



Balanced LIVING

Coping with major LIFE CHANGES

Major life changes, such as getting a new boss or having a baby, affect all aspects of your life. Whether positive or negative, change can be difficult to adjust to.

“All major changes involve a component of loss at their center,” said Cara DiMarco, Ph.D., a counselor in Oregon and author of *Moving Through Life Transitions with Power and Purpose*. “That loss might involve a particular routine, loss of opportunities, loss of a sense of yourself or a loss of hope.”

As a result, most people going through major life transitions can expect to feel varying levels of anxiety, stress, confusion and possibly self-doubt. These feelings should not become persistent, however, but should decrease over time. If they don't ease and your ability to function in daily life becomes significantly impaired, you may need professional help.

The adjustment period typically is uncomfortable, but you can do things to make change easier on yourself.

Expect disruption

In the vortex of change, many people expect to go on without missing a beat, as if the change were a minor inconvenience. But this attitude isn't realistic. “While it's essential that we're able to be productive in the midst of change, we also need to allow ourselves to not feel fully centered, to not feel absolutely on top of our game,” Dr. DiMarco says.

If you're starting a new job, for instance, and are used to performing at 95 percent, don't expect to be up to speed immediately.

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COPING WITH CHANGE

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Focus on the known

In the midst of change, “people tend to over-focus on the unknown,” Dr. DiMarco says. “This is only natural, because that’s where most of their anxiety lies. But some things you just can’t know until you’re in the middle of the experience.”

To avoid needless worry and self-doubt about changes at hand, focus on the known elements that are present in the new situation.

Anticipate change

Change is inevitable, so it’s helpful to plan for it. “Being prepared allows you to have more options and be aware of potential obstacles,” Dr. DiMarco says.

If you have children in high school, for instance, you know they will soon leave home -- and you’ll have more time to yourself.

To establish several game plans for coping with empty-nest syndrome and making good use of your free time, sit down with someone -- a career counselor, personal counselor or trusted friend -- and use the person as a sounding board.

Pinpoint patterns

How do you move through change? What sorts of feelings and reactions tend to consistently recur? “These are the kinds of questions to ask yourself when your life is stable so you can develop your own personal tool kit of coping strategies when change ensues,” Dr. DiMarco says.

Look for meaning

Change disrupts the continuity of life, but even the most difficult and traumatic changes can be useful. “You can learn from every experience,” Dr. DiMarco says. You might have never chosen that life-changing experience or the lesson it taught you about yourself or the world, but if you can find the meaning or valuable outcome behind it, that experience will become part of your internal world, rather than an external agent acting on you.

That mind-set, Dr. DiMarco says, “Increases your sense of personal control and power. By extracting something out of change, you can create a sense of mastery.”

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EYE-CARE essentials for computer users

If you spend hours each day working at a computer screen, you may experience eyestrain, blurred vision, itchy eyes and occasional double vision.

“But studies have found no indication that working on a computer screen causes permanent vision problems,” says Kent Daum, O.D., an optometrist at the University of Alabama School of Optometry in Birmingham. “Short-term problems, such as tired, irritated or watery eyes, do bother 70 percent to 75 percent of people who work at computers, but these problems can usually be corrected by wearing a special pair of glasses for computer work, adjusting lighting in the workplace and altering the position of the computer screen.”

Correct vision problems. One of the easiest ways to prevent eye fatigue and discomfort is to see a vision specialist.

“Minor visual problems, such as astigmatism or imbalances between the eyes, can be corrected by wearing corrective lenses, and you’ll greatly increase your comfort,” Dr. Daum says. “If you don’t have to see distant objects clearly while at the computer, wearing bifocal lenses with the top adjusted for the computer screen and the bottom adjusted for reading is best.”

If your distance vision must be clear while working at the computer, bifocal lenses with the upper part adjusted for distance and a large bottom part adjusted for the computer is recommended.

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As an alternative, a progressive lens with a large middle section for computer work could be used.

“Some people can comfortably use bifocal contact lenses when working at a computer, but in most cases, glasses will provide greater comfort and clearer vision,” Dr. Daum says.

