



# **Returning to your Family**

## **A workbook for positive transition**

Student Development and Counselling Services | May 2020

This resource was developed by Student Development and Counselling Services (SDC) to support the many students undergoing the significant transition of returning to live with their families due to the coVID-19 pandemic. This also includes students who now find themselves spending most of their time at home with their families, now that classes are held online, and they can no longer study on campus. We wanted to acknowledge the significant disruption and upheaval you are facing by being forced to change your living circumstances and day-to-day habits so abruptly. There are implications for you on many levels of your wellbeing and we are here to support you.

Our hope is that the exercises in this workbook will act as a guide as you navigate your necessary process of adjustment. Incorporating these exercises into your daily life will support you to transition with more self-awareness, skill, and likely positive outcomes such as learning about how to apply your strengths to meet challenging demands. We recognize that no one asked for these changes to occur, but we are hopeful the resiliency of our students can be discovered and activated during this challenging time.

This workbook is designed for students facing these challenges, but we know these challenges can also worsen or create harmful circumstances for individuals. If you are concerned about the risk of family violence or note that you, your family member, or the family generally has become violent, aggressive, and/or highly conflictual, it's important to get external support so your family can create new family patterns and to ensure all members are supported. At the end of this workbook, you will find a resource list so you can easily find the support you need.

With warm regards,

Student Development and Counselling Services Team

We've heard from many students we serve that returning home has been a huge challenge and we've listened by creating this resource. Below, you will find some key ideas about what to expect during this transition, space to reflect upon what's been challenging as well as surprising, and some specific strategies for healthy coping. The ideas in this workbook reflect the spirit of focusing on what is within your control and making active changes.

## A Note about Change and Transition

- **Change is something that happens to us**, such as an external event like starting school or a new job, moving, changing jobs, having a baby, the ending of a relationship, etc.
- In contrast, **transition is what happens internally** as we they go through change. It is a process that unfolds over time. While change can happen abruptly, transition is much slower.
- It takes time to adjust and adapt to what changes will mean in terms of our daily lives. William Bridges is a change management expert who researched and wrote about how individuals respond to changes in their workplace. You can find more information in the following book: *The Way of Transition* by William Bridges, published in 2001 by Da Capo Press.

## Key points to remember as you navigate your current transition

- There is a period of adjustment that happens for everyone. It may be longer or shorter for some folks compared to others, but it will happen none-the-less.
- You will feel some discomfort during this process of adjustment. There may be confusion as you try to figure out routines and what works best, and stress as you navigate everyone's emotions without much separation or even personal space.
- It is okay to feel sad because the life you had designed has to be put on hold.
- It is normal for old patterns of relating to resurface, especially at first. You may feel like you are taking steps backwards but trust that is part of a regression phase that is temporary.
- Having had time separate and apart from your family, it's likely your perspective has changed. Using your increased awareness, you can now take steps to impact the environment you live in, as well as use strategies to better regulate your own emotions. Typical feelings that can come up as you make your way through your transition back home are outlined next.

## FEELINGS THAT OFTEN ACCOMPANY TRANSITION:

- Fear and worry in anticipation of the transition as well as throughout the transition. You might also find you are excited and/or nervous about your next steps or how this might impact your goals moving forward.
- Frustration and anger at the situation.
- Overall uneasiness and apprehension as you try to “settle in” to your new situation and establish a new routine.
- If you’ve moved back into the family home, it’s common to feel a sense of shame and guilt for the necessity of this choice. You may be showing this by finding ways to act out your strong desire to financially contribute or “earn your keep,” or by trying to “stay out of the way” of the family, or so many other ways.
  - Can you think of an example of this behavior that you see occurring for yourself?
- If you’ve had family move in with you, it’s also common to feel cramped in your space, and a need to reclaim some space. You might find yourself annoyed or irritated at the change to your own routine as you adjust to your family members’ presence.

Note that everyone in the home will be adjusting and getting used to each other’s presence. Everyone has their own way of coping with transitions and sometimes, it can be helpful to consider how you have dealt with them before. Transitions are generally the process of the ending of one thing and the starting of something new.

For example, choosing to attend post-secondary education can lead to a big transition, regardless of whether you were coming from high school or a full-time working life or completely different circumstances altogether. This is one transition that can help you identify how you “do” transition.

