

Making Healthy Transitions

What are Transitions?

- Changes in life with a sharp “break” from the past
- Life-altering events, either planned or unexpected
- Can be positive or negative experiences
- Leaving familiar things behind, we must adjust to new ways of living, at least temporarily
- Being unprepared may lead to crisis, including feeling:
 - Shock
 - Angry, anxious
 - Sad, uncertain
 - Lonely, weak, or defenseless

Examples of Life Transitions *Circle the transitions are you going through:*

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| • Accidents | Starting a career |
| • Divorce | Traveling |
| • Losing something or someone important | