

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Don't Let Change Overwhelm You

from the American Counseling Association

Change happens to all of us. Sometimes it's gradual, as when we watch our parents (and ourselves) age, and sometimes it's very abrupt, as when our job ends unexpectedly.

Most of us don't like sudden change. We can easily accept small changes, but large, life-altering transitions can be frightening and stressful. But major changes don't have to be negative experiences.

One way is to view change as an opportunity, not a loss. Losing your job, for example, will produce negative feelings even if it wasn't your fault. The trick is to see what happened as a chance for something new -- an opportunity to learn a new skill, to head in a different direction or to explore a passion you never had time for before.

To make change work for you, you have to take positive action. While a big change might make you want to hide and mourn, you can instead fight depressing emotions by taking steps for a better you. Eat healthier, get exercise daily and be sure to get enough sleep. Living a healthier life will have you feeling better emotionally and physically, and better prepare you to handle your transition.

You also want to look to others for support. Talking to a friend or family member who is able to listen in a safe, non-judgmental way can help you talk through your feelings and discuss what possibilities the future might hold. In some cases you might feel more comfortable talking with a clergy member or a professional counselor.

A sudden change is best handled when you take time to consider what has happened and what is now possible. One helpful activity is to make a list of all the positive, stable things in your life. You might be surprised just how many there are.

It's also helpful to pay attention to how what has happened is affecting you. Try keeping a journal where you can write about what your feelings, needs and wants are at this time. It's also fine to grieve for what has been lost. You're allowed to feel sad for what has changed, but those feelings shouldn't be to the point where they overwhelm you.

Change can be difficult, but when you accept that it can also provide opportunities that might otherwise have been missed, change can often end up being a very positive experience.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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