

Introduction to Change

In day-to-day life we are constantly faced with situations where we have to embrace change. Sometimes this change is self-imposed, for example, making a decision to move house or start a new career. At other times it may be dictated from outside, such as a re-structure in work or a road closure on a familiar journey.

Whatever the change or changes you are facing, our aim here is to explore the impact on you and to share some tips and ideas for maintaining health and wellbeing.

Pressing your Buttons – your response to change

Looking at the matrix below, circle the words that are most meaningful for you when thinking about a forthcoming or current change:

Lonely	Exciting	Fear	Tired
Can't wait	New Start	Vulnerable	Hopeful
Impatient	Opportunity	Not Again	Unknown
Worn Out	Frightened	Anxious	Helpless

Look at your choices. Are most of your choices?

☐

Positive

☐

Negative

☐

Neutral

☐

A mix of all three

Are there any others that you would include?

It is not unusual for people to select a variety of different words when thinking about change. We are all different.

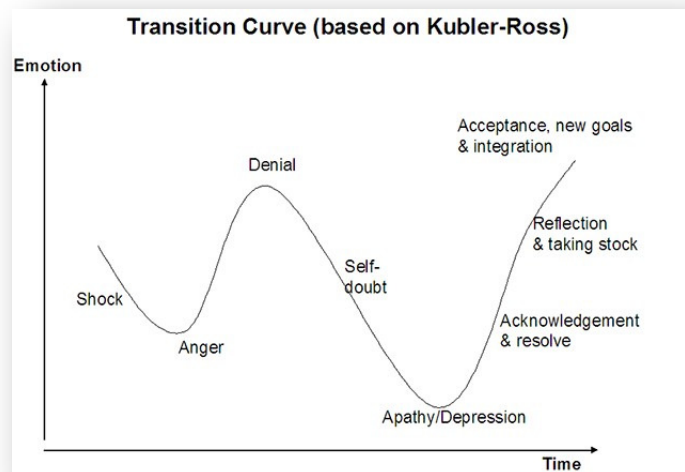
- Some people find it difficult to accept and adjust to change and uncertainty
- Others relish changes and view them as great opportunities
- Some people initiate change
- Others prefer the status quo

Our response may depend on the sort of change we are facing. Change is often associated with high levels of uncertainty. This *may* feel uncomfortable, particularly if the change is imposed from outside so you do not have direct control over it. Our response may also be affected by *where* we are at in what is called the transition process.

In transition? Know where you are

People can have strong attachments to the groups to which they belong, to social structures, to personal responsibilities, and to ways of doing things. When any of these are disturbed, whether by personal choice or through a change from which they may feel quite removed, a transition period occurs.

During a period of transition people may experience a range of feelings and display a range of behaviours. The experience of change can be represented in the transition curve (based on the work of Kubler-Ross and the Bereavement Model). By understanding and recognising some of the possible stages that you, or others, may be going through during a period of transition you will be better equipped to work with change in a positive way.



Personal exercise

Look at the tables on the following pages which show some of the stages people go through when faced with change. Try and find the elements which reflect how you are thinking, feeling and behaving at the moment. Circle, and date, the point in the curve below which best describes how you are responding right now.

Review this regularly. Your position on the curve may have affected your choice of words in the previous exercise, and it will certainly reflect the way you are responding at the moment. It is important to recognise that, whilst circumstances change, so do *you*. Alongside this, it may also help to understand where those close to you are on the curve - we rarely go through a transition alone.

Come back to this exercise at regular intervals, and notice how, over time, you are going through transition stages. This is a useful exercise to talk over with someone you trust, because they may be able to help you see the things that you don't, and because they may be able to support you in finding new solutions. Remember: All of these Transition Stages are valid – there are no right ones or wrong ones. Within any group of people, you will find all of the stages represented at some time or other.

