

COPING WITH COVID: WAYS TO ADJUST TO YOUR NEW NORMAL

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Thank you all for joining us today for Coping with COVID: Ways to Adjust to Your New Normal. I'd like to now introduce our presenter, Melanie Kaplan. Melanie Kaplan is a licensed clinical social worker who is an FOH EAP Consultant serving a multitude of agencies in the Philadelphia region. As a clinician in the field of mental health for over 25 years, Melanie has worked in a variety of different settings providing individual and group counseling, case management, oncology social work and crisis intervention. We're excited to have her with us today to acknowledge our collective perspective of living through a pandemic and share tips and tricks of surviving the ups and downs. And with that, I'll turn it over to Melanie to begin the presentation.

Thank you and welcome everybody. Thank you so much for joining us this afternoon. Coping with COVID, Ways to Adjust to Your New Normal. Let's get started. There is no disputing the fact that since the beginning of the pandemic over two years ago we have undergone changes to the way we work, attend school, have fun, spend time with loved ones, view setbacks and handle stress. It's been a wake-up call to her sources of strength and flexibility in we've gained a newfound appreciation for things we may have taken for granted. Today this has left many of us feeling a bit turned upside down or sideways on how we could live each day alongside feeling a sense of repaired this for what may lie ahead. Despite the feeling of being in limbo and the stress and anxiety that comes with it, we've discovered new ways to make the best of our individual experiences. We will discuss all of the ups and downs and most importantly how to gain control over what we can do how we choose to face each day. With building greater resilience know we can be more apt to thrive during current and future challenges. Let's take a look at what else we will be covering today.

Here is an overview of the different topics. We will be defining what it means for something to be considered a traumatic event and how it applies to what we have experienced today. There have been some unique reactions that we've had that come up quite often in many will identify with and also it's kind of disrupt did the usual ways of coping. We will go over anxiety and understand why it has risen so much and what is the connection. We will go over strategies for building resilience, reducing stress and daily practices to improve overall well-being.

A collective traumatic event. So, the COVID pandemic has been a devastating and disrupt the force on life as we once knew it. As though everyone six variances different call of us have been collectively affected in some way and that is what is pretty unique about the pandemic. The entire world was in the same bow of experiencing its effect. In a very sudden way, so, you might be wondering is what we've all been living through actually considered a traumatic event or a trauma? Have we been traumatized X although the pandemic has been extremely different

