

SOURCE LINES

Managing Change and Loss

Throughout our journey of life, unavoidable changes and losses will certainly arise: changes at work, loss of someone close, separation, loss of ability or autonomy due to illness or aging, loss of employment, relocation to a different neighborhood, grownup children leaving home, end of a friendship, change in life stage (e.g. transition into adulthood, retirement), etc.

Change and loss always cause a certain level of stress because they disrupt the balance that had existed in our lives until that point. All of a sudden, we face unknowns and uncertainty. Regardless of the nature of these disruptions, a certain sense of security and stability is taken away from us, allowing for anxiety to set in. We find ourselves grieving for someone or something significant.

It is impossible to avoid situations involving loss and change, however, it is possible to learn how to better manage them.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHANGE OR LOSS IS EXPERIENCED?

Not all changes and losses necessarily lead to actual grieving. Generally speaking, though, these situations lead to a period of transition that:

- creates stress
- involves certain reactions
- follows a process
- requires time to adapt

WHAT IS THIS PROCESS OF TRANSITION ABOUT?

Essentially, it is a process of adjustment to the loss or change at hand.

WHAT ARE THE STAGES OF THIS PROCESS?

According to the literature, experts identify various stages, the numbers and orders of which vary. It is possible, however, to explain the process of transition using three main stages:

SHOCK

This stage occurs as soon as one learns about a change or loss. It is characterized by a sense of imbalance and sometimes even denial.

Typical reactions :

- denial of the change or loss
- " It's not possible! "
- apathetic attitude and feelings of numbness

DESTABILIZATION

During this stage, intense emotions surface as one becomes aware of the reality of the change or loss. Typical reactions:

- bursts of intense emotions
- tension and irritability
- doubts and worry
- anger
- feelings of depression
- fatigue and lack of energy
- feelings of longing/nostalgia
- difficulty doing daily activities, etc.

ADAPTATION

During this phase, one is able to conceive of a new beginning, to gradually accept the loss, and to slowly open up to change. One adjusts to the best of his or her abilities and knowledge.

Typical Reactions :

- reduction in reactions from previous stages

- pursuit of a new sense of stability through different means
- engagement in new plans, etc.

WHICH FACTORS INFLUENCE THE LENGTH OF THIS PROCESS?

The length of this process can range from several months to several years depending on many factors such as:

- the nature of the change or loss:
- who, what, when, and how
- expected versus unexpected
- chosen versus imposed
- one's attitude regarding the situation
- one's adaptation skills and available support, etc.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO ADAPT?

When your sense of stability is disrupted, it is natural to react. At the same time, certain strategies are known to help with the adjustment process. Here are some of the main ones:

• ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THERE IS A SITUATION THAT REQUIRES ADAPTING TO

Firstly, it is necessary to admit to yourself that something has arisen, that something has changed (or will change), that something will be missed, etc. In short, it is about breaking the denial.

• GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO REACT AND TO EXPERIENCE EMOTIONS

- Accept and be open to your feelings about the loss and change. For example: allow yourself to feel sad, angry, affected, to cry, etc.
- Express what you are feeling. For example: "I'm afraid...", "What will happen to me?", etc. Remind yourself that the situation at hand, though unpleasant at the moment, is likely to be transitional, especially when it is accepted.

• SEEK OUT NECESSARY SUPPORT

- Surround yourself with those who are close to you, people who are significant in your life
- Talk to people who have had a similar experi-

ence. Do not hesitate to consult with a professional, if necessary. For example, if you feel stuck in a particular stage and moving forward is difficult, a professional can help you to better understand the situation, explore ways to disengage, and develop coping strategies.

DECIDE WHICH ATTITUDE TO ADOPT

The way in which you perceive what happens influences how you feel and how you imagine coping with a particular situation. As much as your initial attitude can help, it can also be harmful.

Nevertheless, it is possible to consciously change your view of a situation and the way in which you interpret it, so that the process of adjustment becomes easier.

DECIDE TO BOUNCE BACK

People who have a strong sense of resilience recognize opportunities for growth in different situations, and are able to transform losses into gains.

- choose to be active rather than passive
- accept that something positive can be taken from the experience
- choose to learn and grow through the transition rather than dwell on the past and isolate yourself, etc.

IN CONCLUSION

Changes and losses are inevitable throughout the course of our lives. This is why it is essential to understand the ways in which they can affect us and to learn coping strategies to manage them. In this way, when the next disruption occurs, of course we still stand the risk of feeling destabilized. However, we will be in a better position to understand what is happening, to know what to do to get through the transition, and to adapt well.