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BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

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Taking Charge of Change Adjustments You Can Make to Minimize Stress

Change is a common part of life, but change – even positive change – can be stressful, and stress can cause a person to feel anxious, uncertain or overwhelmed. Understanding how change causes stress, learning the common signs of stress and the stages of change, and practicing simple stress management techniques can help you manage change.

Change is the process of going from something familiar to something new. A baby faces change when learning to walk and talk. A child faces change when first going off to school and making friends, or by mastering tasks like learning to get dressed or tie shoes. Change in adulthood can take many forms, including building a career, forming adult relationships, and starting a family.

The Three Stages of Change

Understanding the stages of change can help you make the transition from something familiar to something new. In his groundbreaking book, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, William Bridges describes three stages:¹

- **Saying Goodbye.** Every transition begins with an ending even if it's a good change. We have to let go of the way things used to be and feel a sense of loss.
- **Shifting into Neutral.** Next comes an in-between time that's uncertain. We may have "buyer's remorse," even if the change is a good one.
- **Moving Forward.** Last, we start to accept the reality of the change and

identify with our new situation.

Resilience Helps Us Cope

A person's ability to deal with change and the stress it causes is shaped by the person's temperament, how they view the change, their success dealing with past changes, and the skills they have for managing change. Every time a person deals with change they gain skills and confidence that help them deal with the next change. Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity and change.² A resilient person is more likely to experience positive stress. They meet change with a sense of excitement and confidence, and feel motivated by change.

What Changes Are You Experiencing?

Many of the changes in our lives are positive, while other changes are not. Whether the changes are welcome or not, they still disrupt our lives, forcing us to adjust our usual routines and explore different ways of thinking about our lives. That's why they create stress.

Are you going through any of these life events? If so, this is a good time to learn more about coping with change.

- Losing your job or changing jobs
- Getting a promotion
- Getting married or entering a committed relationship
- Planning to get pregnant, going through pregnancy and giving birth
- Adopting a child
- Having a serious illness
- Grieving for a loved one
- Divorcing
- Buying a home
- Relocating
- Retiring

Upcoming Articles

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September 2011

The Road to Recovery

Ten Tips for Navigating Change

1. Remember that change is a part of life.

Accepting that change happens throughout life can help you maintain a positive perspective during periods of change. Find comfort in the changes that you managed earlier in your life.

2. Be optimistic. Look for the advantage in changing. An optimistic outlook makes it easier to navigate change.

3. Take care of yourself. Take time to rest and eat well. Avoid drugs and alcohol. Exercise can help, as can taking part in activities that you like. Recognize your feelings. Give yourself time to mourn losses.

4. Keep things in perspective. Think about the change in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion.

5. Take decisive action. Act on negative situations instead of detaching from your problems and wishing they would go away. If change seems too big, take decisive action one step at a time by breaking it down into

more manageable pieces.

6. Experiment with small changes. Practicing with small changes like taking an alternative route to work, or trying a different kind of food can prepare you to deal with larger changes.

7. Discover something about yourself. Change always provides an opportunity for self-discovery. Stop and reflect on your experience. You may discover a hidden strength, develop a better sense of your worth, or appreciate life more.

8. Build a support network. Family, friends and colleagues can be of great help when a stressful change occurs.

9. Get help from support groups. By sharing information, ideas, and emotions with people going through the same changes as you, you can get comfort and feel less alone. Reading books by people who have successfully lived through adverse situations similar to yours may help too.

10. Get help from a mental health professional. A counselor can help you develop a better perspective on change, and make decisions about how best to move forward. Talking with a mental health professional can be especially helpful if you're feeling overwhelmed by change.

Coping with change isn't always easy. But you don't have to go it alone. UBH is here to help. Call or log on any time for help with any of life's challenges (see Resources).



Resources

United Behavioral Health

Ask your HR representative for your access code and toll-free number.

www.liveandworkwell.com

- Visit the Life Stages Center for resources and assistance to successfully navigate your life change. Just click on the life-changing event that you're experiencing.
- Visit the "Coping with Stress" Life Stages Center for strategies and resources on how to minimize stress during the change you're experiencing.

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1 Bridges, W., (1980). *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

2 American Psychological Association. "The Road to Resilience." <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>. Accessed August 2, 2010.