bridge the gap.

It is helpful that the entire world is basically in the same situation, a commonality that is leading to the rapid development of coping strategies from multiple sources, including friends, schools and businesses but the effects of prolonged physical distancing on one's relationships and mental health are yet to be established. Clearly, establishing safe ways of maintaining physical distance, while still fulfilling your social needs should form part of your transition plans.

Remember to offer yourself loving kindness and understand that it's going to take some time to readjust to life following lockdown just as it took time to adjust to lockdown and that doing this in a slow, step-by-step manner, just like a phased return to work adjustment in the workplace, might be just what you need in your social relationships too.

Don't be afraid to reach out to someone who can help you to process your emotions and develop strategies for successful transition.

Helpful resource Links:

Exploring grief and loss in the Covid context

<https://www.verywellmind.com/understanding-grief-in-the-age-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-4801931>

<https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/coping-change-and-loss-covid-19-times>

Work life beyond lockdown

<https://theconversation.com/five-workplace-trends-will-shape-life-after-lockdown-138077>

Navigating Transitions

<https://www.psycom.net/dealing-with-change>

Social Connection

https://www.connectioncoalition.org.uk/prioritise_social_connection_post_coronaviruses_lockdown