

Retiring? Expect to go through different phases

My husband is planning to retire next year. We'll be OK financially, but what other aspects of retirement should we be preparing for?

Many people look at retirement as an event, but it's really both a process — one that requires planning and adjustment — and an entire stage of life that (hopefully) will last a number of years. It's wise that you're looking beyond that last day of work and the retirement luncheon and asking "what's next?"

In the 1970s, gerontologist Robert Atchley, author of the textbook "Social Forces and Aging," developed the idea that there are different phases of retirement. Not all people experience all phases that he outlined and refined over the years, but knowing about these phases will give you some idea of what you and your husband might expect during his retirement years.

(Note: The phases are summarized in the Ohio State University Extension Senior Series Fact Sheet, "Stages of Retirement," available with other resources online at <http://ohioline.osu.edu> — search for "Senior Series.")

The first phase is what your husband is in now: pre-retirement. If he hasn't already, don't be surprised if he starts becoming disengaged from the workplace, and begins spending a lot of time and attention to what his retirement will entail. Both are normal in the pre-retirement phase.

The next phase is the actual retirement from paid employment, and there are three possible paths a retiree might take. One is termed a "honeymoon" — the feeling that you're on a permanent vacation. Those who take the honeymoon path spend most of this time in



leisure activities they didn't have time for during their work life. Others, who have had a full, active schedule even before retirement, may take an "immediate retirement routine" path in which they quickly settle into a comfortable but busy schedule. Still others might take a "rest and relaxation" path — a period of low activity as compared to either of the other paths. Those taking this path usually increase their activity levels over the course of several months or, sometimes, years.

The other phases are those that retirees may or may not experience. One is called "disenchantment." At some point, even if your husband now is anxiously awaiting his first day of retirement, he may begin feeling a sense of disappointment or uncertainty. Retirees are often surprised to find how much they miss the daily contact they had with their co-workers or the feeling of productivity they had in the workplace. Disenchantment may also come about if life throws a curve ball — the death of a spouse, an undesired move, or a financial crisis. It may take some time to find a way to cope with those feelings.

"Reorientation" is another phase. That's when retirees take stock and make adjustments to live a satisfying, enjoyable life.

Settling into a comfortable, fulfilling routine is a good goal for any retiree. Understanding the different paths to that phase could help your husband get there more quickly.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to *Family Fundamentals*, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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