

on your mind

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NAVIGATING CHANGE

Life requires us to make transitions, some wanted and others not. These transitions might include retirement, changing schools or jobs, the death of a loved one, marriage, divorce, becoming a parent and relocating to a new home or city. Adjusting to change almost always involves some stress as we adapt to our new circumstances.

Many people come to Child & Family Psychological Services because they are experiencing a significant change or transition in their lives. Adjusting to the change has been so difficult that it is interfering with their ability to enjoy life fully. Sometimes the change hasn't even happened yet; maybe it's a change that the person wants to make happen, such as conquering an eating disorder or unhealthy habit, improving a relationship or building self-esteem.

Change can require individuals to make challenging shifts on a number of levels. On a cognitive level, a person might need to adjust the way they look at their situation and even the way they view themselves. On a behavioral level, a person might need to make shifts in their daily routines and how they use their resources. And on an emotional level, someone feeling overwhelmed, depressed and anxious needs to find ways to feel more comfortable with, and calm about, the change they are dealing with.

The articles in this issue of On Your Mind address many of these challenges. While reading these articles, you may notice a common thread — grief. That's because most transitions involve some degree of loss. As my colleague Rob Schram wrote in a previous CFPS newsletter, "Most of life's transitions signal the end of something we are familiar with and therefore we experience a certain sadness over the change. We grieve for how things once were and those people and places that are no longer a part of our lives in the way they used to be."

Most of us tend to be pretty adaptable and can find successful ways to manage change. But when transitions prove to be more challenging than anticipated, the decision to reach out for help can make the difference between floundering and taking charge of our lives. If you find yourself challenged by change, our professional staff can help you navigate your way to a better, more comfortable place.

Larry Beer, Ed.D.
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TRANSITIONS: OUR LIVES ARE FILLED WITH THEM

by ANN MUNTTER

Licensed Master's Social Worker



A transition is defined as a change from one thing to the next, either in action or state of being, as in a job

transition or as in the much more dramatic example of a caterpillar making a transition into a butterfly.*

I remember a professor in graduate school encouraging students to be mindful of transitions and how stressful they can be for clients. She told us that a large part of our work as therapists would be to support clients as they navigate transitions and eventually return to a state of homeostasis or stability, when they can once again enjoy normalcy in their lives.

It is important to embrace transitions no matter how difficult they are, and that can be the tricky part. There can be so many twists and turns during a transition that it can be emotionally unnerving.

William Bridges, an author and consultant perhaps best known for his insights about transitions in business, wrote a good book about personal transitions called *Transitions: Making Sense Of Life's Changes*. He wrote about transitions that we choose or that occur naturally, such as adopting a child, starting college and the deaths of aged loved ones, as well as transitions that are imposed on us, such as divorce, losing your house in a fire and unexpected deaths of significant others.

Bridges explains that there are three stages of any transition: an ending (letting go of an old situation), the neutral zone (the confusing in-between period) and a new beginning. The second stage, the neutral zone, is a time when the old is

* Source: Vocabulary.com

gone but the new hasn't yet been defined or taken hold. Bridges likens this period to a field lying fallow. The seeds have been planted but all you can see is the dirt, and it does not look like much is happening. But in time you see the light green of plants start to emerge — the new beginning. As we go through transitions, that fallow period is a critical time for figuring out who we are and what we want — and from there what we want our new beginning to be.

One of the most difficult emotional challenges in transitions can be dealing with the uncertainty of what tomorrow will look like. In times of stability, we picture ourselves in our day-to-day routine which on some level provides comfort and consistency for us. But if we were to lose a job or become divorced, for example, we may not be able to picture where we will work or live for a while. The near future might loom like a black hole.

Some transitions bring about conflicting and vacillating emotions. A couple starting a family may miss parts of their



life as a twosome yet still be excited about the birth of their child. Similarly, there can be times of sadness for an empty-nester when an adult child leaves home even though the parent is excited for the



child and looks forward to having more time to develop hobbies and personal interests.

