



For those ready to reconnect in real life, here are some tips for overcoming post-quarantine awkwardness.

From the time we're born (even beforehand, based on studies of twins in utero), humans want to be social. According to the Mental Health Foundation, loneliness is associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety and worse. And having poor social relationships is associated with increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

The pandemic forced us to find new ways to socialise. But now that we have a chance to start reconnecting in real life, we also have the opportunity to reconstruct our social lives. It might feel weird at first, but here are some tips to help you reconnect thoughtfully and overcome the awkward:

Do consider who you want to reignite a relationship with. With the time and space to reflect on what's most meaningful in life, you may have realised not everyone on Facebook or Instagram is worthy of your time. It's OK to bow out of brunch with long-time friends if you're not into it. Respectfully decline.

Do give yourself more time if you need it. Just because it seems like everyone is starting to party like it's 2019 again doesn't mean you have to. Give yourself grace if you're still working through mental health challenges brought on by the pandemic. (You're not alone. During the pandemic, according to the ONS "around 1 in 5 (21%) adults experienced some form of depression in early 2021".)

Do encourage others to reengage with those who mean the most to them. Interestingly, men more easily let relationships go

than women do, according to a study published in the American Sociological Review. So husbands, sons and dads might need an extra push.

Do find a new routine. A lot of our social connections are built into our schedule, like happy hour every Thursday or cycling class on Mondays. When that routine is broken, the social connection is lost too. But this is a chance to create different habits that may work better for you.

Don't be afraid to create physical boundaries that are comfortable for you. Friends may get giddy and go straight for the bear hug. But if you're not there yet, let them know. It's ideal to discuss your comfort levels before meeting up so expectations are set.

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Don't beat yourself up. Remember that everyone is just getting back out there. However, if you're feeling a sense of dread about connecting with someone in particular, you may want to re-evaluate that relationship.

Don't take it personally if your closest friends have boundaries that are different than yours. Just as you should assert your comfort level, be respectful of others'. Obey their wishes to mask up or dine outside, for example.

It's significant for our well-being to have social connections. But the pandemic also gave us a reason to pause – and reflect. So step back and construct your new social life carefully, and more meaningfully. And now that your debit card is making an appearance more frequently too, talk to your wealth manager

about re-establishing a “fun” budget so you can start to enjoy life again without the worry of getting overzealous and going overboard.

NEXT STEPS

Before you meet up with friends, gauge their comfort level by asking:

- Would you prefer we meet outdoors?
- Would you prefer I wear a mask?
- Are you comfortable with hugs/handshakes?

Sources: wired.com; mentalheath.org.uk; kff.org; healthline.com; ONS.org.uk