

RETURNING TO WORK:

Managing Your Mental Health



mindhk

May 2020

Where Are We Now?

The past few months have likely been a tipping point for many; given the lingering uncertainty and prolonged nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, our mental health has been impacted.

The outbreak has resulted in a complete overhaul of people's day-to-day lives e.g., changes in working arrangements, job security, schooling, child care and parenting, eating out, spending time with family and friends, travelling, and even with how we are exercising. Moreover, constant unfolding of news stories has added stress for many, particularly given the surge of 'fake news' and sharing of unverified and sensationalised information.



As Hong Kong starts to return back to work and a new "normal", the transition back to previous schedules and a busier pace of life may bring up a range of feelings. For some, this will be a welcomed change. Many will be eager to resume work to reinstate the day-to-day activities that they had lost, including connecting with co-workers in person and not over Zoom. Returning to normalcy also marks an indication of financial gain and job security for some businesses.

For others, restrictions being lifted may spark worry and anxiety for a few key reasons: concerns about health - particularly in dense offices, office buildings, meetings, and on public transportation; the transition from flexible, remote work to structured, office work; and the pressure of Hong Kong's fast-paced, busy lifestyle.

How is This Affecting Our Mental Health?

Change creates uncertainty, and uncertainty generates worry, which all plays a role in feeding into a vicious cycle of stress and anxiety. Precautionary measures and circumstances have led to a prolonged state of stress and worry, as well as feelings of social isolation, all of which can take its toll on our mental health.

As we transition back to business as usual, it is normal to be feeling a little worried, stressed or anxious about more change ahead. Transition and change bring uncertainty, which naturally will cause feelings of unease.

Stressors Around Resuming ‘Business as Usual’

Here are some common feelings/emotions you may be experiencing:

With the many uncertainties around COVID-19, the majority of us are understandably still concerned about our own and family's well-being. The safety aspect of returning to work and face-to-face social interaction adds to this stress.

Hong Kong workers are renowned for constantly being busy and working long hours. For those who managed to slow down during the pandemic, returning back to the hectic city pace, including rush hour, may seem daunting. Some may also feel the need to work overtime or take on additional tasks to push businesses forward after a long pause or difficult few months.

**ANXIETY,
WORRY AND
APPREHENSION**



JOY AND RELIEF



For many of us, social distancing measures have meant that we have had to spend more time being cooped up indoors. For many people, this will have been a big challenge, given the limitation of small living spaces in Hong Kong, particularly for those living alone. Understandably, this may have impacted our moods, relationships and overall wellbeing.

Given the huge change from the norm we have all experienced in the last few months, it's likely that some people have been feeling frustrated, particularly given the 'loss' of activities they are used to engaging in (such as work, school, socialising).

A reinstatement of activities will therefore mean a huge sense of joy and relief for many people, particularly as this may mean – people being able to go out again, meeting friends, seeing colleagues, going shopping, eating out, etc.

For some, the flexibility and privacy of working from home may be less stressful and preferred. Many have relished in the opportunity to spend more time in the comfort of their own home and with their immediate family and doing things they enjoy, e.g. cooking. Working from home may feel as if it has become the 'new norm', **if you have well adjusted to this way of working. If this sounds familiar, then it's completely understandable if resuming 'business as usual' actually creates another sense of loss, which is different from the feelings of loss caused by social distancing.**

SADNESS AND RELUCTANCE



Tips on Managing Mental Health

When returning to work or changing routines:

Regardless of how you may be feeling, it's **important to recognise that all these feelings and reactions (whether it's stress, worry, joy, relief or sadness) are completely normal**. As work restrictions change, make sure to slow down and not jump right back into it. Take some time to take care of yourself and others; this has been a difficult time for everyone. Here are some quick tips to help you ease back to pre-COVID-19 routines:

- 1 Prioritise self-care**
- 2 Continue exercising and make this a part of your routine.** Even if it's a 30 minute walk around your neighborhood or an online class. Do what makes you feel safe and comfortable
- 3 Continue the hobbies you started or built on** over the last few months; don't see this as the end
- 4 Check in with your colleagues;** ask them how they are doing
- 5 Be transparent with your manager** about how you are feeling about returning to work
- 6 Alike to work, don't overly plan social events with friends and/or family,** as this can be overwhelming as well.
- 7 Take your time.** Be flexible with your schedule (if work allows) and slowly ease back into the office life
- 8 Take it slow** and slowly transition back to the lifestyle you previously led
- 9 Try to check the news once or twice a day and turn off notifications** to avoid feeling overwhelmed



ABOUT MIND HK

Mind HK, established as "Mind Mental Health Hong Kong Limited," is a **registered S88 charity (91/16471)** committed to **improving awareness and understanding of mental health in Hong Kong**. We collaborate with other local and international mental health charities and provide online support and training programmes, based on global best practice, to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem and equip them with the resources they need. Through collaborative research, Mind HK is leading the way in understanding mental health problems in the city and providing its population with the right support and resources.

MIND HK'S MISSION AND VISION

- To ensure **everyone in Hong Kong living with a mental health problem has the recognition, support and respect they need to make the best recovery possible**.
- To provide partnership, collaboration, training, innovation and best practice to facilitate the work of all those involved in improving mental health in Hong Kong.
- To lead, promote and support the destigmatisation and transformation of community mental health care so that Hong Kong can become a global leader in the field and a model for other Asian cities.
- To research and audit these strategies and share them internationally.

RELIABLE INFORMATION ON COVID-19

Centre for Health Protection:

<https://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html>

World Health Organisation (WHO):

www.who.int/

If you want to learn more about loneliness, mental well-being and other mental health topics, please visit **our mental health A to Z**:

www.mind.org.hk/mental-health-a-to-z/

COVID-19 Mental Health Tips:

<https://www.mind.org.hk/coronavirusoutbreakmentalhealthtips/>

If you like to learn more on **how to check in on others**, please visit:

www.howokayareyou.com



#HowOkayAreYou

#你有幾OK

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If you are experiencing strong levels of distress or trauma which are interfering with your life, remember that you do not have to face it alone, and that **help is available**.

For emergency support please contact:

- **Emergency hotline:** 999
- **The Samaritans 24-hour hotline (Multi-lingual):** (852) 2896 0000
- **Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only):** (852) 2389 2222
- **Suicide Prevention Services 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only):** (852) 2382 0000
- **More crisis support services can be found here:** mind.org.hk/find-help-now
- **More non-urgent support services can be found here:** mind.org.hk/community-directory/



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