I have found that what surprises many people is the grief process that goes with transitions both good and bad. The parent who feels sad as their adult child leaves home is grieving the loss of the family life they had while living together. Even knowing that they will continue to create many happy memories with their child, some parents cannot help but feel melancholy knowing that an era has ended. A more obvious transition that often involves grieving is the loss of physical ability due to aging or a life-changing medical condition, such as cancer or Parkinson's disease. Someone who once functioned indepen-

dently but now needs help with everyday activities may feel a loss of identity as they adapt to relying on other people.

When going through any transition, good or difficult, it is important to process the meaning of that particular stage of life and how the change is impacting you. A therapist can help you process difficult emotions and

issues as well as make sense out of what is happening. Those who are able to make meaning out of a life change or transition tend to feel a sense of personal growth and more at peace with themselves.

YOU'VE GOT THE POWER!

by **JANEÉ STEELE, Ph.D.**

Licensed Professional Counselor



Change is one of the few guarantees we have in life. Sometimes we welcome change. Promotions, new babies,

or even reaching weight loss goals are just a few examples of the many occasions in which we celebrate change. At other times, change can be difficult, overwhelming and unwelcomed. The loss of a loved one or a job, for example, can be devastating emotionally, physically and financially. During those times, the support we receive from family and friends can be invaluable. Yet, there is one person who often goes overlooked as a source of strength and guidance during times of difficult change. That person is you.

A sense of personal empowerment is one of the most effective tools you can have for dealing with change. Being empowered doesn't mean you always have the right answers or that you don't need anyone else's help. Instead, being empowered means you know how to take action to improve your life situations. Some key characteristics of empowerment are:

Belief in your own abilities. Another term for belief in your own abilities is



self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to how much you believe you are competent and can achieve the goals you set for yourself. It gives you the motivation to try new things and the confidence that you can overcome difficulties alone or with the help of others. As the saying goes, "If you can believe it, you can achieve it!"

Self-awareness. Self-awareness means that you understand your strengths and weaknesses and know your personal values. People who are self-aware are good at determining what is important to them and recognizing when they are struggling and need to ask for help.

Community awareness. Information is one of the most important aspects of empowerment. Community awareness means you are aware of the community resources available to you — resources that can help you achieve your goals. The more you know about your options, the more likely you'll make the best possible decisions.

Goal setting. Change often requires taking a new path in life. Setting goals can give you a sense of direction and purpose. It allows you to take charge of your life as you move forward.

By developing these characteristics of personal empowerment, you can give yourself the power to overcome most obstacles that may come your way. If you find yourself avoiding change or lacking confidence in your ability to deal with change, therapy can help. Your therapist can help you explore your feelings, discover your strengths, set goals and learn how to locate resources to assist with your difficulties. There are many self-help books that can help you as well. One of my favorites is

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey.

Be bold in confronting change, and remember, you've got the power!

STEPPING INTO RETIREMENT

by **GORDON HARE, Ph.D.**

Licensed Psychologist

Ah, retirement. The time in our lives to have, well, the time of our lives. Many of us dream of a wonderful life of leisure, doing everything we've long



wanted to do if only we had the time: sleeping late, traveling, indulging in hobbies. Others look upon the transition

to retirement with apprehension: How will I fill my days? How will I fit into my world? Will I be bored? Lonely?

For most of us, retirement finds us somewhere in between. What's important is recognizing that this life transition, whether planned or unexpected due to a health condition or layoff, is a complex mix of psychological factors, especially in the areas of self-identity and relationships.

Here are some suggestions for a smooth and pleasant transition into retirement:

- **Plan well.** Retirement is all about less stress and more enjoyment. What you do and who you associate with will continue to impact your psychological well-being.
- **Start slowly.** Give yourself some time to relax and get used to the idea of retirement. We often derive a great deal of our sense of identity through our work. 'Who am I?' is closely tied to the work we do. Think about who you want to be and what you want to do as a retiree. Ask yourself

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COPING WITH GRIEF AFTER LOSS

by **TAMI PARKE**

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The loss of someone you love is undoubtedly one of the most difficult life-changing experiences you may face. Life as you once knew it is changed forever when someone you love dies or is otherwise no longer a part of your life. Grief is the process of figuring out who you are, now, without your loved one. You are forced to redefine yourself and your life.