because it was not just a clear, single life altering event, rather it was a chain of events. There is emerging research that demonstrates that the very reactions reflect what would be considered symptoms of experiencing the trauma. No matter how mild or severe the effects way on us and to that end let's look at the characteristics of what we would normally consider a traumatic event. So, here you can see characteristics and typical reactions. As we review the care there is sticks and trades it's understandable why the pandemic has in fact been a traumatic event. So, this of course causes shock, fear, distress and major involuntary change, while this certainly was a change that was quite sudden and highly disrupt Dave. Everything came to a stop, a new reality took over and for most of us home became the working center of working, leisure and everything in between. Feelings of loss, and unanticipated and intense feeling. Of course there were actual losses that includes the death of loved ones, but, there were also losses of things that we normally didn't even think twice about the things in our lives that were natural. And of course, that deep uncertainty. Uncertainty was and remains a constant theme. In many ways we still don't know what might happen next in so many aspects of our lives became one big question mark. As you look at the typical reactions, those are also what we are experiencing and what we did experience over the past couple years and some of us still today and headaches and maybe some emotional and psychological effects and sat her helpless. Foreseeable recovery timelines so, again that's what we typically see in traumatic events, we have a framework based on past experiences in terms of the length of time that we typically experience and recover from an exposure to a traumatic or stressful event. Over time they tend to feed and some DIMMs begin to improve but COVID is different with multiple stressors occurring in waves over a period of time with no predictable end in sight so in the case of the pandemic we don't have a project double timeline. And this has certainly been present altered capacity to cope with stress is something that lingers and you may feel as though life is lost the meaning and what happens if your symptoms continue long after the event without a clear ending which is what we have experienced. Pandemic specific reactions. Here are some examples. So examples of new common recurring themes have emerged, labeling and understanding these effects help us to make meaning, gain understanding make sense of what happened and helps us become more self-aware and whether the road ahead. So we are going over these in more detail so it might seem that were looking back I were taking a cook trip back in time. But it's important to know that for many we are still experiencing variations of the reactions today because it appears that COVID is here to stay and so will the unpredictable folding of the directions that it takes and the first one is the idea of a depletion of surge capacity, we heard about this earlier in the pandemic and as humans we are wired with what's called the stress response that delivers short bursts or surges of emergency repaired miss going to crisis management mode. The adrenaline is high and we operate with a sense of purpose and focus on solutions and drawn the response for short-term survival. But, it has limits and wants depleted it needs time to replenish and renew. During the pandemic we reached surge capacity and yet the emergency phase just dragged on and became these rolling waves of stress. So, we eventually became fatigued and overwhelmed and may have felt hopeless. We were depleted, our search capacity was depleted so this was something new.. Dealing with multiple losses. And so, of course there were many losses that we experienced over time and continue in death of loved ones, family friends but that's one of the biggest losses in the loss of familiar routines like going to work, the gym, the movies and loss of traditional rituals and celebrations, gatherings, loss of our sense of safety loss of trust in our

community but mainly it became difficult because it was a loss of the go to coping strategies that we normally turn to like spending time with friends or attending church, those things were taken away early in the pandemic. Now thankfully that is not the case anymore but, over time just having multiple losses, it affects us.

So, this is not new but, for many of us it's a bad habit that was formed during the pandemic. It was named as one of the best of the year that best reflects the mood or occupation of the year with lasting cultural significance. So why do we do this? Why do we torture ourselves in this way. Maybe, there are different reasons, it may be a compulsive need to try to just get answers when we are afraid. We're seeking facts and we are seeking justification for our behaviors, then we plan, based on that. When we feel threatened we have a tendency to scan and assess the level of danger So, wanting to take in all that information that helps us to assess that. There is also an interesting theory that when witness from the safety of your own home it can actually be calming and reinforcing to view negative news. Finally there's just a human fascination element and we just can't seem to look away, our eyes are drawn to the train wreck and the dumpster fires and then for some reason we feel the need to scroll through the comments and we just can't stop. So, developing an awareness of this habit and the time spent doing it is the first step towards making a change. It is not easy. It is something that it's a compulsive need and once we start doing it's very difficult and it's very difficult to stop. All of the negative reporting, the negative media is designed that way, the job is to keep us watching and keep us engaged in they know it's hard to turn that off. It's not entirely our fault.

Pandemic flux syndrome. To be in a state of flux is one that is constantly changing. Last summer this term of pandemic flux syndrome was floating around after the emergence of the new Delta variant which followed a period of real up to visit after the vaccines came out and we returned to normal and we can remove our masks and then we are hit with this Delta variant. So because of this disappointment and the realization that there wouldn't be a clear ending or the delineation of a fresh start which is just as important as an ending, many of us felt numb, confused, restless, bored. This is a time that people header just to make life changes like move or change jobs and others felt debilitated and a feeling of being disoriented and conflicted and eager to socialize again but then not experiencing the joy they had hoped after reuniting with others. It's been a little all over the place, the feelings of whiplash.

This is not a clinical term but it was someone who coined the phrase during that summer. It's pretty accurate.

