

Balanced LIVING

healthful ways TO MANAGE CHANGE

We live in a constantly changing world in these times of the COVID-19 pandemic, a boom-bust economy and rapid-fire technological and scientific advances.

"In this present environment, it can be challenging to retain a sense of control, especially if you're someone who likes to maintain the status quo," said psychologist Elizabeth Stirling, Ph.D., a change coach in Santa Fe, N.M.

"In general, says Dr. Stirling, it's more difficult to react to change that happens to you, such as getting laid off or experiencing a health scare. But the change you initiate, such as switching jobs or moving, also can be difficult.

"The unknown is always a little scary," says Dr. Stirling, especially if you haven't done a lot of changing previously, or if change wasn't fostered during your upbringing.

"But personal change can become easier if you adopt a positive attitude," she says. Dr. Stirling offers the following tips for riding the waves of change with your sanity intact.

SOLIDIFY YOUR SUPPORT

To cope with change effectively, align yourself with a group, such as a spiritual organization, and/or nurture relationships with friends and family members with positive outlooks.

"You need cheerleaders, people who are going to encourage you when change happens," says Dr. Stirling. "When someone says your new job sounds exciting, your confidence gets a boost."

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MANAGING CHANGE HEALTHFULLY

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APPRECIATE NATURE

For general stress relief associated with change, “connect with nature to get a sense of being part of a larger whole,” suggests Dr. Stirling. “Go for a leisurely walk in the park or sit by a body of water. Experiencing a deep sense of sacredness of all things, like the splendor of a spring day, can ease stress and put your issues into perspective.”

LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

Many changes provide the opportunity for personal growth. If possible, “tap into the benefits of change,” says Dr. Stirling. “Ask yourself: ‘What will I gain by making this change?’”

Even negative changes offer opportunities for learning. Overall, “staying positive can help you reach your potential and recover faster from setbacks,” says Dr. Stirling. But seek support, from professionals like those at Continuum EAP, if change has you chronically anxious or stuck in the grieving process after several months.

FLEX YOUR CHANGE MUSCLES

Change gets easier when you do it often, so force yourself to experience enjoyable change frequently, especially if you haven’t changed much in a while or you feel stuck in a rut. You might, for example, take a different route to work every other week, get involved in a new hobby or enroll in a class that interests you.

TURN OFF THE TV & DIGITAL DEVICES

Prolonged viewing of screens can increase stress because of violent or disturbing content and the constant visual stimulation.

STAY IN GOOD PHYSICAL SHAPE

Before and during times of change, it’s important to stay in good physical shape and not let your eating habits slide.

“Healthy nutrition and regular exercise can help your body support you,” said Dr. Stirling. If you experience a major health setback, for example, you’ll be in a stronger position to recover. And you’ll also feel more psychologically prepared to cope with change.

“By eating healthfully and exercising regularly, you’ll gain a sense of personal control that can translate to the change at hand,” she said.