As a grief counselor, I have worked with hundreds of people struggling with the loss of their loved ones. Although everyone grieves in their own unique way, there are common emotional, physical, social and spiritual symptoms of grief.

Emotional These symptoms may include feelings of intense sadness, anger, guilt, yearning, shock, loneliness, numbness, anguish, depression and anxiety. Experiencing one or a mixture of these emotions is common.

Physical Grief can manifest itself in physical ways, including crying, sighing, headaches, exhaustion, difficulty sleeping, lack of ability to concentrate, weakness, aches and pains, and brain fog.

Social/behavioral Individuals who are grieving may isolate from others, feel detached from others, seem unable to stop thinking of the person lost, feel detached from life, lack motivation, drink more than usual and behave in other ways that are not normal for that person.

Spiritual Spiritual expressions of grief often involve questioning — questioning the reason for the loss, the purpose of pain and suffering, spiritual beliefs, if there is a God and the meaning of life.

In her groundbreaking book *On Death and Dying*, psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross identified five stages of grief: denial, bargaining, anger, depression and acceptance. These stages are not necessarily experienced sequentially, and not everyone experiences every stage, so it's most helpful to look at them as guides that can help us understand the healing process and our personal reaction to trauma and change.

While time is considered to be the great healer of grief, it is important to remember there is no standard timeline for grief. Some people feel numb for the first few months, then feel intense, raw emotions for the next four to six months. Some experience intense emotions for longer than a year. Each person experiences grief differently and moves through phases on their own individual timeline.

How can you support someone who is grieving? If you are someone who feels uncomfortable around those who are in



deep emotional pain, it may be difficult to know what to do or say. I've heard numerous grieving clients say they were devastated after comments like "Just get over it" or "Isn't it time you were ok?" Instead, having someone just listen to them, without trying to "fix" their pain, feels incredibly supportive.

Research suggests that most people

can and do recover from their loss if they have social support and maintain healthy habits. However, sometimes grief is complicated and people find themselves unable to cope or carry out their daily activities. If at any time you or someone you know needs help through the grieving process, seek out a therapist or grief support group. Grief is one experience that doesn't lessen in intensity until processed.

Here are some practical tips for coping with grief:

- **Talk about your loss** with your friends, family, colleagues, spiritual leader and therapist. Sharing your feelings and having someone to hug or cry with can be healing.
- **Allow and accept your feelings** as they are. Feelings are like waves: they come and go, so let them.
- **Take care of yourself** by eating well, getting adequate sleep and exercising.
- **Remember and celebrate your loved one.** Create photo albums, plant a memorial tree or garden, donate to a charity in their memory, write special memories on balloons and let them go, or create other meaningful rituals.

Grief can be the most challenging experience of your life, but it can also be a catalyst for positive change. The experience of loss and grief can inspire you to live life more meaningfully, perhaps in honor of your loved one. It can create in you a deeper sense of purpose and a deeper gratitude for the things

you do have — the kindness of friends, the love of family and the company of those around you. It might help you recognize that life can be too short and that each day is precious.

Grief is a universal emotion experienced by everyone at some time. If we allow it to, it can create connection and empathy in us all.

WHAT HAPPENS TO TWO AFTER BABY MAKES THREE

by **LARRY BEER, Ed.D.**

Licensed Psychologist
Licensed Professional Counselor



One of life's greatest gifts — the birth or adoption of a baby — can also bring about profound changes that

can send even the best of relationships into a tailspin. Many parents will admit they had no clue how difficult the transition to parenthood would be. They may have prepared by taking classes, reading books and buying everything needed to care for a baby, but few couples discuss and plan for the impact that parenthood will have on their marriage. As a result, they may find themselves having surprisingly negative feelings toward the individual they once felt so lucky to have as a partner.

Among the most common stressors that come with parenthood are sleep deprivation, loss of control, loss of freedom and value differences between partners.

