When Change is the Challenge

May 2011 Monthly Bulletin

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Coping skills for change

As we go through life, one thing is absolutely predictable: change! Some dislike or even fear it. Others embrace it. Wherever you find yourself on that continuum, here are some practical tips for coping:

- **Get ahead of the curve.** Whenever possible, be proactive when you see change coming. If your nest is about to empty, consider finding new activities to fill the void. If you are moving, check out your new neighborhood beforehand to identify schools, shopping areas and other resources you’ll need. That will help you feel more comfortable when you make the move.

You can’t be proactive in every instance since many changes are unexpected. But there are times when you can take action to feel more in control of your changing life.

- **Put on a positive spin.** Think optimistically. Change includes loss but also offers opportunities. When you relocate, you move away from old friends, but you have the chance to form new relationships. When you retire, you leave familiar routines, but you also have newfound time to pursue your dreams. As the saying goes, “When one door closes, another door opens.”

- **Strengthen your change muscles.** Think back to transitions you’ve come through in your life to build confidence for current and future change. You can strengthen your coping and adjustment skills by drawing on the support of friends, family or groups. Remember that change is inevitable. The skills you build during times of change will always come in handy!

Getting help

Confidential support, information and resource referrals are available for a variety of concerns – both work and personal. Call for assistance for you or your household members. Call or visit us online today!

When Change is the Challenge
Steps to successful change

Life can change in an instant. But adjusting to change often takes awhile. The process of change—or transition—requires us to pass through three stages. These stages can be emotionally challenging and sometimes even downright painful. Extra doses of patience and energy are usually required. The good news is that a stronger, more resilient “you” emerges through the journey of adapting to change.

The stages of transition

■ Stage one: An ending: It’s ironic but the first stage of any change is when something ends. Even when a change is positive, it still signals some type of ending.

As a result, change can create a sense of loss. So, for example, when you have your first child, you may be ecstatic. At the same time, you may feel saddened by the loss of your more carefree, pre-parent lifestyle.

■ Stage two: Limbo: This is the hardest stage of change because you are sandwiched between what was and what is to be. At this point, it’s still hard to tell how things are going to turn out. This period can be marked by doubt and confusion about the future, and even depression.

The goal during this stage is to remain strong and optimistic. If needed, reach out for support from family, friends, a support group or professional counselor.

■ Stage three: A new start: When the future begins to take shape, you are in the last stage of transition. As the “new” begins, feelings of doubt are replaced by hopefulness and excitement. You may still have a bit of anxiety about what’s ahead—and some remaining sadness about what’s been left behind. But by and large, there is a sense that you’ve turned a corner—and are ready for what lies ahead.

Like all things human, everyone’s feelings and experiences along the road to adjustment are unique. Be kind to yourself as you make the journey. And, at the end, celebrate your success!

1Adapted from Transitions: Making the Most of Change, William Bridges and Susan Bridges, September 2009.

Getting help

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Mastering acceptance

Do you ever find yourself thinking, “If only ...” or “What if?” Having dreams is a way for us to shape our future and consider possibilities. This can be a healthy way to create change. What if, however, we are unable to change the reality of a situation? How do we master acceptance?

- Allow yourself to feel your feelings and name them. Change can create a host of feelings — anger, hurt, disappointment, frustration — as well as happiness, relief and joy.
- Let go of rigid beliefs about how things are “supposed to be.” Things are the way they are. No amount of railing against the situation is going to change it.
- Stay flexible. Pay attention to what brought you to this place. Look for the next opportunity. Don’t dig in your heels in order to stay where you are. You may find the next place more exciting, challenging or more in line with your values.

- Think about what this situation teaches you. Perhaps you have learned more about how to love or how to take yourself less seriously.
- Use the situation to your best advantage. Try to look for the “silver lining.” Believe it or not, many people who lose a job or an intimate relationship discover new, positive opportunities. Finding the “silver lining” can be a challenge, but it is worthwhile.

Stay in the moment and accept the reality you are in. You cannot change the past and can only guess about the future. You have the best possibility of making the moment work for you when you stay present and use these tools.

Getting help

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Is your glass half empty or half full?

Here’s a short, familiar anecdote that speaks volumes about the importance of keeping a positive attitude:

An elderly woman looked in the mirror one morning. She had just three hairs left on her head. Being a positive person, she said, “I think I’ll braid my hair today.” So she braided her three hairs, and she had a great day.

Some days later, looking in the mirror and preparing for her day, she saw that she had only two hairs left. “Hmm, two hairs... I think I’ll part my hair in the middle today.” She parted her two hairs and, as usual, she had a great day.

A week or so later, she saw that she had just one hair left on her head. “One hair...” she mused, “I know: a ponytail will be perfect.” Again, she had a great day.

The next morning she looked in the mirror. She was completely bald.

“Finally bald...” she said to herself, “How wonderful! I won’t have to waste time doing my hair anymore!”

The message of this fable:

We can moan and groan about the changes in our lives, or we can choose to find the brighter side. Think about how this message might apply in your own everyday life.

Do you have opportunities to see things on their sunnier sides? Are there times when you can reframe changes in positive ways? While some see this as a “mind game,” it is truly an essential coping skill. And one that can serve you well!

Getting help

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All calls are confidential, except as required by law (i.e., when a person's emotional condition is a threat to himself/herself or others, or there is suspected abuse of a minor child, and in some areas, spousal or elder abuse).

Information is believed to be accurate as of the production date; however, it is subject to change.