Good afternoon,

As UHD begins to safely reopen and you prepare to return to campus, the upcoming transition may have you feeling somewhat anxious or stressed. Changes in your current routine, concerns about navigating campus modifications and worries about COVID-19 can affect both your physical and mental health.

To help you successfully transition back to working on campus, please use the following tips to reduce stress and anxiety and ease your return.

**Protect yourself and others**
It is often said the best defense is a good offense. To help protect yourself and others from COVID-19, you can take the following steps to feel more in control while also helping prevent the spread of the virus.

- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water often
- Clean high-touch surfaces regularly
- Wear a face mask where required
- Maintain a six foot distance from others
- Stay home if you are sick

**Manage anxiety and stress**
Returning to campus after being away for a few months inherently brings with it uncertainty, and this uncertainty can cause fear and stress. If you experience these, remember you are not alone. Many are facing the same challenges.

While it is important you practice good hygiene and physical distancing, it is just as important you manage stress and anxiety. Below is a list of basic tips to get you started.

- Take five deep, abdominal breaths at least five times a day
- Download and use a stress-reduction app
- Practice mindfulness
- Implement self-care
- Create a plan for you and your family to manage the transition
- Accept some anxiety and fear is normal
- Look for only credible COVID-19 information
- Take time to unplug from social media and news outlets to avoid information overload
- Seek support from loved ones, friends and colleagues to help you feel less alone
- Eat healthy and avoid over use of alcohol, tobacco and other substances

If you need additional assistance coping with the changes and emotions of returning to campus, you are encouraged to speak with an Employee Assistance Program (UTEAP) specialist for free 24/7 at 713-500-3327. If you are HealthSelect of Texas member, you can also speak to a personal health assistant at 800-252-8039
Monday through Friday 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturday 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. to obtain a list of mental health professionals or learn about virtual mental health visits.

**Embrace the return to structure**

Odds are your telecommuting workday routine is quite different than when you were working on campus. Most likely you’ve slipped into workdays with less structure. Returning to your old routine can be comforting but the change could also affect both your physical and mental health. To help lessen this effect, it’s important you get back to your campus work routine while still at home. Practice your old routine at least a few days before returning to campus, if not sooner.

- Wake up at your normal time
- Bathe at the same time as before
- Dress for the office
- Follow your on-campus daily schedule/timeline
- Reflect on your telecommuting time to see if you’ve picked up beneficial habits that can transition to on-campus work

**Get sleep and boost your immunity**

Getting enough sleep really is as important as we keep hearing. It is easy to dismiss the benefits when you really want to binge one more episode of a favorite show. However, now that commute time will be part of your day again, it is even more important you work to get enough sleep. A healthy night’s sleep of at least seven hours can improve your mood and reduce the amount of anxiety you experience.

When you combine healthy sleep with exercise and good nutrition, you also boost your immune system.

**Work on having a flux mindset**

A flux mindset is where you make plans but also assume those plans can and will change. With all of the uncertainty of returning to campus, nothing is concrete. However, by having a flux mindset you position yourself to be flexible enough to adapt to changes when they happen. Having a flux mindset doesn’t mean not making plans, but getting used to rolling with things when those plans change. This mindset can help reduce stress and anxiety.

**Prepare your family and pets**

Changes to your routine and absence from home can be tough on your loved ones and pets. It is possible your family will experience, to some degree, a level of separation anxiety when you return to campus. When this happens, you may see clinginess, depression, whining, etc. from those you love.

When you experience these behaviors, it is easy to get frustrated and upset. Instead, take a moment to understand the root of those behaviors. To help lessen the effects of separation anxiety, prepare your family, including your pets, for the transition with small changes to your routine.

- Simulate your on-campus work routine (see “Embrace the return to structure” section above)
- Spend time away from your family and pets in advance so they can get used to you leaving
- Adjust mealtimes and family time to match pre-telecommuting schedules
- Have a talk with your family about your return to campus to discuss the changes

Once you return to campus:
• Visit with your family/pet through a call or video call at least once throughout the workday
• Provide extra attention to your family and pets when you return home
• For pets, leave the television or radio on while you are away
• Be patient with your loved ones’ behaviors while they adjust to the transition

Explore accommodations and leaves
If you have issues with returning to campus, please speak with your supervisor to resolve your concerns. If a solution is not available through your supervisor, I encourage you to contact UHD’s Benefits Unit at Benefits@uhd.edu to discuss leaves and accommodations that may be available to you.

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