



Work Life Services Newsletter September 2020
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Focus on Your Emotional Well Being

COVID-19: Finding the Next Normal

A pandemic is a powerful, disruptive force, and COVID-19 has proven to be as catastrophic for businesses, communities, and the lifestyles people enjoy as it can be for one's health. Of course, there are preparations that can be made to mitigate the overall impact a pandemic can have, but it's difficult to predict how long and how devastating a pandemic will be when there is so much disagreement over the best ways to respond and when those responses will be activated.

Americans across the country are wondering when their lives will return to a sense of normalcy and trying to determine what the *new normal* will look like when the nation climbs out from underneath the weight of this health emergency. With the various challenges COVID-19 has created, it may not be a new normal that people find but the *next normal*.

Right now, there are multiple emergencies that are shaping how lives are lived. These emergencies will not be resolved all at once, but in phases that can extend over varying lengths of time. This means that you may find one crisis coming to an end while many others still exist and continue to impact your daily living needs for weeks or months to come. This can keep you in a protracted state of uncertainty and anxiety, which can cause you to overlook that some areas of your life may have actually improved over time.

The next normal is the period between a resolved crisis and facing one or more of many ongoing emergencies. It is a time for acknowledging the removal of one crisis and using that extra emotional freedom to start to prepare for accepting, overcoming, or adapting to the effects of the next round of instability or trauma. There may be many rounds ahead and many new emergencies that develop, but you can find ways to work through what is happening and feel the sense of personal success that comes from not letting the pandemic and its associated emergencies take full control of your life.

Here are five recommendations for finding the next normal today and in the future:

1. Allow yourself to grieve

Extreme changes in your life can be traumatic and produce emotions that are on par with the loss of a loved one or a dear friend. This is a normal and acceptable emotional response, and you should give yourself the room you need to grieve for what has been lost or altered as a result of this moment. There are resources and programs available to help you through the grieving process, so you can accept what has happened on your own terms and emotionally prepare yourself for moving forward when your grief begins to subside. Many services are available that have online and telephonic support, so you can safely work through your grief while maintaining a safe distance.

2. Accept, forgive & forget

Accept the changes and challenges in your life that you can accept. Forgive the mistakes or missteps that may have been made in the past. Acknowledge the things that you cannot accept or forgive and then let yourself forget them. This process will help you let go of the worry, frustration, anger, and the things that are simply outside of your control that may prevent you from being able to move forward with your life. Do not expect this process to happen overnight. Time, patience, and a conscious effort to step forward are your best tools to work through this recommendation.

3. Learn to be flexible

Flexibility is your greatest ally right now. Your life may be in a constant state of change from one day to the next, and the opportunities that appear during the pandemic to help sustain you or aid in your recovery may require you to step outside of your comfort zone, learn new skills, or give up old habits that defined your life before COVID-19. The more rigid you are in your response to the challenges you face now, the more difficult it may be to find the resources that will help you prepare for and adapt to the next normal that follows. As there is always the possibility for this situation to take a turn for the worse, the sooner you can exercise your flexibility, the earlier you can put into place the elements that will help strengthen your personal defenses against further disaster.

4. Practice mindfulness

You may not immediately be aware of it, but your life might actually be better off than someone else's right now. You may still be employed, you may have enough set aside to pay your bills for several more months to come, you may not have had any family members or friends sickened by this illness. While there are those who will always have an easier time coping with situations like this, there are also those who are truly struggling in ways you may not comprehend. Take stock of your life, the resources you have, and the opportunities available to you, and use that awareness to help you recognize where you are in your response and recovery process. Engaging with mindfulness can help you predict and plan for new challenges, understand your limits, and identify the areas where you can make improvements to better stabilize and disaster-proof your life.

5. Prepare for the next normal that follows

The only certainty in life is change. What you're experiencing right now is going to become something else at some point, and you can't always control what that next phase of this crisis will look like. Life may become easier for you or it may seem harder than before. Take what you've learned up to this point—from the positive decisions you made and from the mistakes you wish you avoided—and use that information to help you become as prepared as possible. Being better prepared will help you feel more resilient and more in command of your life in the face of the periods of uncertainty that will surely appear again and again in the future.