Prior to becoming parents, we may hear “Enjoy your sleep while you can” from friends and family. It is easy to underestimate how much sleep we may be forced to lose and how that loss of sleep can affect our ability to function at work and interpersonally. Being sleep-deprived can make it hard to be in a good mood and all too easy to react to others in impulsive and emotional ways. Often the person getting the brunt of our bad moods is our partner,

who might be struggling with the same condition. This makes having positive interactions with our partners more difficult and can lead to some bad feelings that are challenging to manage.

We all like to feel some sense of control because it allows us to relax and feel safe. This sense of control gets turned upside down after parenthood. Babies cry and can't tell us what they need. When they get older, they become experts at totally messing up the home. They reject our best-cooked meals and throw tantrums over seemingly nothing. So it's no surprise when parents feel like their lives have spun out of control.

Another source of stress is the loss of personal and financial freedom. Leisure activities that we used to take for granted, such as going to the gym, spending time together or hanging out with friends, now require careful planning. And let's face it: Having children is expensive. It can strain not only our freedom for time but also our financial freedom.

Becoming a parent is a huge responsibility, and there are many decisions to make. Should our baby sleep in our room? Should we attend to her every time she cries or is it OK to let her fuss? Should we hire a babysitter and go out for dinner or should we sacrifice our time together for our child? When should we be firm and when should we be flexible?

When new parents face decisions such as these, it is not uncommon for value differences between parents to surface. Because parenting is such a huge responsibility, it can be difficult to simply go with your partner's preference.

The stakes feel too high. Most of the time parents can find ways to manage these value differences, but sometimes they lead to difficult feelings that strain the relationship.

While there is no doubt that children add stress to a relationship, it doesn't mean that having a baby is a ticket to a failed relationship. Counseling can provide an important avenue for couples to successfully navigate the transition to parenthood by helping them develop strategies for staying close and happy together.

TIPS FOR TWO

Communicate. If you think you're doing an unfair share of chores or not getting enough “me” time, talk about it with your partner instead of harboring resentment.

Stay connected. Schedule a weekly date night and stick to it. If you don't have a friend or relative who can babysit or the money to hire a sitter, find quality time together at home, even if it's snuggling on the couch while watching TV. Or take the kids out and make it a fun family date.

Go out without each other, too. It's psychologically healthy to have a life and interests outside of your family.

Forget the kids for awhile. Talk to each other about things other than your children. Maintain your identity as a couple, not just as parents.

Show appreciation. Acknowledge how much your partner does for the family. Recognition can go a long way in creating good feelings.

Make intimacy a priority. Period.

Practice forgiveness and patience. Parenting is hard. Remember that you and your partner are new at this and that you're a team with the same goals for your family.

Laugh. When things get tense, look for humor in the situation.



FINDING PERSPECTIVE IN A SEA OF CHANGE



By **PATTI CRISWELL**

Licensed Master's Social Worker

While combing through a social media site, I saw the quote, “Everything will be OK in the end. If it’s not OK, it’s not the end.” I thought to myself, “What does that even mean?!” After



some pondering, it occurred to me: We are in a constant state of movement, of change. We move through life

checking off developmental milestones one by one — we crawl, we walk, we run — and day after day we grow and change, and after some bumps and bruises, we land in adulthood. But that’s not the end; it’s just the beginning (and we even throw a party to celebrate it!). Little by little, day after day, we keep striving for the “OK” moments in life.

Recently a client shared with me her concerns for her young daughter. “I just want her to be OK,” she said. I understood what she meant. Parenting is a lot of responsibility. But the fact is, life is a series of “OK, not OK, OK, not OK” moments — and that’s really OK! Change is a part of life. But it’s also something we wholeheartedly resist. Many of us crave control and predictability; we want a guarantee that things will go our way. We like to feel like we’re in charge.

I’m reminded of the story of the ragged peddler who came to town to sell the people happiness. He asked them to hang their troubles up for everyone to see. When everyone’s troubles were on display, he asked them to take the trouble they saw as the least burdensome. The townspeople didn’t want each other’s troubles and from then on looked at their own with a different perspective.

