

# *The Caring Presence*

## *Everything Changes*

It has been said that everything changes, and we all know that to be true. Every day we are faced with some sort of change, whether it is in our lifestyle, our friendships and relationships, or in our health. It's true, there are changes going on all around us.

But how do we deal with all those changes? Some of us just mosey on through life dealing with whatever comes our way, seemingly not noticing, adjusting to the changes without hesitation. But others are taken aback by the smallest change in their routine, their menu or whatever change comes along.

Why is it that some of us are able to cope so well with change while others do not? In some, change can bring about drastic changes in personality and in a person's ability to feel hopeful, and yet others just "whistle while they work."

Does our ability to adjust to change more easily make us the better person? I believe it means only that each of us deals with change in our own way, in our own time and speed, and because we are all different, our adaptability to change is also different.

"Human beings aren't terribly adaptable," says Carrie Holl, PsyD, and Director of Behavioral Medicine at Georgetown University Medical Center. "We like things to remain status quo. Anything that violates that familiarity can be very disruptive."

More and more experts are helping people to cope with the transforming events in their lives. People need to realize that change and transition are not the same.

"Change is an external even that usually happens in days or weeks...Transition is the internal process of saying good-bye to the old and getting comfortable with the new, which can take months or years," notes William Bridges, PhD, author of *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*.

He goes on to say, "Even when you choose to make a change in your life, you rarely think about the long, bumpy road you must take to get from one place to the next."

Some of the tips given by experts on coping with change include:

- Organize a support system (Friends who will cheer you, individuals you can call upon for emotional support)
- Let yourself feel bad (Know that it is okay to feel lonely, sad or scared – some stress from change can be motivating)

- Skip the “what ifs” (Stewing or worrying over the things that haven’t happened yet can escalate stress and is often unnecessary)
- Appreciate the good (Remind yourself, out loud, of your achievements and appreciate them)
- Maintain healthy habits (Follow a good diet and get exercise, and also get plenty of sleep)
- Be open and flexible (Know that change can happen at any time, which will help you adjust when it does occur)
- Have a positive attitude (Keep your “sunny side up;” a good attitude will help you feel good about yourself and able to cope with changes that come along)
- Take control (Make a list of things you can do now that will help you cope with the changes in your life, a list of options)
- Use resources around you (Seek our self-help publications, support groups, friends and more; learn to recognize and utilize them)

In the popular book, *When Bad Things Happen To Good People*, one woman responded when asked about her day, “I need bad days to help me appreciate the good ones.” She pretty much sums up a lot about life. None of us experience only joy and happiness. We all have things that happen in our lives that bring about change. Some things are anticipated and some of them come as a surprise. It is how we deal with them that makes the difference.

Do we curl up in a ball and give up? Do we look the situation right in the eyes and stay determined to make it into something good?

I believe that how we cope with situations will depend on a lot of different things. One, how old are we at the time of the change? How much changed have we endured? A young person may be more able to deal with change than a senior who feels overwhelmed with life.

Do we, or have we had, role models in our lives? Are we financially secure or are we working with a limited income? Do we have family members around us or are we all alone? All of these things and more can affect how we deal with change and how effectively we cope.

Many individuals, as previously mentioned, may instantly adjust to changes that take place while others may adjust but it just takes a while longer. Yet others may not adjust to change at all. Even so, our individual makeup can greatly determine how we adjust to the changes in our lives.

If you are experiencing change in your life and you believe that it is affecting you physically, there is a very important thing to do. Call your physician. Your physician can be of

assistance in many ways. Let your doctor know about the changes taking place in your life, how you are feeling about those changes, and what you are experiencing physically as a result of the changes and the stress that has been brought into your life.

Your doctor will have options for you to consider. It is also important to talk with someone regarding your feelings so they don't become all-consuming. Perhaps a family member, friend or pastor can listen and help you through the transition. However, if left unaddressed the physical reactions you may be having as a result of stress or change can lead to more serious physical complications. Again, it is important to tell your physician.

It has been said there are three stages to change. The first is the ending. Though it is called "the ending," it is really the beginning, the beginning of the transition period. Perhaps you have experienced the loss of something or someone important in your life, or a habit has been given up; something has changed in your life.

The second stage is the neutral period, the bridging between old and new. Typically this stage can be a struggle. There is mourning for what has been lost. This is when you should talk with someone about your feelings. Information-gathering also takes place during this stage, and options are considered and new plans are made.

Lastly, the third stage is one of new beginnings. New goals, relationships, lifestyle changes or patterns of behavior develop. Acceptance of the neutral zone takes place in this stage, and you need to allow for reflection and discussion with others.

Change, unfortunately, is inevitable, especially in today's world of high speed, face pace and the ever-present upgrade in order to make things "better." I think we all wish, from time to time, that we could just have it all stay the same or go "back to the way it was," even for just a day in order to adjust to all that is happening around us.

Those feelings cross boundaries between age, gender and culture. Those feelings affect everyone to some degree. Life today is filled with changes that come upon us faster each day. We barely have time to adjust to something being different before it is changed once again. Whew!

Perhaps Henri Bergson, a French philosophy professor, who lived during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1927, said it best when he said, "To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly."

If you are facing change in your life and aren't sure how to go about shouldering the change and need help adjusting to whatever may be going on right now, whether temporary or not, please let us know.

The Caring Presence is here to be of assistance, or we can provide resource information that can possibly be of assistance to you.

Remember, you are not alone; just give us a call today.

Rebecca Matson  
Marketing Coordinator  
The Caring Presence

Credits:

Carrie Holl, PsyD, and Director of Behavioral Medicine at Georgetown University Medical Center

William Bridges, PhD, author of *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*

Health Looks Good on You, Dealing with Change, Fran Smith

Gale Loeffler, Colorado State University, Cooperative Extension Office

Doris Walker, Extension Specialist, Kansas State University, Dealing with Change

*When Bad Things Happen To Good People*, Harold S. Kushner, 1981

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