

Not ready for post-pandemic mingling? Expert offers tips to ease anxiety

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While some people may be ready and eager to reconnect with family and friends at social gatherings post-pandemic, it's OK to feel apprehensive.

As [restrictions](#) loosen because [infection rates](#) are plummeting and more people are getting vaccinated, many people are experiencing feelings

that they didn't expect—such as anxiety about returning to [social situations](#), according to a psych services expert.

"For some people, these changes are exciting, and for other people, they're daunting," said Dr. Itai Danovitch, chair of the department of psychiatry and behavioral neurosciences at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles.

It's normal to struggle with change, even when it's positive, Danovitch said. After so many months spent at home, returning to the workplace or attending a family barbecue can cause many to feel worried, anxious or even panicked.

"Fear or anxiety is normal," he said in a center news release. "We feel things for a reason, and anxiety is basically a threat response."

These feelings will vary from person to person. Even one individual's perception may change from day to day.

It is possible to work through these feelings, Danovitch said. He suggests that people take the time before a social event to think about exactly what parts of the upcoming interaction make them anxious, then strategize about what they can do to work through their concerns.

"Think about what factors are within your control," Danovitch said. "For example, if you have concerns about an upcoming event or a gathering, talk to the host about those concerns early. Get the information you need to make a decision about your comfort level, and don't be afraid to communicate that decision."

This may mean having to limit the time spent at a social gathering or even declining an invitation.

"We need to have honest conversations with each other," Danovitch said. "It takes a certain amount of bravery and courage to do that, to be honest about how you feel, because there's risk of being misunderstood."

These feelings aren't always a sign of an anxiety disorder, he said. They may just be trepidation or shyness that will be alleviated over time.

That's not the case when anxiety and fear cause dysfunction, impairment or severe distress. For those who struggle with [social anxiety](#) to the point where it impedes their lives, Danovitch recommends talking to a primary care provider about care and treatment options.

"For example, if you're so anxious about returning to work, which is a [social setting](#), that you're not coming into work at all," he said, "if you are having recurrent panic attacks, or if your [anxiety](#) is persistent, pervasive and affecting your function, then it makes good sense to seek professional help. Anxiety disorders are very common, and there are a number of effective treatments available to address them."

More information: The Anxiety & Depression Association of America has more on [social anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

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