Then COVID social anxiety. Many of us lived in variations of a bubble which was easier for some than others. Some didn't mind it summit was much more difficult. But, many have had and continue to have difficulty with the merging back into being social again and out of the bubble. Smalltalk, seeing people's faces and having spontaneous conversations. And they were out of practice and the brains were working harder which can be tiresome. It can make us tired. We are out of social shape. People are noticing best so this is very much true today, people are noticing after spending time socializing with friends they need to go home, retreat, withdraw and rest, it's

something about it that's exhausting. Many of also found that there being much more selective with making plans and not doing it is often it's also related to how we spend our free time.

I work with the client the other day who used to make plans every Saturday night, it's every other weekend and she values the time at home and she knows that the weekends need to be balanced with some quiet time for solitary time with family.

Decision fatigue So, this is the feeling when you are overly stressed or overwhelmed by the endless number of decisions that he had to make throughout the day. You can see on the slide all the different examples and different decisions we are faced with, even for those of us who are not over thinkers had difficulty here because we were tasked with making so many decisions on a daily basis and then making up our own rules and then changing our minds which is exhausting. The number of choices outweighed the brainpower to make them and that S to wanting to procrastinate or avoid making decisions impulsively, that's a result of decision fatigue and, I think a lot of these dues still continue today, they are certainly back and forth, especially like this one, do I need to wear a mask? And did I already wear that mask, can I wear it again? Should I throw it away? It goes on and on. And then finally, languishing. This is been described as the mood of 2021 feeling blah and on the spectrum of well-being, on one and we have depression and on the other end is flourishing as the peak. Languishing lies somewhere in the middle and it's characterized by apathy, sense of restlessness, feeling unsettled or an overall disinterest in the things that bring you joy. This term first appeared in the New York Times article by an organizational psychologist, Adam Grant, and I'm sure a lot of you side, there's a name and it's called languishing for having the label to describe the feeling and knowing we weren't alone was really powerful and it brought relief for many of us. This was the Arctic calls most read story in the most saved Arctic across all platforms. So, this brings us to the next section about anxiety.

So another common theme is this overall rise in anxiety that's absolutely true but it's important to define what is anxiety? Here you see some definitions, it's characterized by feelings of tension, physical changes, it's a fear of nervousness about what might happen, stress or uneasiness caused by fear, danger or misfortune all definitions of anxiety.. It's just some statistics demonstrating the rise in the numbers, it's pretty obvious here. So, the rates of anxiety were about four times higher between April 2020-August 2021 than they were in 2019. Just last month and a row, the U.S. preventive services task force came out with the new recommendation of the children and adolescents between ages 8-18 B screen for anxiety it's not just adults it affects children, also. So, even before the pandemic we've always lived with uncertainty, on a daily basis but the drastic ongoing changes in the lack of knowing the direction where we were headed and the real threats to our health and our safety have made this time a particular breeding ground for anxiety. And uncertainty is unnatural and an unavoidable part of life. We've been shown over time how life can change very quickly and be unpredictable. Now, most think of anxiety as a problem or an emotional state to avoid or get rid of an indication that something is wrong or broken because it's uncomfortable. But, it's actually an important signal and it's a biological alarm system that we all have. It's a response to a perceived threat, it's a prediction so it may be a true alarm or may be a false alarm or imagined but if it's real it most

certainly helps us to survive and when it's imagined we think it's our way of protecting ourselves or eliminating the feeling of being out of control.

So, when we think about all the changes from the pandemic with the stops and starts and more and more questions over time and we understand why anxiety levels went up and continue to be high. Just to take a look at distinguishing the different degrees of anxiety, as I said, we shouldn't always assume it's a problem, so is it the traits, estate or disorder? And so if anxiety can be part of someone's personality and they just function that way, for example, I'd like to get to the airport two hours early, sometimes even more, I'm someone who never allows my gas tank to go below half a tank. So, it doesn't impact their life, they just need to do this. It might be annoying to other family members that live with them but it's a trait, part of the personality. A stay is a temporary condition of anxiety being experienced for a short period of time and that could be feeling nervous about going out to the office, your stomach feels queasy, you couldn't sleep last night because you're thinking about sitting in traffic and leaving your son with a babysitter. That's being in an anxious state but a disorder is a condition that is disruptive to daily life, so it's excessive worrying with physical symptoms lasting more than six months. So where does this leave us? We've moved forward in so many ways but the effects continue to linger and we are faced with other ongoing life events, stresses in our world, in our communities and we do still have COVID that's not going away. Resilience.

Okay, defining resilience. You might be thinking, not again with the resilience. We have heard this term over and over, it's a buzzword that is just constantly talked about but it's become pretty clear that how to become more resilient as one of the most valuable tools that we can all be reminded of. So, just to remind you again of what it is, it's the human ability to adapt in the face of difficult situations and it's also the ability to recover or adjust easily to misfortune or change. Notice I didn't say that it's bouncing back because it's not bouncing back, you're bouncing forward when you're resilient. Were not going back to how things work you're able to get through it and continue with the next chap. So here's some points about this during the pandemic and beyond.. There are so many benefits to prove our resilience, these are the skills that help us to deal with all kinds of challenges whether they are short-lived, sudden or ongoing, so think of that as part of the toolkit for navigating through life. It's the ultimate life hack. Some people are naturally more resilient or they've had previous life experiences that strengthen the abilities but anyone can put forth effort to improve and experience the benefit of this important skill and it helps regain our sense of control and improve focus and moves the reaction to the various reactions. So, I'm just gonna go over some strategies for improving the resilience. The first one is being change your perspective and reframe your thoughts.

Acknowledging and defining the situation before you can adjust to the way that you are viewing a situation, you need to accept that it's happening. It doesn't mean that you agree with it, it of course may not be so easily defined and may be too painful to fully process. Our brain sometimes go into self preservation mode by numbing us are creating a sense of detachment but acceptance is a key step forward to steering your way through whatever you are facing.

Self-awareness is important, taking a step back assessing, am I thinking clearly? You may be selectively filtering information are only seeing certain aspects of it while ignoring others, these are examples of what we call thinking traps. We are all guilty of it. Just becoming aware of this distorted way of seeing things is a step towards reframing or shifting your overall per

Of and mindset. You want the mindset to be one of realistic up to Ms. him, which is a general attitude that things will work out without denying the fact that things are difficult or upsetting. It's an awareness that things will change, that the circumstances are temporary and that both of those things to be aware of will help you with that attitude. You may have heard about the dangers of toxic positivity of forced optimism, that's not what were talking about that it's not a mindset that oversimplifies things, it can deny dark emotions or minimization or invalidation of real human emotional acts variance. So realistic up to Ms. him, it's not about being naïve to the realities, it allows you to view opportunities for growth without problems. Within problems. Some strategies for improving resilience. The next one is take action. So, once you take a step back and view the big picture, then you have to ask what can I do and you break things down into smaller steps, you ask what choices do I have what is out of my control and what is in my control? Don't get stuck in your anger about what's out of your control? You have to move past that and realize that there are things you can do. What can I try to influence or make an effort towards changing? An example of that, I had a client who was very angry about teleworking and he couldn't accept that this is what he was going to have to do for a long period of time in his house was completely disorganized. He was unable to make it work and we broke it down and he realized he has no control over the fact that this is happened and a decision has been made but what can he control to make it better. Changing his workspace and making adjustments to the structure of his day. That's just a small example of moving past the anger and what's out of your control. And the next strategy is maintaining relationships and staying connected. Staying connected to others is extremely important and we want to seek out support and avoid isolation. Sometimes we need to seek out new connections with people in similar situations. As you see here, we are feeling like this together and it's invaluable to being able to collaborate with other people facing the same challenges or maybe had a similar situation in the past. Don't be afraid to ask for help. And, it's also a time, and again and it's not just during facing a challenge but make sure that you continue with efforts with your friendships, relationships with family members, we have friends for different reasons. We have some friends that we just laugh with, some are good listeners and they comfort us, some are direct and purely -- brutally honest and so on. So not every friend is going to help you solve your problem but even just not being alone and sharing an enjoyable experience and having company will help you and make you a more resilient person.