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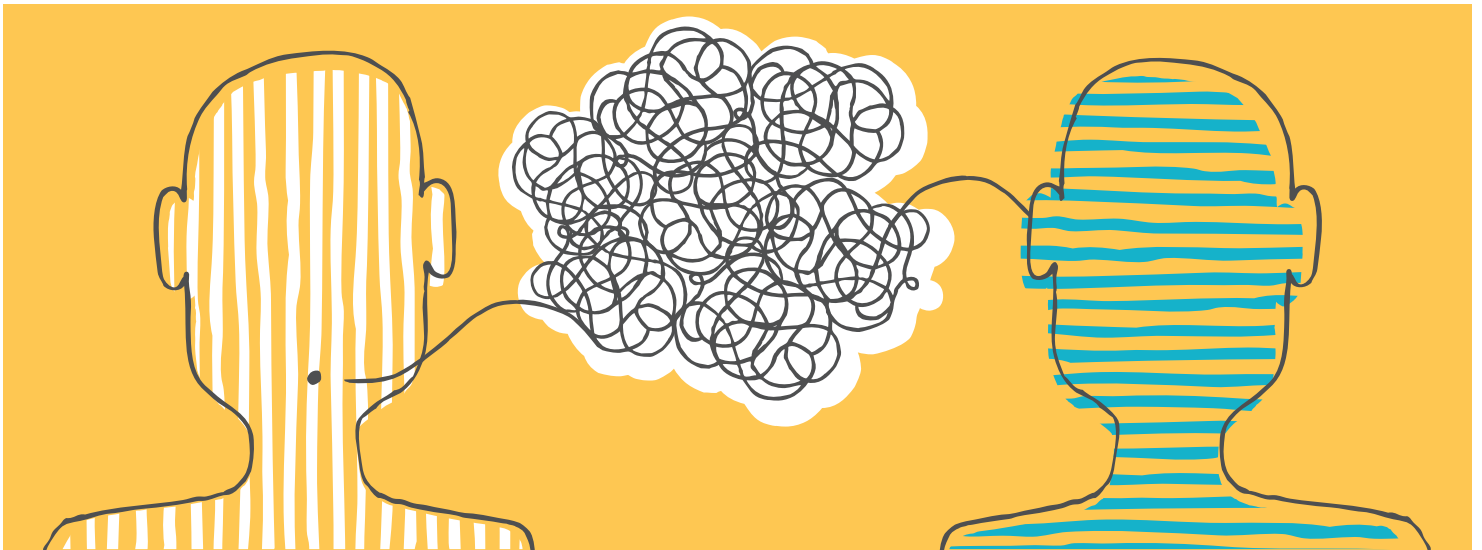
Recognizing & overcoming COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

Learning the barriers to effective communication can not only help improve your communication, but also your overall quality of life. Below are some common communication barriers to learn and avoid:

Preconceived notions. These are the preconceived ideas, feelings, motives and prejudices that we bring into a conversation. Due to the complex nature of our opinions, these preconceived ideas can actually affect what you hear. For instance, if you realize that the way a person speaks reminds you of an irritating acquaintance, be on guard for reacting to that person the way you would react to the acquaintance.

You don’t have to try to completely rid yourself of preconceived issues; what you want to do is recognize them when they come up, and then do your best to set them aside and listen and connect with the person in the conversation. The key is that by recognizing these notions, you can avoid letting preconceived thoughts shape your communication.

Bringing expectations. When we bring expectations into a conversation, we set ourselves up for disappointment. These expectations can include how the person will respond to us or how the conversation will transpire.



By focusing on what we expect to hear or encounter, we cast a shadow over the conversation and convolute what is actually said. Further, by going into a conversation with preconceived expectations, you close yourself off to any new and interesting information. If you focus on keeping an open mind and reducing expectations for an interaction, you can fully engage in and learn from what is really being said.

When listening, try not to judge how well the person conforms to your standards or other expectations. Listen with an open ear. You may be in situations where you think you have already heard what's going to be said. This may or may not be so. The only way you will know is to drop your expectations and listen.

Do you think the speaker is going to take a particular stance on a subject before the person opens his or her mouth? This can inhibit you from listening effectively; chances are you can't completely predict how a person will respond.

Physical Barriers to the other person. Body language can often speak louder than words. It's important when communicating with another person, that you take note of the physical characteristics of effective communication. For the best communication, follow the tips below and make sure:

- **You can see the other person.**
- **You both engage in eye contact. Wearing dark glasses or not looking directly at the other person can prohibit active listening.**
- **You sit at a reasonable distance to the other person. When listening to someone, try to be**

in an area where you can see his or her body language.

- **You remove objects between you, when possible. Sitting behind a desk when communicating isn't always best.**
- **You talk to the person face-to-face. Emailing and phoning can be barriers to effective communication, as through these two means, you'll miss the body language of the other person. Tone of voice, enunciation, facial expressions and other physical keys all give indications of what is really being said.**

Try to speak with others in a quiet place. Noise, activity and other people may all cause enough distraction to make conversation ineffective. By being in a quiet, safe and non-distractive setting, you can better focus on the person and his or her words and body language.

