



## CHANGING COURSE: MANAGING LIFE'S TRANSITIONS

Life is constantly moving: you grow, you age, you learn, you make mistakes and you adjust. As hard as you may try to keep things exactly the same, they rarely stay that way. Why do so many people try to fight these changes?

### CREATURES OF HABIT

Whether it's having toast and coffee every morning, playing tennis on Saturdays or putting in ten-hour workdays, everyone gets used to routines and personal rituals. But when change – good or bad – occurs, the stable situation you relied on becomes new and unknown. This uncertainty can leave you stressed and uneasy.

It feels a little like driving on the left side of the road, when you've spent your whole life driving on the right. Many of the rules still hold true – stop, look both ways, signal – but if you don't adjust to the new situation you could be in trouble. You need to cope with the changes and adapt to them before you wind up on a collision course.

### RESISTANCE IS FUTILE...

When a change is beyond your control, you may feel overwhelmed by it. You might try to ignore or reject the change at first. This may work for a while, but if you refuse to budge, you could be left behind or end up in a more complicated situation. The tips below will help you rebalance after a change:

1) **Assess the situation.** Separate those things you can control from those you can't and ask yourself truthfully what this change really means to your work or family routine. Will the change really have a serious impact on what you do and how you do it? If so:

- **Plan a course of action.** Think about how you can make the transition easier on yourself. If you've just been promoted and are bombarded with new projects, prioritize your tasks and hand off less important jobs. Or if you've had your work hours scaled back, draw up a budget to help manage life on a reduced salary. By taking positive steps to deal with the change you feel more in control and less stressed.
- **Ask for help.** In times of great upheaval, there are usually people around who are more than willing to lend a hand. Speak up and let those around you know when you need help.

2) **Give yourself time to grieve.** It takes time to adjust to a change and you may mourn the loss of someone or something familiar in your life. Grieving is a natural way of coping when a big change occurs.

3) **Stay flexible.** Be prepared to ride the wave, or at least test the waters of change. Try to look at change in a positive light and avoid the "my way or the highway" mentality.

4) **Look for a new opportunity.** You may think that the new change will block you from achieving your goals, but "when one door closes, another one opens." If you're too focused on the closed door, however, you might not be able to see the chances that are just a little further down the road.

5) **Build or maintain a healthy lifestyle.** When change is causing you stress, you may try to comfort yourself with fatty foods, alcohol or tobacco. While these may seem to relieve stress, over time they'll make things worse. Eat well and get active: regular exercise helps release tension and gives you more energy. Try relaxing activities like yoga or tai chi.

6) **Be open.** Ask questions and share your concerns with others: your boss, co-workers, partner, friends or family. The more you talk about and understand the change, the less scary it'll seem. You can also contact your EAP and ask to speak with a counsellor for additional support.

Remember that change is a natural, normal part of life that helps you move forward and grow. Confronting the new challenges that change brings can be frightening. But once you get past your initial fear and deal with the task at hand, you'll feel more confident and better able to anticipate and tackle changes on the horizon.



## Change and your Family

When you're in the middle of a large transition – such as a move, divorce, or a new baby – it's easy to forget that the winds of change may also affect those around you.

Children, partners and even your extended family can have trouble adjusting to the new situation. Though these changes can be challenging, they can also strengthen family ties if they're handled well. Below are some suggestions to help your family settle in when times are changing:

Keep the lines of communication open. Tell your kids that they can talk to you about anything, anytime. Listen and empathize with their concerns. Explain changes in detail and assure your children that not everything will change (e.g. different school but same friends). By knowing what lies ahead, your kids will be better able to cope with the transition.

Allow children time and space to be unhappy. Children can have trouble adapting to change so allow them to grieve for a while – it's a natural way of coping.

**Maintain routines.** Routines help kids feel in control of their environment because they know what to expect. When things change drastically, daily habits or rituals are comforting.

**Remind children of similar challenges** they faced and handled successfully in past. Explain that, over time, every new experience will be easier to cope with.

**Ask friends or extended family to help out.** Children sometimes need extra comfort when parents are least able to give it.

**Take time to work, play and relax together as a family.** During times of flux, make a concerted effort to balance different aspects of family time.

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## Two Major Family Transitions

For better or for worse, family transitions take time, patience and understanding. Whether you're separating, having a baby or blending families, here are some tips to help you navigate the potentially choppy waters of family change.

### **BIRTH OF A CHILD OR BLENDING OF FAMILIES**

Reassure each child they have an important place within the family, both before and after the new sibling or stepparent arrive on the scene.

**Keep your kids involved.** Let them help with the new baby or, when step-siblings and parents move in, plan fun activities that the whole new family can participate in.

**Establish new goals and rituals as a new family.** Getting input from each family member helps kids and adults feel in control, involved and part of a team.

### **SEPARATION AND DIVORCE**

Reassure children that they are not to blame. Many kids feel that they somehow caused the break-up so it's important to emphasize that this is not the case.

**Don't make unkind remarks or argue with your expartner in front of children.** Remember that your children love both of their parents. Saying hurtful things, face-to-face or behind your ex-partner's back, only confuses children and pressures them to choose sides.

**Make sure that each parent has one-on-one time with each child.** It tells children that they are still loved and gives them the chance to share feelings, thoughts and ideas. Both parents need to communicate regularly with their children and support them through the transition. Change can divide and isolate family members. But by working together to overcome these challenges, you can improve your relationship with one another and strengthen family bonds. Your commitment to openness, teamwork and an optimistic attitude will help you and your loved ones focus on what matter's most: a loving, unified and supportive family.