Reserving a sense of purpose and meaning. So, whatever the circumstances are it doesn't have to define you. It's important to just find things that are meaningful. It might be something within the context of the stretcher situation like helping others, collecting donations. It can also be that maybe joining up prayer group were also just part of your daily routine to do things that give you a sense of connectedness to something greater or outside of yourself to spending time in nature or small acts of kindness. And finally, self-care. So, we've heard a great deal about the importance of self-care and just as a daily practice, so this is really a way to frontload ourselves for navigating challenges and learning to recognize the stress looks different on everybody, some

hold it in certain muscle groups and others might have appetite changes or mood changes but knowing when you're particularly stressed, pick up your response time to practice the self-care strategies.

Balanced living practices, taking care of your body, and what you eat matters. Although stress eating and cravings for comfort food is a real physiological process, we can still pay attention and be purposeful about our diet. I always tell people, in moderation and you can always make good choices. And it's easier said than done but it's directly linked to physical, mental health the ability to problem solve and it helps with memory. Practicing creativity and whether it's gardening or painting or dancing, doing a house project, those are all examples of using your creativity to put yourself in that state of flow which is being completely immersed in an activity with full attention. And finally, exercising we are all familiar with the multiple benefits of exercising, not just on the physical health and on a sense of well-being. Walking became particularly common during the pandemic because the gyms were closed and it's a way to get out of the home and a lot of people have continued with that habit which is wonderful. If you can walk outdoors in nature, even with a friend that is even better.

In addition to building resilience it's also important to improve your overall sense of well-being or level of happiness because it does offer protection from the negative aspects of challenges. There's been a great deal of research on happiness, their courses at Harvard now on the science of happiness, there's been this kind of explosion and revolution of research that is happened and it's all really interesting. Three of the things in the research, three simple habits that you can add to your daily life that will contribute to better overall well-being are mindfulness, gratitude and laughter.

So, talking about mindfulness. Here are some definitions on the slide. So, when you are practicing mindfulness, you are living in the now and it's essentially about being more aware and awake in every moment. It's about intentionally paying attention and acknowledging the sensations that you feel and what you observed with all your senses and noticing your thoughts. It involves except since, meaning we pay attention to our thoughts and our feelings without judging them or believing there is a right or wrong way to think or feel at a given time. Our thoughts tune into the present moment rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future. Whenever you bring awareness to what you are directly experiencing with your senses are to your state of mind you are being mindful and it sounds pretty simple, how can actually help you? Here are some benefits of mindfulness, again, being present. One practice regularly, research has shown that people have observed that the way that they handle stressful interactions or situations slows down, so rather than impulsively reacting they are more thoughtful and responsive. In other words, mindfulness helps put space between ourselves and our reactions. Studies have shown that practicing mindfulness causes changes in the structure of our brains to learning, memory, emotional regulation and empathy. So you may notice that by practicing mindfulness on a regular basis you feel calmer and more patient.

There are a lot of ways that you can practice mindfulness and one is mindfulness meditation. There's a lot of misconceptions about mindfulness meditation. There's a book called 10% happier

by Dan Harris, he's a former ABC news anchor and describes himself as a fidgety skeptic. The book is his autobiographical journey to discovering mindfulness and meditation. He talks about that when meditation was first suggested to him he pictured himself seated in an unbearable crosslegged position in a room with smug practitioners reading bells and with crystals but later states that meditation has really bad PR so, his version was pretty extreme. But, if you are listening today and you are cringing when you hear the word meditation, it is actually pretty simple and just to give you an idea in a nutshell, during mindfulness meditation, you devote a short period of time, even 3 to 5 minutes, seated comfortably, not crosslegged, in a chair. You will be free of all distractions and you focus your attention on your breath and the sensation of breathing in and out normally. Yes, you will have thoughts that run through your mind and the part of meditating is becoming aware of having a thought and letting it pass. Turn your focus back to your breathing. Now, the goal of mindfulness meditation is not to clear your mind, that is definitely a misconception. Acknowledging that you're having thoughts and returning focused year breath as part of the actual practice and not a problem to overcome so that one day the real meditation can start.