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Reaction	Behaviour	Emotion	Thoughts	What you might need from others
Shock	Vary from frenetic activity to immobility	Panic Disbelief Surprise Numbed	I don't believe it! There's been a mistake No thoughts, mind blank	Acknowledgement of the shock Lots of empathy Them to be available
Denial	Withdrawing or pretending nothing has changed	False optimism or confidence Euphoria Suppressed anger	It's not that different I'm not affected Reorganisation won't happen	Patience, to be allowed some retreating Not to be judged, respect After a while to be gently challenged to see reality
Anger	Blaming or complaining, irritable, hostile to work colleagues, friends and family	Anger Fear	I won't stand for this I'll make them pay It's someone's fault	Tolerance and understanding A soothing response Some reality checking in a supportive way
Self doubt	Losing interest and focus, worrying	Confusion Low self-esteem Anger, guilt, doubt Fear of the future, worry	Have I the skills? I should have seen it coming Will I cope / what will I tell others?	Support Empathy with the depth of feeling Help to reframe negatives and doubt
Apathy	Low activity, slow responses, withdrawing from contact, work in spurts	Depression Vulnerable Low self-worth Helplessness	What's the point? Nobody wants my skills I can't change anything	Empathy with your inactivity and understanding Help to reframe and see different perspective To be energised with activity
Acknowledgement and resolve	Increased drive but undirected activity, letting go of the past and trying new things, but resisting commitment	Increasing energy and elation Returning hope and optimism	The past is gone I want to succeed in this new post / culture This is going to be difficult, but	Acknowledging their turning point Encourage focus and meaning to activity

Reaction	Behaviour	Emotion	Thoughts	What you might need from others
Reflection and taking stock	Structured activity, taking time to review the past, present and future, commitment to the tasks ahead	Purposeful Reflective Increasing confidence	What have I learned to take with me? What do I need to learn now? What do I offer?	Ask helpful questions to help clarify both wants and needs Reflect and summarise Encourage focused activity
Acceptance and new goals	Setting clear goals Following an action plan Networking, making new friends Sense of belonging and integration	Feeling of growth and renewal Energised	What a difficult time but I've learned a lot I know my roots but I am happy with where I am now The future is bright	Encourage and help clarify goals Encourage them to be specific in their actions and set milestones to review Celebrate success

Harnessing resources

Adjusting to change can be tiring. It may draw on a lot of your energy. There are a number of things that you can do to help yourself.

Personal exercise

Look through the list below.

Which do you currently do? Which could you do more of? What else works for you?

- Give yourself time and space to react – change cannot be rushed and we all have different adjustment cycles. People often criticise themselves for their emotions. Remind yourself that these are not wrong; they are simply your reaction to the situation.
- Keep perspective– a change in one area of your life may seem to encroach on all aspects of your life. Change can make you feel uncomfortable in your own skin. Keep perspective by maintaining the other aspects of your life that keep you healthy and grounded. If the change is big keep up with familiar routines where you can. When times are difficult, give yourself hope. Plan something to look forward to every week.
- Apply caution – the low points on the transition curve are not good times to make important decisions. Postpone any decisions you can or discuss your ideas with someone you trust before you act.
- Use your support networks – emotional support makes a big difference during change. It is too easy to lose sight of the resources that are still available to you.
- Manage your health – many people feel extra stress during a transition process. Don't fight it – but do take care of yourself. Maintain or improve your personal fitness, follow a healthy eating routine, take time for rest and relaxation.
- Ask for help – if work or life feels like it is getting out of control it is okay to ask for help.
- Contact the EAP - our confidential helpline is there for you to talk about a range of issues, including change.

How did you feel completing this exercise?

Sometimes when change is imposed and we cannot control it we feel angry and resentful. This can create a barrier to keeping well and happy.

What barriers are getting in the way for you? How might you overcome them?

The opportunity in change

Frequently in life we hear the phrase 'look on the bright side'. A well-meaning friend or colleague may offer these words by way of encouragement or we may say the words to ourselves in an effort to gain perspective. Whatever the circumstances it is usually said in a bid to change our perception of a gloomy situation. For most of us, at some point in our lives, however, there will be times when 'looking on the bright side' is neither easy nor welcome advice.

We know from many examples of human triumph in the face of adversity that a positive outlook can be extremely rewarding, particularly when the situation seems dismal, uninvited or hopeless. Change can seem all three but it also invariably offers opportunities for personal and career development. Whether or not you (a) see and (b) take these opportunities is down to you.

In difficult times, possibly when change is imposed or it affects something you consider central to your sense of being, the opportunities associated with it may be missed and your confidence at managing it may be lacking. At these times it is worthwhile to take time to reflect and reframe.

Reflection - Your experience as a change expert!

It is well worth remembering that you have survived (maybe even enjoyed) all manner of changes already in your life. Whether it has been in relationships, becoming a parent, moving home, changing job or career direction, buying a new car or even changing hairstyle. Write down three major changes you have 'survived' below. If you get stuck ask a good friend - the examples will be there.