



## Coming Back Together: Managing Anxiety

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an increase in fear for most people. We have had to figure out new ways to keep ourselves, our families, our campus, and our communities safer while going through periods of uncertainty about how the virus works and how to protect ourselves.

***It is completely normal and adaptive to have fear about the impacts of the pandemic and to want to keep ourselves safe.***

Sometimes, our efforts to keep ourselves safe can rev up and get in the way of our functioning. This can look like anxiety. Anxiety is a concern about a perceived fear or anticipating a threat, and this anxiety can be distorted. There is increased anxiety during periods of uncertainty and change. Anxiety as we come back together in fall of 2021 may be:

- a continuation of anxiety from the past or a pattern that predated the pandemic
- exacerbated by the pandemic
- a brand new experience that has come out of the pandemic

There are many types of anxiety that you might notice in yourselves or others. These include:

- **Social Anxiety**  
Example: Thinking about going back to campus and becoming distressingly worried about your ability to have conversations with people that you will see
- **Phobias**  
Example: Fearfulness of and avoidance of small spaces
- **Panic Attacks**  
Example: Someone approaches you quickly and you hyperventilate and feel like you might fall over and pass out.
- **Generalized Anxiety**  
Example: Ruminating about every aspect of your situations such that the worry causes distress

Here are some types of approaches for the increased anxiety you may be experiencing:

- Plan Where You Can. You can't plan for every situation (even though anxiety would like to say that you can), but you can talk to your supervisor about work procedures for returning to campus or visit campus again a few times before your first day so that you can acclimate.
- Tiny Tools For In The Moment. These are quick tools to bring you into the present when anxiety is high. Some examples are focusing on your breathing, saying a comforting statement to yourself, or talking to another person.
- Take Effective Action After your body is calmer, ask yourself what you can do to address the problem and take that action.
- Keeping Up Supportive Practices Practices such as exercise, mindfulness, sleep, and seeing our social groups all help with anxiety. Keep these practices going as you adjust your schedule.

If you find that you would like help in managing your anxiety, you can schedule with one of the counselors at the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). You can make an appointment by emailing [eap@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:eap@austin.utexas.edu) or calling 512-471-3366.