In his book, Dan Harris explains that when you go through this cycle of feeling the breath, losing focus and then hauling yourself back that you build your mindfulness muscle the way a dumbbell curl build your biceps and it gives a good example of this. There's other ways to practice mindfulness, even just in everyday activities like walking, eating, drinking, you can take something called mindful walking where you focus on the physical sensations of your body while moving like the souls of your fee or the bending of your knees, even eating and drinking. You allow yourself to eat very slowly and fully experience the taste and the textures and sensation of chewing and the feeling of fullness. There are a lot of ways to practice mindfulness.

Gratitude. Here is a definition of gratitude that reflects the deep appreciation for what we value, what brings meanings to our lives and what makes us feel connected. While gratitude is an emotion, if we want to experience its full power we have to make it a practice. Practicing gratitude lots of benefits and it helps widen our perspective and we look at things more broadly and increases positivity and well-being, improves our confidence and relationships with others. When we increase our awareness and we acknowledge the good things in micro pleasures and blessings in our lives, especially during times of uncertainty, gratitude practice can be a stabilizer. Gratitude has been a hot topic and in the past 15 years there have been hundreds of studies documenting the social, physical and psychological benefits.

Practicing gratitude, so anyone can practice gratitude. There is always something to be grateful for. It's not about just giving thanks for something that happened to you. It doesn't have to be direct it towards a person or a reward, it could be something you observed or experienced that was peaceful and joyful. You may experience gratitude even in just taking the first sip of coffee in the morning or while you are laughing with the baby or listening to a favorite song or cuddling with your dog. Maybe you've received good news from a friend so gratitude journaling is a really good tool and you'll actually be writing these things down and write down three things that you're grateful for and try to make the something new, something that actually occurred rather than just saying I'm grateful for my health and my family, you gonna reflect on the day. And you

kind of re-train your brain to scan for the positive. You start to pay attention to things as they are happening throughout the day, and then you think all I can write this in my gratitude journals. So that's what you mean when you say you become a greater participant in your life and, finally writing just thank you notes or expressing appreciation, emails or text on a daily basis is another great way to practice gratitude.

Laughter. So, this is my favorite tip, I saved the best for last. Humor is a big deal in my family. In my family we laugh all the time and my father is somewhat of a local celebrity in a silly area, he's known for telling jokes on his radio ad for his business. On the door of his store the welcome sign reads, a small family business, nobody over 5'6".

Nothing works faster or is more dependable to bring your mind and body back in balance than a good laugh. It lightens your burdens and inspires hope, connects you to others, keeps you focused and alert. There is growing research about the positive effects on our health. We hear so much about stress being bad for our health. It causes inflammation, too much cortisol has negative impacts. Laughter has the opposite effect and we rarely hear about this but it can counteract unwanted burdens of stress. There's lots of amazing things that happened in our bodies that involve the releasing of the feel-good chemicals or endorphins that counteract and get rid of the cortisol. So, as a result, laughter boost our immune system, lowers stress hormones, decreases pain, relaxes our muscles, improves core health. And it breaks the tension in moments that just become too much for us. You can think of scenes in movies, the funeral and's deal magnolias this happened. Some will argue that it's a defense mechanism or way of avoiding some and that we don't want to face, but whether or not that is true, in some cases, the goal is to recognize the value that the humor brings in actually laughing.

