



Ascension

Ascension WI EAP

Reintegration After “Safer at Home”

Everyone has had to make significant life adjustments during the COVID-19 pandemic. These adjustments have created shifts in perspectives, and questions about what it will mean when things go back to “normal.” This article offers a model to help you prioritize your needs and values, so you can decide what your new normal will be.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us have had the pause button hit in our lives. You and your partner may have been working from home, laid off, or furloughed. If you are a parent, your children have been home all day. You have become, at least part-time, a teacher for them. The busy schedule of sports, clubs and extracurricular activities have screeched to a sudden halt. Many families who did not have time for family meals suddenly were having every meal together.

For all of us it has been an adjustment. As states and businesses are reopening, and many of us are returning to 40-hours per week at the jobsite, we might be questioning if hitting the restart button is what we really want.

Two months at home was a long enough pause to make many of us question things we had previously taken for granted. For example, some people have asked, “is the job I’m returning to still the right choice for me?” Have you started to wonder if a slower-paced life is more in line with your values? Or maybe you have not yet been called to return to work, or your employer has gone out of business. What now?



Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is a psychological theory constructed in 1943, and is still widely used by psychologists, counselors and social workers today. It is useful in understanding what needs must be met before a person can move up to the next level of the hierarchy. This is a useful model in helping people evaluate priorities and make life choices in line with their needs.

Basic Needs

At the base of this pyramid are physiological needs of food, water, warmth, and rest. In order to provide for these needs we need an adequate

source of income. If you have been recalled to work and you realize your work is no longer fulfilling, you may want to consider if the job is at least providing the means to meet your basic needs. Without the fulfillment of the most basic needs, it does not matter what your values or dream jobs are, because if basic needs are not met it becomes difficult, maybe even impossible, to advance up the hierarchy.

Safety & Security

The next tier in the hierarchy is safety and security. It is important that these needs are given high priority, as it is difficult to make life-changing decisions in the face of threat or danger. Is your living environment safe, or do you frequently experience domestic violence, intimidation or fear? Is the physical environment unsafe, such as broken floorboards, exposed electrical wires, or neighborhood violence? Is the place you are living too costly to maintain, therefore increasing your feeling of insecurity and instability?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, carefully consider what options and resources are available to you. Consider calling your Employee Assistance Program, or 2-1-1 for help and support in enhancing safety and security in your life.

Love & Belonging

The next building block in the hierarchy is love and belonging. This is the need for intimate relationships and friendships. Has “safer at home” drawn your family closer together or driven you further apart? If closer together is the answer, what practices can you glean from this time that can be maintained when everyone

returns to work? If farther apart is the answer, can relationships be mended and improved? Would seeking help through your EAP be worthwhile, or are there other mentors or trusted friends who could help?

In addition to family relationships, consider how friendships and collegial relationships have changed. What has been better? What has been worse? How will you maintain or improve the relationships in your life as things go back to “normal?” How would changing your job, routine, or priorities impact the “love & belonging” level of your hierarchy?

Self Esteem

The pyramid of needs continues with the need for self esteem. Our feelings of self esteem are often interlaced with our ability to live in line with our values. Some find that self esteem and sense of value comes through the warmth of relationships and caring for others. For some it is expressing creativity, and others might find it through accomplishment in their work, or being an active member of the community. People find self esteem in many different ways.

Cultivating self-esteem may require some work. We must know our own values, and strive to meet our minimum standards in various life domains. For example, are you meeting your own standard in the domain of physical and mental health? Have you built and maintained quality relationships with family and friends to your level of satisfaction? Are you meeting or working towards your work, educational, and financial goals? And do you feel a sense of spiritual fulfillment -- whether through religious traditions, humanitarianism, or in the beauty of nature?

While each person needs to use a slightly different recipe to achieve a sense of self-esteem, true self-esteem comes when we live our lives with intentionality and purpose.

Self actualization

Finally, at the top of the pyramid sits self-actualization, or reaching our full potential. Operating at this level of the hierarchy requires a solid layer of each of the other building blocks below it. Most people find that when they work on improving and enhancing each of the other layers, that self actualization is a natural byproduct of this hard work. Self actualization demonstrates characteristics of development, growth and resiliency. It is a process that comes over time and with effort.

Self evaluation

The pause brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has given us time to think and evaluate. What level of the hierarchy are you (and your family) operating at? What needs are being met, and what needs have yet to be met? Will changing your job, routine or priorities enhance or detract from this, and in what ways? What values will help you improve your self esteem? What is helping you move into self actualization? What is stopping you? What will you do next?

If you recognize that you need to make some changes, but aren't sure how or where to start, you may want to consider calling your Employee Assistance Program. EAP is a free and confidential counseling benefit available to you and your household members.

What is next for you, and what creative solutions will you find for the next chapter of your life?