

## Early Career Psychologist Column

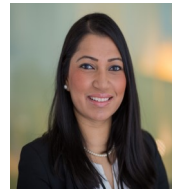
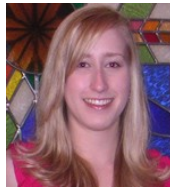
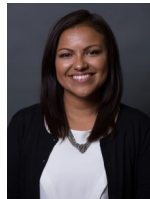
### An ECP Guide to Navigating Your First Pandemic: Survival First, Then Tenure?

Geovanna Rodriguez, PhD, University of Oregon

Joanna Mussey, PhD, Assistant Professor,

Gazi Azad, PhD, Columbia University

Sasha Zeedyk, PhD, California State University, Fullerton



It is Spring 2020 and COVID-19 just put a huge damper on your semester plans. If you were among the “lucky” ones that spent their spring break or the week between semesters quickly scrambling to pivot their research, teaching, clinical work, and service duties from in-person settings to virtual formats, you are the real MVPs. Online teaching, telepractice, and remote research environments were new uncharted territories that left many wondering, “How did I get here?” While many academic and medical institutions and departments went into triage mode, adjusting policies, practices, and procedures to help faculty and students with the transition, many junior faculty and early career professionals soon had to face the unprecedented realities of this “new normal.” There were many unanswered questions at the start of the crisis related to productivity standards, remote teaching practices, teaching evaluations, tenure expectations, research funding activities, hiring freezes, and navigating work-life balance from home, just to name a few. Needless to say, the pandemic crisis has the potential to negatively impact the career trajectories of ECPs. For instance, while many campuses may have offered tenure-clock extensions, these “stop the clock” policies have been shown to be more favorable towards males compared to females. This has been attributed to gendered resource disparities, which

have always been an issue in academia, but negatively impact women more now as a result of this crisis. Women may find themselves struggling to return to full scholarly productivity due to household obligations and mental load (e.g., childcare, housework, eldercare), as well as the hidden labor that comes with increased mentoring of students (e.g., students asking for extensions and emotional support). Greater cognitive demands may inadvertently limit the attention and energy necessary to engage in a creative space for scholarly work. Even with supportive partners, the gender disparities may widen the gap between male and female faculty, especially those shown to be historically disadvantaged (e.g., women of color, women with children) who may no longer have access to the supportive networks, mentors, and equitable resources to fund their work and scholarly activity.

Remote academic work is not for the faint of heart, and many ECPs were faced with new challenges, some new and some not so bad. I, for one, did not mind working in my joggers every now and then, or not having to compete for parking at 7:30am. “I miss my commute to work” were words I never thought I would say out loud and yet after the novelty wore off, I found myself grieving the loss of a term I would not get to experience in person. I started

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thinking to myself how much I missed and valued the things that once seemed like minor inconveniences. I missed the daily hustle and bustle of walking from one meeting to the next, grabbing a coffee with an esteemed colleague, running into staff, having students interrupt me in my office just to say a quick hello and catch up, and my personal space. Time alone to think and create. Sure I miss writing in coffee shops and having my personal space, but what I found myself missing more was the opportunity to socially connect with my academic peers and students. I no longer took “small talk” for granted. I realized it was an integral part of my intellectual stimulation. So I found myself reaching out to former mentors and friends and asking what worked for them because as a new faculty member in my first year, I did not plan to end my first year like this, no one did. One of my former advisors said to me, “Social distancing does not mean you need to be socially disconnected. You are practicing physical distance, you can still stay socially connected.” At first, the thought of scheduling more Facetimes or Zoom meetings seemed too much of an ask, but I now see what she meant. I have been more intentional about how I ask for help and more strategic about what I need in the present moment to survive during this crisis. I reached out and connected and have asked my peers to share their thoughts and tips for “surviving and thriving” during your first (hopefully, last) pandemic. Full disclosure, these are tips that helped us get through the good, the bad, and the ugly, but in case you need more, we have also included some helpful links at the end of this article to include in your “pandemic starter pack” as you transition to this new environment in the summer and fall.

### **Barriers and Facilitators: Helpful Tips from Tenure-Track Faculty, Early Career Psychologists, and Postdocs**

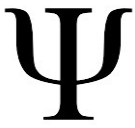
**Building in a Commute:** Commutes home are often used as a way to “decompress” or

transition from work to home life. Without it, we are often thrust into home life without any means to physically and mentally transition. I have started to end my work day 15-20 minutes early to take a walk, sit on my deck, or chat with a dear friend/relative. It gives me a clearly delineated break from my work life to my home life.

**Maintaining a Routine:** Keeping to a routine is easier said than done, as working from home creates a head-on collision between work and life responsibilities. However, keeping to even small parts of our routine (e.g., starting the work day at 9, going to sleep at the same time) may be one way to hold onto a sense of normalcy.

**Separating the Work Week from the Weekend:** With long-term work from home, the day of the week may start to become irrelevant. Many of us struggle to even remember what time, day, and season it is. I have found that clearly delineating the work week (e.g., working from home, meal preps) from the weekend (e.g., spending time outdoors, ordering take-out) gives me something to look forward to at the end of the week.

