



Navigating Change

Despite understanding transitions and change are a part of life, adapting to change remains a constant struggle for many. These days, the pace of change has increased, and with it, the directions from which change comes. Understandably, many feel overwhelmed and lost.

Avoidance Coping

When faced with rapid change, many may want to bury their heads in the sand. When you find your behaviours are dictated by a desire to evade thinking, feeling, or dealing with a situation or concern, you may be experiencing avoidance coping.

While avoidance coping strategies may be beneficial under certain circumstances, they often bring negative consequences. These may include an increase in anxiety and stress, fractured relationships, and limitations on support.

By understanding our response to change and developing adaptive coping strategies and skills, we can support our overall wellbeing and increase our capacity to adapt and grow through change.

Phases of Change

Individuals experience relatively predictable concerns and questions when facing change. William Bridges' 3-stage transitional model assists in identifying and addressing our presenting needs with the change process.

Phase 1: Ending, Losing, and Letting Go

The first phase commences when we are made conscious of the change. During this time, we may experience:

- Intense feelings, such as sadness, anger, shock, and/or fear
- States of confusion and being overwhelmed
- Physiological responses, such as headaches and general aches and pains.

During this stage, we need to honour our emotional reactions, thoughts, and feelings relating to the change. Connect with others who may support us in speaking our concerns and who may sit with us and hear our grief. This time is invaluable; it allows us to identify what is lost, what is different but not gone, and what we may hold and take with us.

Phase Two: The Neutral Zone

This phase is a time of vulnerability and uncertainty. There is a high tendency to look back favourably on the past and the sense of safety and familiarity attached to it. During this time, we may experience:

- Symptomology of stress and anxiety stemming from an experience of instability
- Intense emotional responses, such as anger or resentment directed at the change itself or those we hold responsible for the change
- Low mood and productivity, linked to a feeling of hopelessness within the change.



Phase Three: New Beginning

The final phase sees growth in acceptance of the change. Things begin falling into place, and we start to see ourselves as masters of this new norm. During this phase, we may experience:

- Reinstated a sense of purpose and direction
- Improved mood and enthusiasm
- Drive to succeed and achieve – increased flexibility of mind.

Navigating Our Way Through Change

Proactive strategies can aid you in shifting your frame of reference from being defenceless against the change, to feeling empowered and active.

Notice your 'Self-Talk'

When we are overwhelmed, we sometimes repeat things in our heads that contribute to our stress and anxiety. This unhelpful self-talk may include, 'I can't cope', or 'It's not fair'. While we may think these are truthful descriptions of events, they are not always helpful to repeat and can even make us feel worse. The key is to notice when we are engaging in unhelpful self-talk. Try positive self-talk, such as, 'This is not the end of the world'.

Express your Emotions

Allowing space to express emotions ensures they don't overwhelm us, and, instead, provides us with emotional awareness and control. Try journaling, talking to others about how you feel, using art to express emotions, or going to counselling.

Focus Within Your Control

We all seek control over our lives, including how much others impact and shape our experiences. At the end of the day, what we have is not control but rather the capacity to influence. In essence, shift your focus from the 'what if' questions towards questions such as 'what you can do?'.

Practice Sitting with Difficult Emotions

The aim is not to avoid or remove our feelings, but rather to sit with and allow our emotions. Mindfulness is a strategy you can draw upon, aiding your capacity to calm your mind, reduce your stress, focus on the here and now and make clear and meaningful decisions.

Reframe your Perspective

Looking at and reframing your perspective of the change can help you explore the situation through an alternative lens. Consider what you can learn, grow, and benefit from, as opposed to focusing on what is lost. This expenditure of energy is an investment in your overall wellbeing.

Self-Care

Self-care is better understood as self-nourishment that supports your capacity to function and show up for yourself and others. When we are at our best physically, mentally, and emotionally, we increase our capacity to go about our day and meet what comes our way. Taking time to place energy into activities and actions that bring you joy, or a sense of relaxation, rest, or revitalisation.

