

Coping with travel stress when you return

Expect that you may experience some re-entry reactions. Recognize that even good changes and transitions usually require adjustment, disrupt routines and relationships, and take some energy. People often criticize themselves for feeling irritable or more emotional during re-entry. These emotions, and others, are normal in the face of change.

- *Create a buffer zone between the field and home.* This can be a geographic buffer zone, like a stop-over somewhere neutral and comfortable on your way home. Or you can take steps to create personal space during the first two days you're home; for example, you might delay telling people of your return (and even ignore email and phone calls) to give yourself time to unpack and restock the fridge.
- *Prepare for “those” conversations with family and friends.* Pick one funny anecdote, a little known fact, or an interesting (and not too grim) prediction about the future development of the place you have been working in. Then be prepared to change the topic of conversation if people don't ask follow-up questions.
- *Debrief your experience with a counselor or people you trust who will understand:* Ask and answer questions such as: Tell me about the faces and lives of the people you met? What stories were significant to you during this trip? What did you learn about yourself? What lessons are you carrying away with you?
- *Get involved and back into “routine.”* The feeling of belonging to a community again will help if you're struggling with re-entry. Get involved in your regular home routine (e.g., community or church groups). Continue reaching out to people and working to reconnect. However, be wary of packing your schedule too full.
- *Plan a realistic work schedule.* Don't add to your stress by crowding your schedule or having unrealistic expectations regarding how quickly you will be able to tie up the details related to your trip and how much work you will accomplish immediately after getting back.
- *Take enough time (and then some extra) for rest, relaxation, family reconnection, and your personal priorities.* Now is the time to make some space for yourself to wind down and devote some time and attention to your personal priorities. Relax and indulge yourself in moderation.
- *Avoid making big decisions in the immediate aftermath of returning home.* Just as any other period when you're under heightened stress, you should try to avoid making decisions about important issues right after you get back (such as whether or not to quit your job).
- *Give yourself a spiritual check-up.* Ask yourself questions like these: Do you feel closer to or more distant from God or your source of spiritual energy? How have your beliefs been challenged or changed? Do you need to try something new in the way that you are nourishing your spirituality?