The young mother’s insecurity may cause her some anxiety over her daughter, but it’s also her motivation to do her best, love deeply and honor her intention to be a dedicated parent. As a mother of emerging adults, I look at her worries with a different perspective. They seem small compared to those of impending adulthood: education, money, jobs, love. But it’s all relative; in the end, we all just want to avoid the “not okay” moments as much as

**If we ask the question,
“Where is my locus of control in this situation?”
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possible. For most of us, this is uncomfortable, but for some it feels like more than discomfort. It can cause people to feel anxious, even unsafe.

The key is to be able to manage the feelings. To do this, we need to have an internal locus of control; that is, we need to look at what we can do in any given situation, and what we can’t. If we ask the question, “Where is my locus of control in this situation?” then we have an understanding of what is within our power to change. We can look at our options, evaluate the pros and cons of each and come up

with an action plan. And for the things we can’t control? Well, we’ve got to find our own version of the Frozen song: “Let it go, let it gooooo.” The key is to make this process automatic — controlling what we can, letting go of what we can’t and finding peace in the process.

Those who have struggled with addiction and recovery know this dynamic well. The Serenity Prayer, used in many 12-step recovery programs, says, “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.”

There are many mind-body practices that can help us manage our feelings associated with change. Yoga and meditation are evidenced-based interventions that can reduce angst and anxiety levels. Contemplative or centering prayer often brings comfort. Regular exercise and adequate sleep also go a long way to help manage the negative feelings associated with change. And if the endless train of changes feels like too much to handle, counseling can be helpful in finding the right plan of action to make you feel better.

As her daughter grows, the young mother will trade one set of worries for another. From learning to walk, to making friends, to finding her voice and purpose, to finding love, and loads more . . . Do we ever get to exhale? When I asked this question of my mother, who is 85, she said, “No, because then it’s the grandkids, and it’s jobs and illness. No, the concerns never stop, but you learn to cope with the uncertainty of life, you do what you can and realize that it has to be enough.”

Change is inevitable. So maybe the quote is really saying, There is no end, there’s always another “not OK” moment around the corner. But not to worry; “OK” will be back around, perennial as the flowers in spring.

A THERAPIST'S JOURNEY TO 'THE OTHER SIDE'

By **PAMELA MAIRS-PELLERITO**

Limited Licensed Psychologist



"I can't."

"I won't."

"I don't want to."

These three little phrases describe what is most difficult

about changing a behavior. Think about all of the times you or a loved one has wanted to alter a disruptive or unhealthy behavior, such as smoking or drinking. Now think about the times you or someone you care about has wanted to adopt healthy behaviors, such as increasing exercise or eating better. Both positions, getting rid of unwanted behaviors and encouraging or adopting wanted behaviors, require change. And change can be downright difficult.

Mental health practitioners support individuals and families through change in ways that help them decrease their stress while increasing their chances of reaching their desired goal. Oftentimes, clients are seeking help for addiction and addiction-like problems related to drinking, drug use, food, gambling, sex, pornography, shopping or other concerns. I tell my clients that the process can begin once they demonstrate a strong desire to change and an understanding that giving

up a longstanding behavior means that grief will be part of the process.

I'm an ex-smoker. I'm the one who complains about others smoking or the smell of stale smoke in public areas. I'm the one who can cite every known health reason why smoking is bad for your health (and mine). But it didn't start this way. It began with a strong belief that I could not quit. I tried patches, medication, cold turkey and limiting the number of cigarettes I smoked each day. I set up elaborate smoking schedules, often telling myself that I could have a cigarette after the completion of some disliked chore. I even started eating well and exercising with the belief that this would curb smoking. Nothing changed.

Then I got defiant: "I don't have to quit if I don't want to." I told myself that no one, not a loved one or a physician, had control of me. Smoke outside? "No way, this is my house!" I told people who commented about my smoking to mind their own business. I'm pretty sure I behaved poorly at times. Of course, I told myself I could quit if I wanted to.

