

A Guide for Administrative Staff in Emergency

Israel Trauma Coalition

Practical Tools for Administrative Staff — When Fear of Leaving Home is High

It is not only academic faculty who find it difficult to return to routine. For administrative staff, leaving home and coming to the office requires a different kind of psychological effort — and that is completely legitimate. The fear of exposure on the way, of open spaces, of uncertainty — these are normal responses to an abnormal situation. The following tools are designed to help you return — at your own pace, with support.

Before Leaving — A Short Preparation Routine

- ◆ Write yourself one sentence before you leave: "I'm leaving now. I can handle whatever comes." This is not trivial — it is cognitive preparation.
- ◆ Know in advance where the protected spaces are along your route — before you leave, not while on the way. Certainty reduces anxiety.
- ◆ Don't leave "empty" — eat, drink, sleep. The body is the foundation of regulation, and neglecting it increases the nervous system's sensitivity to threat.
- ◆ Define a "return time" for yourself before you leave. When there is a known endpoint — the pressure decreases.

On the Way — Tools for Managing the Journey

- ◆ On public transport — stay near the door, maintain moderate alertness. Full-volume earphones disrupt your sense of surroundings and increase anxiety afterward.
- ◆ If anxiety rises on the way — try 5-4-3-2-1: 5 things you see, 4 you hear, 3 you touch, 2 you smell, 1 you taste. This brings the brain back to the present moment and reduces the intensity of the stress response.
- ◆ If an alert sounds on the way — follow protocol. Afterward: stop for 2 minutes, breathe 4–6 (4 seconds inhale, 6 exhale), tell yourself "I am safe now," then continue. Don't try to "carry on as normal" immediately.

On Arrival at the Office — Initial Grounding

Arrival routine	Come with a small plan: coffee, a familiar seat, a brief conversation with a colleague who is waiting. The brain needs a familiar anchor to exit a state of heightened alertness.
Defining the space	Know where the nearest protected space to the office is. This is not paranoia — it is preparation that reduces survival anxiety and frees attention for work.
Check in with yourself	Ask yourself when you arrive: "What do I need today in order to function?" — and do at least one thing from the answer.

During the Workday

- ◆ Work in blocks of 45–60 minutes with a built-in break — get up, go to the kitchen, talk to one person. Social connection biologically reduces the sense of threat.
- ◆ Limit news consumption to two windows per day — morning and afternoon. Continuous updates increase stress and impede concentration without improving the sense of control.
- ◆ If a strong urge to leave arises — ask: "Is there a real threat right now, or is this a feeling?" Most often, it is a feeling. Stay 20 more minutes and check again. Small successes in presence build confidence.

For Managers of Administrative Staff

Acknowledge difficulty openly	Say in a team meeting: "I know that showing up these days takes effort — and we appreciate it." Public acknowledgment reduces shame and increases commitment.
Measure contribution, not hours	A staff member who comes three days a week and works at full quality is worth more than one who comes every day in body only. During wartime, physical presence is not necessarily a measure of functioning.
Flexibility as a management tool	Remote work is not a reward — it is a tool. Ask: who needs it in order to function? Who will function better in the office? Require presence when there is a critical meeting, a role that cannot be performed remotely, or when fragmentation is harming the team.

When Is Remote Work Legitimate?

- ◆ When the anxiety about leaving is paralyzing — not just difficult — flexibility is psychological support, not surrender. There is a difference between difficulty that can be managed and a situation that requires distance from exposure.
- ◆ Also when a family member has special needs, a specific security event limits movement, or a health condition affects the ability to leave — these are valid reasons, not excuses.
- ◆ But remember: staying completely at home over time generally deepens anxiety rather than reducing it. If the difficulty leaving persists for more than two weeks — it is recommended to seek professional support.

Mental Health Helplines		
Available for you and your students		
*5486 National Resilience Center	1201 ERAN — Mental First Aid 24/7	1800-363-363 NATAL — Trauma & Stress Victims 24/7

Remember: asking for help is strength, not weakness. You too are entitled to support.