



With restrictions slowly lifting and life slowly returning to some kind of normal, we are once again met with uncertainty and more social change. It is important to think about how we will re-engage and re-integrate with our family, friends, work, and communities. Some thought and preparation now can ease anxiety and help us feel more hopeful for the future.

We have heard that some of our families have actually found cocooning at home a socially acceptable way to avoid situations they found anxiety provoking. We would then expect that an end to social isolation will be accompanied by a sharp increase in anxiety. Others have found being at home offered a sense of safety and certainty at a time when much was changing.

According to research, it appears likely the psychological effects of quarantine is going to be wide-ranging, substantial and could be long lasting. We have witnessed increases in anxiety and depression amongst our Gidget clients. There may have been more family conflicts, fears of infection, more disturbing dreams, frustration and boredom, more anxiety in our older children who lost their anchoring of the school environment and much less support for new parents.

For families with toddlers and pre-schoolers, we have also noticed increases in behavioural issues which is understandable. This is the way they communicate with us and tell us how they are feeling especially as they cannot articulate it, they often act it out for all to see. Just as home isolation can be stressful for adults, young children can struggle as they adjust to changes in routine and losses of outside activities that they cannot fully comprehend. This is an additional stress for parents.

The environmental constraints we have had to deal with were enormous – something most of us had never experienced before. It has been

unchartered territory. There were financial losses, medical issues, psychological struggles amongst other stresses. These might have added up to one of the most challenging times in your life.

### WHAT TO DO NOW:

The long-term effects of all these losses and implications of COVID-19 will not be known for a long time. A lot of the distress we are feeling is a normal human response to a severe crisis. In the short term though, acknowledging and accepting these feelings can help ease the intensity and prevent them from getting worse. You can work out ways you feel comfortable engaging again, and who to start seeing again and take it at your own pace. Everyone will do this differently and there is no right or wrong way.

Another strategy is to set realistic goals to challenge those worries in a gradual way: give yourself time to adjust but also face the anxiety provoking situations (avoid avoidance) – baby steps.

Whilst it might be early to discuss post-traumatic transformation and silver linings, there are definitely ways we can reflect on what is important to us and what we actually enjoyed in this time of physical isolation and see if we can continue to do those things. You can think about what sparked joy, what filled your cup, and what doesn't serve you anymore. The air might be cleaner, the earth certainly benefitted, you may have had new opportunities to set new routines, felt more appreciative, focused on what really mattered to you. Now could be time for a re-fresh.

Once the initial shock and pain has subsided, research into post traumatic growth (about 1/3 of people go through this process after a trauma) →



# fact sheet

## RE-ENGAGING AS COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS LIFT



SELF-CARE TIP RE-INTEGRATION\_18.5.20

shows that people and communities valued relationships more, lived life to the fullest each day, had an increase in compassion to others, set new goals and felt more connected. This of course varied person to person and doesn't always happen. It does however highlight the fact that we can view this difficult period as a time to reflect on our lives and think about how we would like to move forward.

Now is a great time to re-asses and plan for how you might like life to look. Can you work differently, reduce commuting, deliver more teleconference meetings or have you had enough of these type of meetings (teleconference fatigue)? Can you spend more time playing with your children, slow down the pace of life a bit? Walk with your partners more? See how you can keep the things that you enjoyed. It could have been new things you added to your life or old friends you re-connected with or some neighbours you didn't know before.

Maybe your partner now has a more accurate view of what daily life is like looking after a baby!

Identify what is important to you now and change some of your old routines – or perhaps you are craving some of the old habits that gave you security and pleasure. You might just like to resume what you used to do and keep it that simple. Maybe you have more coping skills now. Maybe you tried something new that you felt good about.

The key is to work out what needs to change, if anything, and how you can work towards that. Keep in contact with those you love, increase that physical connection that we all missed and be open to what the next stage brings. Take it slowly if you need to. Eat and sleep well and allow time to heal. These are still difficult times. Be generous and kind to yourself, and others. If it is all too overwhelming, then reach out for support. We are ready for you at Gidget Foundation Australia. 🌸



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Gidget Foundation Australia exists to promote the importance of emotional wellbeing among expectant and new parents, their healthcare providers and the wider community to ensure that those in need receive timely, appropriate and supportive care.