Using the above example or another one of your choice, answer the following questions to help you clarify how you cope with and manage transitions.

1. What made this transition stressful for me?

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2. What helped me manage my stress during this transition? Why was it helpful?

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3. What didn't help me manage my stress during this transition? Why was it not helpful?

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4. What do I want to try again to help me in my transition in living with family again? What do I want to avoid doing again?

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## Regulating your Emotions

As everyone in your household works through their own adjustment, it's likely there will be tension filled moments. It's important to put effort into defusing tension before it escalates into conflict.

- Try tracking your emotional temperature often throughout the day. Use a rating scale, such as the one pictured below, from 1 (calm and regulated) to 10 (highly reactive, easily bothered, upset) to track how you feel at different points throughout the day.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

- Observe key signs you notice that signal you're getting escalated. For example, do you notice your heart rate increasing? Has your breathing become shortened and shallower? Do you feel warmer? Are you restless?
  - Think of these **physical sensations as wise messengers**; there's no need to feel badly for experiencing them. The trick is to notice and do something in the moment to calm yourself. You can drink a glass of water, get fresh air, take a break from your task, walk around, etc. Interrupt the emotion by noticing what is happening in your body and doing something different.
- Anger is often described as a **growing emotion** and it will help you to know a physiological response takes place when anger starts to show up. It's most effective to acknowledge early signs of anger (irritation, annoyance, frustration, etc.) versus pretending they aren't happening.
  - Be aware of the **anger monologue!** Since anger grows, without outside feedback a small irritation can turn into a major violation quickly. Anger often does alert us when something isn't working well but speaking from raw anger often doesn't allow us to get our message across effectively.
  - If you find yourself mentally going to the past to tally up previous similar incidents or thinking your family member "always does this" or "never does that", do what you need to do to bring your emotional temperature down into a safer range. Take a break from anger by engaging in a temporary distracting activity to help you interrupt the growth and to help you get your message across clearly.

What effective strategies do you know personally work for you to bring your body to a state of calm quickly? List them below.

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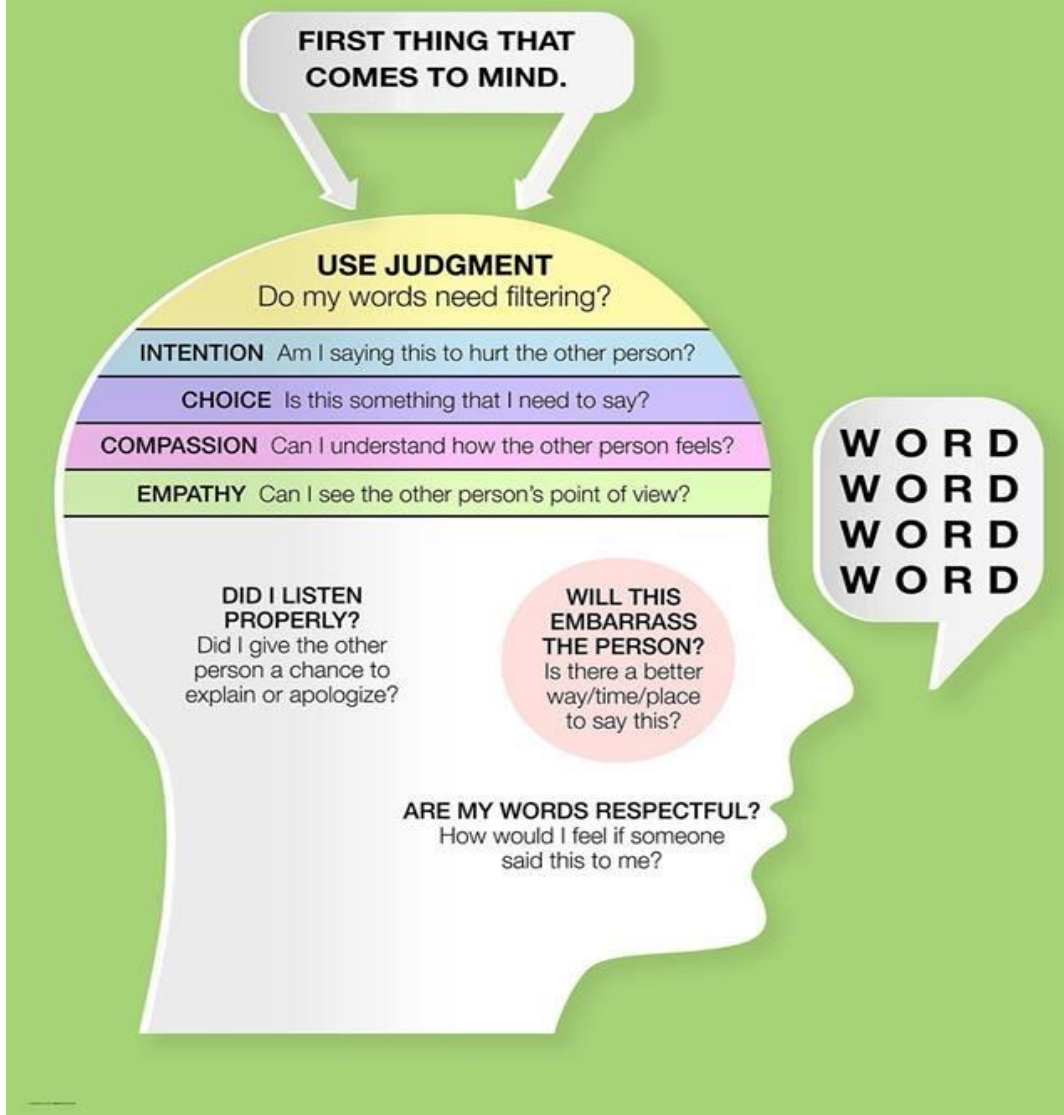
## PAYING ATTENTION TO HOW WE COMMUNICATE