During the pandemic there was a recognition of humor even as horrific things were happening. We saw memes, jokes and silliness. There were opportunities to recognize some of the absurdity in our circumstances. And, humor during dark times is not new and there are examples throughout history. Some things will never be funny, but knowing that you can give yourself permission to laugh is really important to remember.

So, while laughter is a tool during challenging times, a little off topic here, it's really about laughing purposefully every day. So let's get back to this idea of making it a daily habit. How do we do that? It's different for everybody because different things make different people laugh. There are ideas listed here of ways to laugh in a purposeful and planned way, rather than relying on it to spontaneously happen during the day, you have to make it something that you do deliberately. So, of course connecting with friends, playing games, time with pets, watching comedy, watching clips on YouTube and TV shows and movies, clips with standup comedians. On YouTube there are some really good videos called try not to laugh. You are actually viewing people watching funny things and they are trying not to laugh. For some reason watching others that are trying to hold back her laughter and then watching them lose it and crack up it's very funny and that's why watching bloopers make us laugh, especially news bloopers because you know the newscasters are really trying to hold it together, maybe somebody made a mistake and eventually they can't stop and they lose it. And they break character because they start laughing.

That laughter is contagious and you will start laughing when you're watching other people laugh. And then there's laughter yoga and groups. I and just remember not to take yourself too seriously. And you can make anything funny, just different senses of humor, slapstick or deadpan or sarcasm, it's just a matter of finding what makes you laugh.

So now we have a whole question. So the question is what are some positive changes that have occurred in your life due to the pandemic?

All right, before I open the poll, I'd like to point out that this does have multiple answers with many different options so if you're not able to see the questions and responses in their entirety, drag the entire column of panels to expand them. The columns within the polling panel can also be adjusted by using the horizontal and vertical scrollbars. Let me go ahead and open this poll now.

I'm just gonna read over the answers of what are some of the positive changes. Enjoy more quality time with partner and kids. Reevaluate priorities. Work on home projects. Spent more time outdoors. Adopted better sleep habits. Gain more control over time. And over my child's education.

Very great, there's two seconds left in the poll question will close .

Just one moment I'm gonna show the results.

They should be showing now. Second sounds like enjoy more quality time with partner and kids, not surprising, reevaluated priorities. Goes to the top ones and not surprising because especially, again early in the pandemic that was time that people never had out of the usual busyness of day-to-day, working in sports, that was enjoyable for people. I'm really glad to hear that

Okay, there have been positive effects on the pandemic and it's important to recognize that the facts as we move forward, there are always silver linings amidst the sadness, angst, the confusion and the chaos, there were also new discoveries and reevaluation of our lives and prioritizing what was most important. A reset of how people wanted their lives to look moving forward, people became really resourceful, a lot of people started their own businesses they had fun dancing on tiktok and they learned new skills and a lot of them got into baking, cooking, many appreciated being able to spend more time as we saw with family during the shutdown and have continued with the efforts for family dinners and game nights, which is great. People also found ways to connect virtually. Increased awareness in mental health and the rapid development of tele-head telehealth medicine were positive changes. You can see on the side here some really good positive changes as well.

Feeling better equipped to handle challenges. When we do look back we realize how far we've come and how well we did. At the beginning we thought will never be able to do this, look where we are now.

So, just in summary, this pandemic has been a collective of continuously changing and it can affect people differently but it has resulted in unique reactions in different ways of coping. Uncertainty is directly linked to anxiety. Learning ways to become more resilient can be really helpful and developing the three habits to raise the level of happiness mindfulness, gratitude and laughter, talk to someone who's gonna make you laugh every day. They hope to create beneficial changes that are really good for your help and it helps with your resilience and your day-to-day participation and sense of presence and enjoyment. Here are some resources and you will be getting a more complete list. Of course I did recommend that 10% happier book by Dan Harris that I referenced earlier, it's an easy read. It's funny and it does a really good job of explaining mindfulness and meditation. There is a good article on laughter and some science and interesting things that happen to the article goes a little bit more into that and I love podcasts. Podcasts are great if you take a walk outside. There are so many great podcasts out there right now with really great information.