"I don't want to." This is where we all eventually land. I wanted to smoke, but let's face it: Smoking is a horrible habit. It's smelly and expensive, and it put my health and the health of others at risk. Eventually, I knew I had to let go. I had to change

for myself. This led to a dark period of grief. Now you may laugh and say I'm being a bit dramatic, but think about this: Everytime we let go of something in our lives we experience loss. None of us wants to experience loss. It hurts physically,

emotionally and spiritually and leaves us feeling out of control and unsettled for a while.

My addiction was smoking, but all addiction is like this. Sometimes the physical withdrawal is the most difficult, as is often the case with drugs and alcohol, whereas in other circumstances the emotional withdrawal can be the most challenging, such as giving up someone we love who no longer loves us. Whatever the behavior change is, whatever it is that we need to do, grief is part of the process we must go through to find a peaceful balance and a new way of behaving on the other side.

Strategies for success

Why are some people successful at changing a behavior while others are not? What can we do to increase our chances of success?

Experts who study behavior change agree that people who are self-motivated to change and who employ positive thinking are more likely to achieve their goals than those motivated by guilt, fear or regret. Success is also more likely if goals are specific and limited in number. "I will lose 20 pounds," for example, is more achievable than "I will lose some weight." Further, because changing behaviors requires time, energy and willpower, it's best to focus on changing just one behavior at a time.

But setting a goal isn't enough, experts say. You also need a practical, realistic strategy for reaching it. That might include involving a friend, co-worker or family member who can help keep you motivated and accountable or asking a therapist for support.



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NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Cindy Beer

RETIREMENT *(from page 3)*

what you wish you had done in your earlier years and turn that into your new focus.

- **Consider a new career.** A second career, whether paid or volunteer work, is a great way to stimulate your mind and make new connections, as well as instill a sense of purpose and fulfillment.
- **Negotiate new ground rules.** If you have a spouse or partner at home, talk about what your retirement will mean to your relationship. You'll suddenly have a lot more time together, and that can strain even the best of relationships.
- **Nurture friendships.** Stay in touch with friends, connect with retirees you worked with and look for ways to meet new friends by joining community groups or taking classes. Social networking (online and off) can help ward off stress and depression.
- **Learn a skill or start a hobby.** Some schools or community centers offer classes specifically for seniors. Kitchen, hardware and hobby and craft stores often have classes that can help you get started with a new hobby or activity.
- **Have a realistic financial plan.** Even if you've made sure you have enough money to live on in retirement, create a budget and stick to it. Take advantage of senior discounts offered by restaurants, movie theaters and grocery stores. Consider downsizing your home. A smaller home typically has the added benefits of less property to maintain and lower utility bills.
- **Set your legacy for your family.** Write a brief biography about yourself and your family. Your children and especially your grandchildren probably don't know all of their family history. Knowing who we are and where we came from is important. This is also a good time to organize and label all of those photos you stashed away in boxes.
- **Stay active.** Many studies have shown that regular physical activity relieves stress and anxiety, improves memory, promotes sleep, helps ward off illnesses and boosts mood.

Retirement is a process that can take you through various stages and shifting emotions. If you find yourself struggling, counseling can help you make choices that will lead to a satisfying and meaningful retirement.

CHILD & FAMILY PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES, P.C.

We are a diverse group of psychologists, counselors and social workers dedicated to providing the highest quality mental health services to people needing guidance as they face life's challenges. In a caring, comfortable setting, we serve clients of all ages through individual, couple, family and group counseling.

Our therapists specialize in a wide range of areas, including depression, anxiety, stress management, loss and grief, transitions, relationships, adolescent issues, parenting, self-esteem, trauma, behavioral issues, eating disorders, LGBTQ concerns and addictions, among many others. In addition, we offer psychological evaluations and testing services.

For a complete list of our therapists and their areas of expertise and interest, as well as a list of our therapy groups, visit our website at childandfamilypsych.com.

To make an appointment to see a therapist at either our Kalamazoo or Portage location, please call our business office at (269)372-4140. Our support staff will be happy to work with you in choosing an appropriate therapist based on your needs and preferences.

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