In addition to regulating your emotions, it's also helpful to run your verbal statements through a filter prior to speaking, almost like you would spell check an email before you hit "send". At first this may seem awkward and slow down conversation as you learn to do it well. But it can prevent the hurt feelings and likely repair work necessary if you don't give some prior consideration to what you're about to say when an interaction is becoming tense and heated.

The following infographic provides an outline of steps to follow to allow you to more carefully consider your words prior to speaking. It also highlights key communication skills that promote thriving relationships – skills that help keep you focused on the impact of your words on another person and on the relationship between you.

# SPEECH FILTERS

## THINK BEFORE SPEAKING



**Practice tip:** start with the “use judgment” prompt. You first need to make a habit of pausing and thinking before you speak, before you can start choosing what filter to use.

Next, choose one filter to practice while in conversation with someone and complete the reflective questions below.



**Reflective questions:**

Are there speech filters you notice you already use? If yes, please describe below.

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What specific speech filters do you want to become more skilled at using? Identify a specific family member you want to try this with and explain how this could benefit your relationship with them.

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## Understanding and Working with Family Patterns

Our family relationships are our first exposure to any relationship. We learn about how to relate with others generally with these first experiences, so in a way, our families create a foundation for our future relationships. As such, we also create patterns of relating with our families based on what works within the family. Sometimes, these interpersonal patterns are extended to others in our lives, but sometimes, these patterns are limited to our family members.

Before moving back in with your family, you might have noticed returning to familiar patterns during short family visits, or even short conversations. For example, you might notice getting into similar discussions or arguments with specific family members with the same kind of result. Sometimes you may feel like you are a teenager or a child all over again. Other times, you may find yourself acting in ways that you would never repeat outside of your family. These are common, and it's the result of our pre-existing interpersonal patterns that we easily fall into when we are around our families.

When you find this happening, and you notice that it generally doesn't feel good, there are some things that you can do to help change the pattern.

1. **Recognize it as a pattern.** Reflect back on the specific behaviours that you and your family member demonstrated. If you find yourself saying you *always* have this kind of conversation/interaction with this family member or with all family members, chances are it is a *well-practiced pattern*.

Describe the pattern: How does it start? Thinking about behaviour, how do you react? How does your family member react? How does it keep going? When and how does it stop?

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2. **Recognize your role in the pattern.** Take responsibility for your own behaviours. It takes at least 2 people to keep a pattern going, but it can change with only one person making a different choice. You may have been responding to someone else, but you still have a choice. Reflect on what parts of it you want to own, and what is the others part to be responsible for.

