



# Transition to RETIREMENT

## Your Psychological Well-Being

BY ELIZABETH H. WINSTON, PhD

"I don't know how I ever had time for work!" said a recent retiree as she described a full life of volunteerism, travel, socializing, and relaxation. The transition to retirement can be exciting but also anxiety provoking. Here are some ideas to keep in mind as you navigate the process.

### IDENTITY

Americans identify strongly with our profession and a sense of belonging and camaraderie in the workplace. As we prepare for retirement,

it helps to strengthen and broaden one's identity to include other interests, relationship ties, and group memberships. As you establish a new retirement routine and expand social connections, your emerging retirement identity will solidify.

### ACTIVITIES

Retirement is not a static moment in time, but rather a process. It's okay if it takes you a few months or even a couple of years to find your rhythm. Finding the right number

of commitments and deciding what they will be may be a process of trial and error. Don't hesitate to make changes if you find that an activity you thought you would like does not suit you. According to the American Psychological Association, retirees who are fully engaged with their volunteer work have less depression, higher levels of well-being, and lower blood pressure. Volunteering for a cause you believe in can provide a sense of meaning, belonging, and social connections. But if volunteer-

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ing isn't your passion, it can feel like a burden and, frankly, a continuation of the shoulds from your preretirement life. A growing number of retirees pursue second careers, serve in consultant or mentoring roles in their area of expertise, and take on occasional special projects. Be flexible and keep an open mind.

### RELATIONSHIPS

If you are single, divorced, or widowed, this may be a time for you to pursue a new romantic relationship or close friendship. If you have a partner or spouse, retirement may mean being around one another more often than you have been in years. Some couples redistribute household chores, create a new space for reading or a hobby, or pursue shared hobbies collaboratively. One recent retiree I talked to said that her husband encouraged her to pursue biking, an interest of his. Soon after she retired, they took a delightful bike trip together in the fall, a time she could never have traveled before when she worked as a school teacher.

Retirees may struggle with balancing their own needs with those of family. This is an opportunity to take stock of your values and priorities, and communicate your plans and expectations. Perhaps you aren't willing to care for your grandchildren regularly, but would be happy to spend a long weekend with them once or twice a year. Communicating with siblings about elder parent care and being clear about what you can do is essential.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Like any time of transition, taking stock of your own psychological well-being and that of your close re-

lationships is key. If you tend to become anxious or depressed at major times of transition (think marriage, parenthood, job change, loss of a loved one), then you may be vulnerable to these now. Prepare by talking to a psychologist or other mental health professional to shore up your coping skills. If your relationship with your partner or spouse has taken a back seat for a while, reestablish regular quality time together, get support from your community, or do a few sessions of couples therapy to get you back on track.

Taking care of your mind and your body is just as important as ever. Take the opportunity to cook more healthfully, exercise regularly, and be social. Try activities you never had time for and enjoy this exciting time in your life. You've earned it!

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