

10 Tips for Easing the Stress of Transition and Change

Change is challenging, but we can always choose how to handle the transition.

Some changes in life are forced on us. Aging is one. Other changes are the result of choices we make to better our lives or accomplish goals we have set. Either way, change is challenging and we always have a choice about how we will handle the transition.

For example: a few years ago, my parents decided to move from the ranch home they had lived in for 20 years in Florida to a smaller home in a Senior Community nearby where they would have fewer responsibilities and enjoy the company of their peers. Although they knew it was necessary, my father's anxiety began to increase as they faced the challenge of downsizing and letting go of the role of patriarch and homeowner. The move was very difficult for him because marching into the unknown made him feel vulnerable. He felt old, irrelevant, and feared that this would be the beginning of the end of his life. His anxiety appeared to his family as irritability, stubbornness, and rigidity because we were not used to seeing him vulnerable. As often is the case, within a very short time in their new home, my father became the social and gregarious person he had always been, making the new community his next project in life by starting an annual variety show where he was able to use his leadership skills and his musical abilities to bring joy to my mother and to an entire community.

Now that I am in a similar situation of downsizing my life, I am using my father's reaction as something I can learn from and perhaps offer solutions to others who will at some point face difficult transitions in life. *Marriage, divorce, break-ups, career changes, illness, having children, having an empty nest, financial downturns, moving to a new home or a smaller home, graduating, losing someone you love*—all are among the most common transitions for human beings.

Tips for easing the stress of transitions:

1. Admit that you feel vulnerable which may include fear, anxiety, or sadness along with excited anticipation.
2. Become pro-active in the change process. Those who are empowered look for opportunities to make things better. Victims sit back and worry about what will happen from a passive perspective.
3. Know that feelings are not set and you are never stuck with just one feeling. In the same day we may feel afraid and optimistic and excited about the same circumstances. Focus on the positive emotions.
4. Trust yourself based on small or large successes in your past. Ask yourself: When have I managed change before? How did I do that? How did it turn out?

5. Try to avoid obsessing about the future. The solutions for how you feel now are usually in the present. In my case, I am literally waiting right now to hear from a potential buyer for my house. Instead of trying to push my anxious thoughts into the background, I decided to write this blog.
6. When it seems that your future is dependent on the actions of someone else, you might be inclined to obsess on “What ifs?” A better alternative is to choose to be where you are. Make the moment you are in the most important thing in your mind.
7. Take positive action to get back on track. Stopping certain thoughts isn’t easy without a few tools. Doing something totally different like putting on music and dancing in your kitchen, going for a walk in nature, drinking a big glass of water, opening up your posture (stand and stretch your arms stretched out to each side) and breathing. You can also read something short and inspirational that will steer you in a better direction.
8. Sometimes our minds feel like a runaway train. If you can quiet your mind briefly, you will notice there is always a fork in the road. One option is to let your anxious thoughts hijack your brain (the negative path) or you can find something to be grateful for or you can believe that things have a way of working themselves out (positive path) and choose the positive thoughts.
9. Asking for help when you are vulnerable works much better than being angry, irritable, and critical which pushes people away. Be aware that you may be spreading negative energy to others when you are fearful and obsessed.
10. Many people can lessen their fears and stress fairly quickly with meditation, prayer, or by helping someone else. In other words, get out of your own head.

If you try these tips consistently, you will probably have an easier, but not perfect, transition.

Ongoing fear and distress may be a sign that you may need professional help. For a small number of people, depression can be triggered by stress and will prevent them from bouncing back when things settle down. Anxiety may also make it harder to move on and accept changes.

Although change is good for us, no one change is going to fix everything. In uncertain times we often think we know what is best and can see only one acceptable outcome. However, if you seek and hope for the “highest good” (meaning the best outcome for all concerned) rather than the one acceptable outcome, you may be surprised with something better. The best outcome may not be what you expected, but in the end, it may bring about positive results and options you never expected or considered.

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