

# + MANAGING REACTIONS IN THE FACE OF CHANGE

Rapid and constant change is increasingly the norm in the modern world. As the world changes, we must adapt to change with it. Change can be stressful, unexpected, and difficult to manage. They may be significant, impactful changes like the loss of a job or a cross-country move. Or they may be more modest, like a road closure on our way to work, or getting a new neighbor. We all feel the impact in different ways and may struggle to adapt. This handout offers strategies that may make it easier to manage.

## The process of change:

The familiar ends	Transition	New chapter begins
<p>Our lives are altered in some way. The situation we are familiar with ends. Changes can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ New career or educational path</li> <li>+ Family changes such as marriage, divorce, new baby, empty nest, etc.</li> <li>+ Moving to a new home</li> <li>+ Health status of self or loved ones</li> </ul>	<p>We begin to let go of what was familiar. We start to adapt to the new situation in a few ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Process initial feelings and emotions</li> <li>+ Cope with stress response</li> <li>+ Find ways to integrate the change into daily life</li> </ul>	<p>The change becomes a new norm. The “unfamiliar” becomes familiar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Energize into acceptance</li> <li>+ Take ownership</li> <li>+ Commit to new routines, expectations</li> </ul>

## Why is change so hard?

Accepting something new can feel like a struggle, especially changes where we have limited control. You might not agree with the change. You might think it's unfair, or it will make your life harder. These may be true, but it is usually something deeper that is at the root of resistance to change – a fear of the unknown.

When change pushes you out of your comfort zone and into a new, untested situation, it is human instinct to be apprehensive about what could happen. We are biologically wired to be cautious in new situations. For early humans, “new” situations could mean a threat to our survival. Our natural response can include anxiety and stress as we wonder what the impact will be. If change is hard for you, be assured that this is normal. Resisting the change can feel like a way to keep a sense of stability or control.

## Reactions to change

It is normal to have a variety of emotions and reactions when you learn there will be change. Common reactions might include:

- + Anticipation/excitement
- + Anxiety
- + Sadness/loss
- + Anger/irritation
- + Regret
- + Frustration
- + Blaming
- + Embracing
- + Fear
- + Fatigue/burnout
- + Shock
- + Feel overwhelmed
- + Exhaustion, worn out
- + Denial
- + Relief
- + Resignation

Everyone reacts to change in their own way. Reactions can depend on how big the change is and how much it will affect you. They can also change or shift as a person works their way through a transition.

## Tips for managing change

Whenever there is change there is a period of “habituation,” or getting used to the change. While it can feel like you are “at the mercy” of the change, there are actually ways that you can work through it and build resilience.

### Managing difficult emotions

- + **Allow your feelings.** You may experience fear, anger, or sadness. Or you may feel anxiety for the future, or even excitement. These are all normal reactions. Processing these emotions can help you move past them. Some people find it helpful to let feelings flow out on paper or address them creatively, such as through painting or music. You may want to periodically vent to someone who will be a non-judgmental listener, such as a trusted friend, coworker, or your partner.
- + **Reach out to others for support.** Talking through the change with others can be a good way of seeing a different perspective. They may help you see value in the change you didn't see before. Others can bring comfort, company, or a supportive ear to your concerns. They might also be able to help with some type of practical support.
- + If feelings or thoughts become overwhelming, **intentionally shift to a neutral focus.** This may be a physical activity, doing a household task like folding laundry or washing dishes, or something relaxing. This won't change the circumstances, but it can help bring stress levels down in the moment by redirecting anxiety-provoking thoughts to a familiar task.

### Addressing stressful thoughts

- + **Focus on what you can control.** Give your thoughts a break from “what if” scenarios. Determine what you can do in the “here and now,” and put your focus there. Lean into daily routines as much as possible. The structure and predictability of daily tasks can help us feel more grounded.
- + **Try to see the opportunities within the change.** Consider that the unknowns ahead may lead to interesting new challenges and experiences could improve your life and help you grow. If you are faced with an “empty nest,” for example, you might think about returning to hobbies you no longer had time for with children in the house or trying something brand new.

- + **Put your energy and effort into actions that will help you move forward.** For example, with the ending of a relationship, you might join a book club or a fitness class to meet new people and do something new or creative.
- + **Use positive self-talk.** Positive self-talk doesn't ignore reality, but skews our interpretation of what is happening toward a more positive outcome. Challenge yourself to come up with some positive, affirming alternatives, such as “I've made it through worse; I am strong” or “Whatever I face in the future, I know I can handle it.”

### Prioritize self-care

- + **Spend some calming time alone** to think about the change, how you're feeling about it, and ways to move forward. You might take a long walk, go fishing, or find a quiet place in your home. Put yourself in a calm environment, away from the distractions of daily life and the demands of job and family members.
- + **Be kind to yourself.** Transitioning through change can be stressful. It's okay to admit to yourself that it is a struggle. It may be hard to focus and concentrate during these times. Your energy level may be low. Be patient with yourself.
- + **Don't neglect your physical health.** Do what you can to make sure you get enough sleep to feel well rested and energized to meet the challenges change can bring. Work to maintain a healthy diet and regular meals to nurture your body. Remember that exercise and being physically active through walking, biking, and other activities can reduce stress and tension. Avoid overuse of alcohol and/or substances.
- + **Find time in each day for something that lifts you up.** Change is hard work. It can drain your energy and spirit and leave you feeling a bit lost. Give yourself a chance to replenish and rebalance. This might be trying something new, tackling a task you have put off, or simply doing something that makes you feel content.

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