

As the COVID-19 crisis abates, how do we do normal again?

BY DAVID JASPER • The Bulletin

The world changed swiftly in March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic began to shut down Oregon. Job commutes became telecommutes. Layoffs were rampant. We got to know the term “front-line worker.” We learned all about Zoom. Masks became a second skin. We took up new hobbies and pushed bandwidths to the brink, binge-watching all the shows we could.

Now, with rising vaccination rates, we’ve moved to a lower risk status, and toward some approximation of normalcy to return in time for summer. Soon, even the most introverted of us will be expected to emerge. Restaurants can accommodate more diners. Offices are still a thing, in spite of costs. (Hey, CFOs, I know how you can save some money!)

We’ll have to relearn how to do in-person encounters. And put up with noisy colleagues and microwave odors and wear dress pants and tuck in shirts and ... this will be terrible.

Not necessarily, says Bend psychotherapist Lara Schwartz. When it comes to how to do normal again, Schwartz has some advice.

OWN YOUR EXPERIENCE

“It’s normal to cope with a crisis by just putting your head down, going forward and doing what you need to do,” Schwartz said. “If somebody didn’t have an experience that was gnarly or drastic — in terms of they lost their job, or a family member got very ill from COVID or died — unless it was something like that, I think people felt like they don’t have a right to acknowledge their experience so much.”

“Sometimes people will say, ‘Well my life didn’t really change’ ... or ‘I didn’t have anything bad happen,’” she said. “I think people are not registering the more underlying and pervasive and sometimes subtle effects that living through this past year and a half has had on all of us.”



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As COVID-19 risks lessen and society moves forward, Bend psychotherapist Lara Schwartz urges people to be easy on themselves.

Even if you feel like your life didn’t change much relative to others, there’s nothing normal or stress-free about quarantine, isolation, wearing masks or any of the other changes the pandemic engendered.

“For most of us, it felt like it happened suddenly. One day you were at work, and then you were at home, and there was a really scary reason why that happened,” Schwartz said. “We can’t see anyone, and we all have to not leave

unless we absolutely have to. Just that alone, those few months of that intensity where the world stopped, that’s trauma. That’s very scary.”

On top of its intense start, the long

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