

Counseling Corner:

The Psychology Of Dealing With Change: How to Become Resilient

Many people spend a great deal of effort trying to avoid change, but it will inevitably catch up to you. Whether it's starting a new job, moving to a different city, the end of a relationship, or a loss of a loved one, try these strategies to cope with change

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Any life is a life of change. We experience transitions in work and relationships, changes in our physical and mental health, and new events in our local communities and our world. Sometimes we know a change will occur, while other times it comes suddenly and unexpectedly. Maybe it's a disappointment, or maybe it's a wonderful surprise.

Many people spend a great deal of time and energy trying to avoid change, but it will inevitably catch up to them. If you can learn to cope with change, you'll lower your risk for anxiety and depression. Your relationships will flourish, and your body will feel healthier. But if you can't cope with change, only a minor amount of stress can make you feel overwhelmed by life. You might also struggle to set and meet the goals you have for yourself.

Being able to cope with change is sometimes called resilience. Though your environment and genes might influence your level of resilience, the amount isn't set in stone. Practicing different ways of thinking and being in the world can boost your ability to deal with change and help you create a life that is adaptive to new places and unexpected events. Let's take a look at a few healthy practices for increasing your level of resilience and coping with change.

Evaluate Your Level of Control

Sometimes it's all too easy to become fixated on events over which we have no power, or people who might never change their actions or attitude. But rather than focus on blaming others or moving the unmovable, resilient people set their sights on what they can control. To evaluate your level of control over a situation, you can ask yourself, "What can I take responsibility for in this situation?" When you look for opportunities to empower yourself and work towards change that is possible, you're less likely to feel stuck in difficult situations.

Practice Self-Care After a Loss

Often life's transitions involve losses, such as a death, a big move, the loss of a job, or a relationship ending. Even positive transitions, like a graduation or a job change, can make you feel a little sad. During these times of transitions, don't push away any grief you might feel. Acknowledge the loss, and pay attention to what you've learned from the experience. Seek support and camaraderie among friends and family, and consider speaking with a counselor or other mental health professional if you feel you need extra support during the transition.

Check Your Thought Patterns

In times of change, it's easy for your mind to cut corners. You might see everything in black or white, or you assume the worst will occur. But if you take the time to examine your thought patterns and assess how rational they are, you might find some space to nudge your thinking towards resilience. If you're not sure how to slow down your mind, practicing relaxation techniques, such as mindfulness or deep breathing, can help you feel more in control of your brain and how you evaluate a major change.

You can also generate more positive thoughts if you take the time to remind yourself about transitions and challenges you successfully navigated in the past. Make a list of ways you've been resilient in your life, and consider what traits and actions might be able to see you through the current challenge. By focusing on your strengths instead of your weaknesses, you will feel more empowered to meet what lies ahead.

Be in the Present

While it's important to look to the past to find your strengths, sometimes you can feel too pulled into the future in times of change. When you worry about what the future will bring or what mistakes you might make, you forget to be in the present and observe

what's happening around you. To bring yourself back to the present, get in tune with your body. Pay attention to how it responds to stress, and set aside time every day to relax, take some deep breaths, and bring your focus back to the present.

Find Your Priorities

The most resilient people see change as an opportunity rather than a monster to fear. Transitions in life allow you to consider where your priorities lie. How do you really want to spend your time on earth? What's really important to you? Where do you see yourself wasting your time and energy? With a clear sense of your goals and values, you will find your mind and body can be much more resilient when it comes to the stressors of change.

Above all, prioritizing your health in life's transitions means not being afraid to ask for help when you need it. Humans are social creatures by nature, so you weren't built to withstand every sudden event in life without the support of others. Talk to family and friends who are experiencing similar changes, or consider finding a support group in your community. Ask your doctor about how to prioritize your health during change, and don't be afraid to talk to a counselor or other mental health professional about building resilience. You can't avoid change, but you can live a life of resilience. You can embrace transition and see challenges as opportunities to thrive.

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