Increase your comfort. The following steps can further reduce your eye discomfort and fatigue:

- Place the computer straight in front of you, not off to the side.
- Place the screen at right angles to any windows to minimize glare.
- Adjust the screen angle to minimize reflections from overhead lights or desk lamps.
- Use drapes, shades or blinds to control window lighting and glare. Vertical and horizontal blinds will direct light away from you and the computer.
- Keep the screen brightness the same or brighter than the brightness of other objects in the room.
- Set your computer to display black characters on a white background.
- Use an adjustable copy holder to keep reference material at the same height and distance away from you as the computer screen. “This eliminates the need to change eye focus when looking from one to the other,” Dr. Daum says.
- Use a glare-reduction filter to enhance screen contrast and increase character legibility. Use a three-sided computer hood if glare continues to be a problem.
- Wipe the screen often with an anti-static cloth.
- Take periodic rest breaks. “Every 15 minutes or so, look up and focus on a distant object for about two minutes,” recommends Dr. Daum. “Blinking frequently and using artificial-tear eye drops to relieve dryness and irritation can also help.”

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Secrets to building your **CONFIDENCE** at work



Training and talent can help you do your job well and keep you moving forward in your career. But your performance can take a nosedive when your self-confidence is on the skids.

The following suggestions can help you restore and increase your on-the-job self-confidence.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Learn as much as you can about the subject at hand — whether you're giving a speech, asking for a promotion or making a sales call. You can't be over prepared when your performance is on the line.

ANALYZE YOUR MISTAKES

Knowing what went wrong and what you can do to keep from making the same mistake again can help you turn a negative situation into one that boosts your confidence in your problem-solving abilities.

DON'T TAKE THE EASY WAY OUT

One reward of taking risks is an increased potential for higher achievement. Ask for added responsibility when given a choice between maintaining the status quo or doing something more.

ALWAYS ACT CONFIDENT

Do your best to dismiss your fears if you're worried a speech, meeting or sales presentation will bomb. Force yourself to smile and shake hands firmly. Walk with your head up and your shoulders back.

PRIORITIZE YOUR TASKS EACH DAY

Daily to-do lists are a must, but to really take control of your day you should complete tasks in order of priority. Completing one high priority assignment will boost your confidence more than doing four or five low-priority ones.

MAKE CHANGE A POSITIVE

Welcoming instead of fearing change makes it easier to identify the advantages and opportunities presented by new responsibilities and directions.

KEEP A LIST OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Refer to the list when your confidence needs a lift. Items to include:

- **A major project completed on time/under budget.**
- **A successful meeting you conducted.**
- **A reorganization of your filing system.**
- **Mastery of a new computer program.**

POST YOUR GOALS WHERE YOU CAN SEE THEM

Keeping goals in front of you increases your chances of internalizing and achieving them. Setting goals and meeting them creates a pattern of success you can build on.

STAY CALM WHEN SPEAKING TO OTHERS

Rehearse difficult conversations or negotiations ahead of time. Excuse yourself or set up a time to revisit the conversation if you are unable to control your emotions during a discussion.

BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR ACTIONS

Making yourself accountable for your failures also makes you responsible for your successes. If you take responsibility for your actions, you will believe that your hard work and intelligence — not luck — led to your achievements.

AVOID NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

Pay attention to your inner dialogue and replace negative comments with positive ones. For example: When your inner voice says, "I've got so much to do, I'll never get this assignment done on time," replace that thought with, "I'm capable of focusing my energy on the task at hand and completing it in a timely fashion."

DON'T BE AFRAID OF NERVOUS ENERGY

Butterflies in your stomach and a racing heart are your body's way of preparing for a challenge; they're confirmation that what you're about to do matters.

COMPETE AGAINST YOURSELF

Assess your workplace performance for the past year. Then establish some specific goals for the year ahead. For example, increasing sales by 10 percent, getting to work on time every day, returning all your phone calls within 24 hours or completing routine tasks 20 percent faster.

KEEP YOUR LIFE IN PERSPECTIVE

Maintaining a healthful balance between your personal and professional lives can help you weather a workplace crisis because you're less likely to define your self-worth by how well you do your job.