



Navigating Change in a Fast-Paced World

every connection matters™



Despite our knowledge and understanding that change and transitions 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. It's understandable that many feel overwhelmed and lost.

Avoidance Coping

When faced with rapid change, many may find themselves wanting 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**.

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

Understanding our response to change, along with developing adaptive coping strategies and skills, supports our overall wellbeing and increases 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 of transition commences the moment 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, it is important to honour our emotional reactions, thoughts, and feelings relating to the change. Communicate and 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 provides us with the opportunity to identify and have clarity around 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; this resentment may be directed at the change itself and/or those implementing it that we hold responsible for the change
- Low mood and productivity, which are linked to a feeling of hopelessness within the change.

Phase Three: New Beginning

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

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www.acaciaconnection.com
info@acaciaconnection.com



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

Navigating our Way Through Change

Strategies that are proactive in nature may aid you in shifting your frame of reference from being defenceless against the change, to feeling empowered and active as you engage with the process.

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 ideas such as, 'I can't cope', or 'It's not fair'. While we may think these are truthful descriptions of what's going on, 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 self-talk, such as, 'This is not the end of the world'.

Reframe your Perspective

Looking at and reframing your perspective of the change can help you explore your situation through an alternative lens. Consider what is within the situation or experience that 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.

Focus Within Your Control

We all seek to have control over our own 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 Emotional States

The aim is not to avoid or remove what we are feeling, but rather sit with and allow our emotions to simply be emotions. Mindfulness is a strategy you can draw upon, aiding your capacity to calm your mind, reduce your stress and worries, focus on the here and now, be present and connect with others, as well as make clear and meaningful decisions about how you want to show up.

Express your Emotions

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

Self-Care

The word self-care is often said and encouraged, but what is it exactly? And why should we prioritise it? Self-care may be better understood as self-nourishment or investment in self 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 with confidence. Taking the time – however small – and placing energy into activities and actions that bring you joy, or bring you a sense of relaxation, rest, or revitalisation, can have an instrumental impact on your wellbeing, resilience, and capacity to adapt to change.

Final Words

If you are finding it hard to adapt to change, seeking the support of a professional can be incredibly helpful. Acacia EAP is here for you 24/7 on 1300 364 273.