**Finding the Simple Pleasures:** During a pandemic, it is easy to focus on everything that is going wrong. The world is a scary place right now. I have vowed to focus on the simple pleasures to help me get through the tough times. Sometimes, it’s building a fort with my children to see the sheer happiness on their faces. Other times, it’s scheduling zoom happy hours with my colleagues so we can stay socially connected. During pre-Covid times, these simple pleasures may have already been built into our work lives - coffee with a mentor, lunch with a colleague, etc. But now, more than ever, we need to make a concerted effort to find the time and space for the simple things that bring us joy. I try to think of one positive thing each day that would not have happened if it weren’t for the “new normal.”



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For example, I got to have lunch with my husband and two kids today. This is something that would never happen during a typical week!

**Flexibility (see also: rolling with the punches, playing the cards you are dealt):** I'm pretty sure for most of us this is our first global health pandemic and seemingly overnight everything changed. I was just getting my feet under me at this point in my career. Changes came fast and from all directions. Moving teaching online, mentoring students from afar, keeping up with federal, state, institution, insurance/pay or regulation changes, figuring out telehealth practice for families and clients, etc. My work went from 5% remote to 95% virtual/remote/telehealth. I was consumed by figuring out hardware, software, BAAs, telehealth informed consent, limitations/modifications/changes to typical clinical practice, is there a literature base and if so, what does the research say? To stay above water, I had to lean into resources and expertise of colleagues, my extended network, my state association, and APA, to complement the information that I was finding to provide guidance in a short period of time. All the while being nimble enough to augment and modify when new information or changes presented themselves. We can be flexible and we can do this together.

**Resiliency:** Even with all the planning, information gathering, and research, Murphy's law doesn't go away during the transitions required of this pandemic. There were fits and starts along the way. There were technology issues of every type along the way. Luckily, I found others to be understanding, supportive, and helpful with problem solving. I learned to go easy on myself as well, particularly when some of the technology issues just aren't under our or our clients or students' control. It is also important to communicate and be transparent with students. They are anxious and stressed and need to know you care about their well-

being, so check-in and lean into that vulnerability.

**Uncertainty:** While the globe is going through this together and we are figuring things out together, I want to know what my future holds. What will my job look like next week/month/year, will I be furloughed, will I have a paycut, will I have a job, will I or my family come into contact with anyone with COVID-19, will I spread COVID-19, if I can't do XYZ, what will that mean for my career, etc.? While I'm helping myself through these issues as an ECP, students are looking to me and asking me similar questions. I was just in their shoes, yet the landscape is so very different and we are doing the best that we can to cope with it all. Reaching out for support as well as finding and sharing resources has been paramount to addressing my worries, my anxieties about meeting my students' needs, and responding to my students' questions. One thing that has become certain during this time of uncertainty is that my dog is the cutest yet most demanding coworker that I have ever had and I wouldn't want it any other way right now.

**Give yourself grace as you acknowledge your new reality:** For some of us ECPs, we may have been undergoing other major life transitions when the pandemic hit. I, for one, gave birth to my second child at the end of January. While my baby brings me the utmost joy, adjusting to having an additional human to care for (I also have a toddler), recovering from childbirth, and eventually trying to get back into the swing of work was [still is] a bit of a shock. I had expected to have one child in daycare and the other to start in the summer. At first, it felt like I would never get back into the swing of things. The thoughts, "Will I ever work again?" and "I'm not cut out for this stay-at-home mom life," have crossed my mind several times. However, babies grow, toddlers adjust, and routines develop. I have managed to figure out a work schedule that makes getting something (even

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if very small) done every day possible. Heck, I even learned to angle the camera so that I could take a Zoom call while nursing!

**Share with colleagues:** While it can feel overwhelming and like we're all alone, we're really all in this together. I have found this to be especially true in terms of the transition to teaching online. I have taken the time to reach out to colleagues to see what is working well for them in the classroom (and what is not). When something works really well for me, I make an effort to share with others teaching the same class.

### Resource Links:

Research during Covid-19:

<https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/03/conducting-research-covid-19>

Tips for Distance Learning (DL): <https://anygoodthing.com/2020/05/18/ten-time-saving-stress-reducing-tips-for-online-teaching-to-implement-before-your-semester-even-starts/>

Motivate Students:

<https://anygoodthing.com/2020/05/20/helping-students-stay-motivated-in-online-courses/>

ACCESS Division 33 Podcast: Episode 8 "The Public Health Crisis"

[www.division33.org](http://www.division33.org)

Impact on POC (Women) Professors: <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/05/13/ensuring-pandemic-doesnt-negatively-impact-women-stem-especially-those-color>

Re-evaluating "Tenure:" [https://](https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/04/09/covid-19-demands-reconsideration-tenure-requirements-)

[www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/04/09/covid-19-demands-reconsideration-tenure-requirements-](https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/04/09/covid-19-demands-reconsideration-tenure-requirements-)

[going-forward-opinion](#)

APA Practice Resources in Response to COVID-19

<https://www.apaservices.org/practice/clinic/>

Responding to Sick Students: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Don-t-Worry-About-the/248475>

Secure Vs Insecure Instructors: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Covid-19-Crisis-Widens-Divide/248276>

"COVID is a Huge Headache:" <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590238520301302> - PDF article

No Room of One's Own - <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/21/early-journal-submission-data-suggest-covid-19-tanking-womens-research-productivity>

The Pandemic and the Female Academic - <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01135-9>

The Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality - [http://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/~mdo738/research/COVID19\\_Gender\\_March\\_2020.pdf](http://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/~mdo738/research/COVID19_Gender_March_2020.pdf)

Who is doing new research in the time of COVID-19? Not the female economists - <https://voxeu.org/article/who-doing-new-research-time-covid-19-not-female-economists>

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