

## **MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT:**

### **The Pandemic & Social Wellness**

Hi Leigh Ann,

At the current point of the pandemic, vaccinations have been rolled out, mask mandates have been lifted and people are brushing shoulders again. But how has the pandemic altered our idea of social wellness after periods of isolation, social distancing, and restrictions on social get togethers?

Social wellness helps people to build supportive relationships, develop a sense of connection, and helps communities more effectively deal with conflict; and while this pandemic touched all our lives differently, it's clear that our general social wellness – and combined mental health – has undergone some serious changes.



## Post Pandemic Social Anxiety

Since the lifting of mask bans and social gatherings, many have reported feeling anxiety in social settings. According to Very Well Mind, a 2021 study found that social anxiety symptoms have significantly increased during the shutdowns. This translates to discomfort around large groups, an inability to keep a conversation flowing or anxiety about new social patterns.

Furthermore, “Rates of social anxiety disorder, school refusal, and agoraphobia increased because of the simple fact that people were isolated and avoided social contact for so long.”

David Spiegel, associate chair of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Stanford School of Medicine and director of the Stanford Center on Stress and Health, notes: “When people start avoiding something, they then associate it as something dangerous or stressful.

We’ve avoided people and places for over a year now. It therefore makes sense that we might associate dating, being with people, eating in a restaurant, or participating in a host of activities as being dangerous or stressful. Our hypervigilance and ambivalence are byproducts of this association.” (Very Well Mind)

It’s no wonder then that the restrictions on social gatherings and distancing rules has resulted in many experiencing social anxiety for the first time in their lives during lockdown and upon returning to society.

The remedy is to slowly become reacclimated to society and re-accustomed to social interactions. Take walks. Get outside the house once a day. Call or text a friend or relative. These small interactions will add up.

If you are suffering from social anxiety, [click here](#) for tips on How to Face Society Again or [here](#) for How to Cope with Social Awkwardness Post Pandemic.

## A Transformed Workplace

When looking at people's behaviors during the pandemic, the boom of the housing market speaks volumes: When people were given the option to work remotely, lost their job or changed employment, they were able to reimagine where they'd like to spend their lives, and many left urban life behind in exchange for rural or suburban lifestyles (BBC).

While earning a big-city salary while living elsewhere may be appealing, the transition from a physical office to virtual life comes at a social cost.

When working in an office or similar establishment, you socialize on a daily basis with co-workers, likely have a daily commute, perhaps share lunch with others, etc. For the remote worker, this might now look like virtual meetings, no workplace socializing, and cooking at home. As more and more people go remote, or enter a hybrid workplace model, our social glue inherently changes.

On the topic of remote working during and post-pandemic, Indranil Roy, Executive Director of Human Capital practice, states "Some lessons learned: we can accomplish most tasks remotely without significant drop in productivity or quality.

Most employees appreciate flexibility, especially those with long commute times. Over time, however, face-to-face interaction is required to facilitate collaboration, build relationships, solve complex challenges and generate ideas.

Continuous remote work extends the work day, diffuses work-life boundaries and reduces mental wellbeing. Given these pros and cons, organisations have to rethink their working arrangements. This re-calibration will eventually settle on a sustainable new normal, likely a hybrid workforce and distributed workplace." (BBC)

From an economic perspective, the pandemic showed us that remote workplaces thrive when there is flexibility and trust, and as we enter a new normal, employees and businesses alike need to be mindful of exercising their social muscles.

If you work remotely and are in need of some tips on how to care for your social wellness, [click here](#) for How to Enhance Your Well-Being When Working Remotely.

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