



After working virtually for more than a year and seeing co-workers/students only on the screen, the thought of coming back to campus and having in-person interactions can feel overwhelming.

Anxiety is a feeling of worry and nervousness about future events and outcomes that seem uncertain/unknown. It usually arises when we begin to focus/think about what “could or may” happen which we usually tie to the worst possible scenario that we can imagine.

As you return to campus, you may experience various degrees of anxiety, just as you may have experienced last year when the University moved to an essential services model. You may be feeling anxious about returning to routines that were once comfortable but have now become unfamiliar. The greatest adjustment may be around boundaries and physical distancing. Going from a 2-dimensional (virtual) to a 3-dimensional (in-person) work environment and going from using primarily 2 senses to using all your senses can also be overwhelming for some individuals.

Why you may be anxious about returning to campus

There are many reasons why individuals may be feeling anxious about returning back to campus. The following are some examples:

- Transitions typically increase our levels of anxiety. We feel safer in situations that are familiar and predictable. The minute we move into unfamiliar/unpredictable situations/environment, we typically feel more on edge and are in the lookout for “dangers/potential threats”. This reaction can be very exhausting.
- Whenever you have avoided something for a period of time, you will feel more anxious about returning to it even though it was once normal. Throughout the pandemic we have been told by public health officials to avoid in-person interactions, to keep our distance, to minimize outings, etc. As we return to campus, it is normal to feel anticipatory anxiety about doing things that we routinely did before the pandemic.

How to cope with feelings of anxiety

The following are some strategies that can help ease the anxiety:

- Plan ahead to gain a sense of control over a future that is uncertain. For example, schedule your commute time back into your day to help ease into a normal routine, look for new lunch-to-go recipes, prepare your office wardrobe, have a plan in place to address caregiving responsibilities.
- Take the time to reflect on your boundaries so you can anticipate how you may respond to different situations at work, such as greeting a co-worker or having lunch. Also, practice what you would say and what you would do in these situations.
- Focus on the positives about returning to work to boost your hope and optimism. Think about the co-workers that you have missed and old routines that will be a welcome relief. Also think about the new habits/routines that you have developed which you would like to maintain.
- Explore challenging and engaging activities that can absorb your attention. This can help stop negative feelings.
- Accept that things will be different and get the support needed from friends, family, and professionals to help you get through the period of adjustment.
- Remember that all thoughts are not facts. Seek the information needed to help ease some of your feelings and negative thoughts.
- When you are feeling anxious, stop what you are doing, take a pause, breathe, and recenter yourself.

- Reach out for help if you feel that the anxiety associated with the transition is becoming too much to manage. The Employee and Family Assistance Program can assist you. Go to <https://www.uwindsor.ca/humanresources/EFAP> for more information. Additional supports can also be found on the [Employee Mental Health Resources website](#).

Resources Consulted

Cleveland Clinic. Returning to Work Soon? Here Are Some Ways to Make the Process Easier (May 2021). Retrieved from: <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/>

Eden Health. How to Cope with Return-to-Work Anxiety (May 2021). Retrieved from: <https://edenhealth.com>.

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