



Employers are starting to ask employees to return to the office as states change their respective “Stay at Home” requirements. For the majority of employees, increased stress, anxiety, fear, and depression have been present to varying degrees during the pandemic. Now, returning to work raises additional challenges.

Health psychology concerns include, worry about physical safety, fear that germs (viruses) have increased, distrust of others’ hygiene and state of health, wanting to withdraw from the world and stay at home (this is not agoraphobia, the Japanese call it hikikomori), and a general hyper-vigilance.

### **What can employees do to manage their psychological concerns?**

1. If you are anxious or fearful, ask yourself if it is disproportionate, and am I overreacting? You may or may not be, by the way, depending on the objective information about your workplace. If you are concluding you may be overreacting, how have you coped successfully before and how have you stayed healthy so far?
2. Some of us feel hopeless or like we have no control. What can you take control of? For example:
  - Make sure you have personal protective equipment (PPE), don’t just rely on your employer.
  - Take steps to ensure you and your colleagues still maintain physical distance (6 feet).
  - Stay home if you have symptoms, ask your supervisor to ask colleagues with symptoms to leave work.
  - Take charge of cleaning your personal work area as often as you need each day. Bring your own sanitizing supplies as back up in case your employer’s supply runs out.
  - Use virtual meetings, email, messaging, and phone calls rather than in-person meetings as much as you can in the office to minimize exposure to others respiration.
3. For both depression and anxiety, take control by moving your body through walking or exercising outside. This will help your immune system and overall health. In addition, it helps create brain chemistry changes that are good for you.
4. Make good use of all the free apps for relaxation and meditation sessions that are available. Research is clear that these are good modalities for reducing stress, anxiety, and managing aspects of depression.
5. Seek mental health help. Take full advantage of your employer’s benefits. Your EAP with MINES is free to you! (1-800-873-7138) You can do your sessions virtually through phone, video, or message-based (text) modalities. Remember, you also get wellness coaching, work/life, legal/financial, and unlimited resources through your online PersonalAdvantage.

## What can employers do to help employees manage their psychological concerns?

A recent SHRM article (Kathy Gurchief, May 11, 2020) suggested the following:

1. Prioritize mental health in your benefits plan and remind employees of offers that may be helpful.
2. Communicate, stay in touch, make sure they feel heard, cared about, and supported.
3. Check-in with them, ask how they are doing.
4. Do everything you can to ensure they have PPE supplies.
5. Enforce physical distance, minimize face-to-face meetings, reduce time in common areas and require masks, support frequent hand washing, use your virtual technology for meetings in the office; use texting, instant messaging, video, and telephonic communication methods.

If you or a household member are experiencing any stress, anxiety, or hardships, or would like to talk about any fears you have about returning to work, please remember that your employee assistance program is here for you. MINES counselors are experienced and available. We offer counseling with licensed mental health professionals via telephone, video, and online text/message-based platforms.

**The EAP is available 24/7 at 800-873-7138 or visit [www.minesandassociates.com](http://www.minesandassociates.com)**

For more resources related to COVID-19 and remote working please click [here](#).

You can also access up-to-date information by logging into your PersonalAdvantage account [here](#). Look for the news alert banner on the top of the page for resources including more tips and news sources with live updates.