Okay thank you so much for attending. Now, back over to you .

Great, thank you Melanie. Thank you so much, what a great timely topic to have and so I hope everyone benefited from the tips you gave out. And I'd like to everyone to know if you want more information on this or other health and wellness topics, give us a call or visit us online. This is confidential and is available 24 hours a day seven days per week to help you work through your personal or work related issues. And before we start the Q&A portion of the session, the recording and transcript, a copy of the slides including the certificate of attendance and a resource handout will be emailed to you within 24 hours following the session. All of today's content is available on FOH4You.com in one to two weeks to.

When you exit you will see a satisfaction survey where you can let us know about your experience and provide feedback that you may have. We do read your comments and use them to make improvements and adjustments. We do have a few minutes for questions if there's something you'd like to ask just type it in the Q&A panel and send it to all panelists.

It looks like we have good questions coming in. The first is that the person is saying that earlier you discussed the social anxiety is a common side effect of the pandemic. Is this something that gradually improves over time as we get more practice in social situations?

That's a great question. For most of us, the majority of us, yes, it does gradually improve over time. The more that we expose ourselves and we are actually putting ourselves in social situations it becomes easier and more natural. So starting small is always a good idea and, it's okay to just do what's comfortable for you. You don't have to say yes to everything. It's okay, as I said earlier to cut back on plans and restructure how you spend your leisure time, having more of a balance of quiet time at home, just to recharge and relax is okay also. But, again, that anxiety from not being in social situations, it does get better with practice because like I said we are out of practice.

Great, thank you Melanie.

The next question is I recently returned to the office and have felt nervous about interacting in person with coworkers, any tips for easing back into the office small talk?

Yes, this is something with returning to the office, that is one of the things that people have been anxious about in addition to nerves about commuting and having less time at home. People are feeling uneasy about this face-to-face reaction. A lot of people started their current jobs during the pandemic, so they've never even been to the office, that makes it even harder, it's an added stress for them. But again, same as what I just mentioned. Starting small, starting gradually, understanding the culture of your office because they are not all the same. Also, remind yourself to set boundaries because coworker relationships can be different than your outside friendships. So again be a little more reserved and it's fine and you can ease into that. The good news I will say is amidst feeling uneasy, nervous and anxious, people in general have been pretty relieved and surprised at how good it feels to be interacting face-to-face and able to talk spontaneously with coworkers when they are so used to zoom. So that's the good news.

Okay great. We will do one more question. I was wondering if the resilient strategies are also helpful for reducing anxiety which I am experiencing as a result of the pandemic.

There is so much overlap and everything that I talked about today, you know, tips for managing anxiety would be very similar to the resilient strategies like reframing, shifting your perspective, staying connected with others, not being afraid to ask for help, those are all things that help anxiety. The one thing that I would add would be writing so, with anxiety it's especially helpful and can be a really powerful tool to make a worry list and get all those thoughts out of your head and onto paper for. It sounds silly and simplistic but that can be a really good tool and it will help you to organize your thoughts and problem solve and realize also that I can handle this a lot of these things, I'm able to come up with solutions. Just get them out of your head it will really help the spiraling that a lot of people with anxiety experience in the middle of the night. Writing before bed can be helpful for anxiety.

All right, the great suggestions.

We have reached the top of the hour and we are going to go ahead and conclude the webinar for today. If we didn't get to your question or you have additional concerns, please call the EAP to speak with one of our consultants who can help with your specific situation.

I would like to thank Melanie once again for presenting and I want to thank you for taking time to be here today. Please join us again next month for our monthly webinar Whole-Team Health: Working Effectively with Multigenerational Coworkers which will take place on June 8th. Have a wonderful rest of your day!

[Event Concluded]