Personal distractions. If we are thinking about other things while conversing, we're not being effective communicators. While you are engaged in conversation, try to put the worries of the day aside. Clear the mind of distracting thoughts, and try to be in the present moment with the person who is speaking.

Try not to fiddle with objects or read documents while a person is talking; these things will keep you from being fully engaged in the conversation.

If you feel bored or tired, try taking notes. By staying active while you're listening you will be more engaged and alert. You can also review these notes when you are more focused.

Written by Dr. Delvina Miremadi-Baldino© 2020

WHEN A REWARD FOR KIDS BECOMES A BRIBE

A 5-year-old never puts away her toys without a shouting match with her parents. Mom promises a trip to Disney World if the girl will routinely clean up after herself without an argument. **Reward, or bribe?**

A 12-year-old hates homework and routinely skips it. Dad pledges to spend Saturday morning alone with his son doing whatever the boy wants if he'll complete his homework without a reminder for a week.

Reward, or bribe?

Bribe on the first count, but a positive reward on the second, says David Fassler, M.D., clinical associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Vermont.

"A reward usually doesn't need to be extra large to modify a child's behavior," he said. An extravagant promise, however, "suggests that there's a struggle between parent and child. It implies that the parent is trying to make the child do something he doesn't want to do by upping the ante [bribing]."

And bribes can establish a dangerous dynamic: You can unintentionally teach a child to withhold behaviors until a bribe is offered, said Dr. Fassler.

Children develop a sense of competence and mastery by doing tasks, and they enjoy getting a reward, says Marcia Slomowitz, M.D., of Northwestern University. But a reward definitely is not a bribe. "A bribe means, I'm giving you this candy bar to shut you up. A bribe stops a negative behavior, but doesn't leave children feeling good about their own behavior."

Clearly bribery is out, and positive reinforcement is in. But how should parents use rewards to teach their children?

"We do it all the time," said Ernest A. Kendrick, M.D., a child psychiatrist in Stafford, Texas. "It doesn't have to be monetary or with toys. It can be with praise, hugs or any positive reflection on a child's action."

Whether spontaneous — like a hug — or structured — like stickers on a calendar for using the potty —

positive reinforcement is a valuable teaching tool, Dr. Kendrick said. But spontaneous rewards alone are not enough. Kids must see that their action earned the reward, says Arnold L. Stolberg, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University.

If your daughter plays nicely with her brother, praise the girl for her behavior, then tell her that because of it, you'll play with her. Put yourself in your child's shoes, Dr. Stolberg said. "How many of us still try to get a smile of a loved one? Your child also goes after very similar rewards."

And along with smiles, young children love earning gold stars or stickers. These work well because a young child needs to be rewarded immediately after performing a desired behavior. And don't just use rewards when there's a problem, use them routinely, said Dr. Fassler.

Children are always trying to improve at something, so there's plenty of opportunity. But stick with goals that are achievable. And avoid extravagant rewards that can lead children to expect too much.

"I like rewards that are based on activities kids like to do," Dr. Fassler says. "Parents don't always realize what a powerful reward it is for your child to spend time alone with you." But the reward shouldn't continue forever, Dr. Slomowitz says. A reward may encourage a child to begin doing homework, but eventually the work should be done for its own rewards — like a love of learning, or the satisfaction of completing a task or getting a good grade.

Phase out the reward once your child learns the behavior, Dr. Slomowitz says. If necessary, tell your child you'll be phasing it out. And when you give out rewards, don't go overboard. Certainly, you should hug your children all the time. But praise them only when they have done something to be praised. Otherwise, they'll have a false sense of reality.

Giving your child appropriate rewards for achievable goals helps him develop into an emotionally healthy adult, said Dr. Fassler. A child who learns to achieve a goal and earns a positive reward for it gains a healthy dose of self-esteem, he says. That child should grow up to be a more resilient adult, able to cope with life's ups and downs.