Taking Responsibility: What part do you play in this pattern? What choices do you make when it starts? What isn't your part in this pattern (i.e., What is not your responsibility?)

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3. **Recognize what you need to be different.** Remember, we can't make other people change. We can make a request for different behaviours, however, and hope that others will respect this. That said, it's worth thinking about what you can do to change your part of the interaction. Maybe you need to take a break during the interaction? Maybe you need to work on recognizing the pattern earlier on before it's already in motion? Maybe it is simply acknowledging the pattern exists and letting it be without engaging in it (i.e., "don't take the bait!").

What can you change?

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What do you need or want to see change between you and your family member?

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What can you do to help this change happen?

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4. **Talk about it.** Clear communication is important when trying to change patterns in relationships. Use these vital skills in sharing your requests and helping to change the pattern. Using communication skills, you can establish boundaries around your needs while also being open to what others need to make these changes. We often recommend using I-statements to help communicate your needs. These have a distinct formula as follows:

- a. I feel (emotion word) when you (behaviour you notice). I would like/appreciate it if (requested change in behaviour).

**Example:** I feel frustration and anger when you come into my room without permission. I would appreciate it if you would knock first and wait for permission to come in before you walk into my room.

- b. I-statements are intended for you to take ownership of your feelings and requests. They are a way to communicate what your perspective and needs without placing blame while keeping it strictly to behaviours. Here is an example of what **NOT** to do:

**Poor Example:** I feel you are a jerk and inconsiderate (name calling) when you come into my room without permission. I would appreciate you not being a jerk in the future.

This statement isn't helpful as it involves name calling as well as anticipating others' motivations. It also is not clear in what behavioural change you are requesting. Instead, you want to focus on your reactions to the behaviour, not your thoughts about how or why the person is behaving that way.

- c. Try it:

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Want to learn more about relationships and communication? Check out TAO Self-Help through SAIT Student Development and Counselling's website located in the self-help tools area. Specifically, there are modules on relationships and communication in the Interpersonal Relationships and Communications pathway.

## A Thank you Message and Additional Resources

We want to thank you for taking the time to fill out the exercises in this workbook and reflect upon what actions you can take to support a positive transition for you and your family. It takes courage to be willing to make changes so be kind and appreciative towards yourself. If you are a SAIT student currently enrolled in classes, you can speak to a counsellor with **Student Development and Counselling**. Counsellors are a team of registered/provisional psychologists and social workers. Call 403-284-7023 for an appointment.

Listed below are various community-based supports as well as free online resources you can refer to as you continue your journey.

### FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORT

**Family Violence Information Line: 310-1818 (no area code)**

- Anonymous support available to anyone who calls. Also offered in 170 languages.
- Online chat also available and can be found here: <https://www.alberta.ca/family-violence-find-supports.aspx>

### URGENT/CRISIS SUPPORT

**Distress Centre – 403-266-HELP (4357)**

- Anonymous crisis line support provided by highly trained volunteers, available 24/7. Also connect via daily chat. Only available in the Calgary area.
- For chat hours of operation, visit <https://www.distresscentre.com/need-help/>

**Alberta 211**

- Call or text 211 for Alberta wide Community and Social Services hotline, 24/7. Available in rural areas for added support and access to other local supports near you. Also connect via chat at <https://www.ab.211.ca/>.

### FAMILY THERAPY

**Eastside Family Service**

- Free, walk in counselling servicing individuals, couple, and/or family. Clinic specializes in family concerns.
- At this time, service is only available by phone or eTherapy (information below).
- If you are experiencing difficulty getting through phone lines, please email [crtsupport@woodshomes.ca](mailto:crtsupport@woodshomes.ca) and someone will call you.
- Go to website to learn more: <https://www.woodshomes.ca/programs/eastside-family-centre/>

## INDIVIDUAL THERAPY

Calgary Counselling Centre, Suite 1000, 105 – 12 Avenue SE

- Register for counselling through online intake:  
<https://onlineintake.calgarycounselling.com/>

## BLOG

- The Gottman Relationship blog: a research-based approach to relationships.  
<https://www.gottman.com/blog/>

## SELF-HELP ONLINE MODULES

- Looking after yourself module by the Centre for Clinical Interventions
- <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself>