

Guidelines for Coping With Change

Some people seek out change, but most resist it. People are creatures of habit. Keeping routines makes us feel safe and secure. Change can create a sense of loss—pain, sadness, and even anxiety or depression. But since both big and small changes are inevitable, you need to be able to adjust. Try these guidelines for coping with change.

The process of change

Making the transition from one set of circumstances to another takes time. You can't rush change. Deal with the experience moment by moment, and don't panic if it's difficult to imagine yourself too far down the road. Instead, think of change as a process:

- **The ending**—This stage involves either voluntarily or involuntarily ending an attachment to an old way of doing things, or a familiar person, place or job.
- **The transition**—In this stage, people start to let go and move on. This stage can be easier if you know what to expect in the future.
- **The beginning**—In time, people take ownership of change. Once you've moved along in the transition, you'll begin to return to a sense of normalcy.

Fostering new beginnings

You can't force your acceptance of change, but you can make the process easier. These ideas may help:

- **Expect a reaction to the change.** Realize that it's normal to feel sad or angry. Let yourself grieve. Don't try to downplay your emotions. Avoid saying, "I don't know why this is affecting me this way."
- **Find support.** Seek out friends and family who can reassure you. You don't have to brave change alone. It often takes more courage to ask for help.
- **Keep as many familiar routines as possible.** Hanging on to some of your normal daily activities can help provide a sense of stability when the world around you seems chaotic.
- **"Reframe" your thinking.** The faster you're able to change your outlook about your situation, the easier it will be for you to adjust. Try to stay positive. Rather than viewing change as a threat, try to approach it with excitement and anticipation.
- **Cultivate a positive view of yourself.** Recall occasions when you successfully handled hardships in the past, and use those skills to meet your new challenge. Trust in your ability to solve problems and make the right decisions.

- **Take it one step at a time.** If you feel overwhelmed, try not to concentrate so much on the big picture. Think about how far you've progressed instead. Then break the transition period into manageable chunks—maybe even hours.
- **Keep your imagination in check.** Don't let "what if" thoughts get the best of you.
- **Stay healthy.** Coping with change or grief can be emotionally and physically exhausting. Make sure you take good care of yourself. Take breaks when you feel you need them, eat properly and exercise.
- **Find the positive in the situation.** Everyone has something good in her life. This may seem impossible to keep in mind, especially if you're coping with the death of a loved one, serious illness or job loss. But remember that change makes us wiser and stronger.
- **Remember that your struggle to deal with the change will end.** In due time, your new circumstances will become familiar to you. Make a memorial to the change or loss if it will help you in your transition.

Trying to find balance and cope with change is a learned skill. You may find it difficult to adjust, but trust in life's renewable and sustainable potential.

Sources: American Psychological Association; Fast Company; iVillage; SolveYourProblem.com; *Life After Loss: Conquering Grief and Finding Hope* by Raymond Moody Jr., MD, and Dianne Arcangel. HarperSanFrancisco, 2001; *The Orphaned Adult: Understanding and Coping with Grief and Change After the Death of Our Parents* by Alexander Levy. Perseus, 1999; *Why Me? Coping with Grief, Loss, and Change* by Pesach Krauss and Morrie Goldfischer. Bantam, 1988.

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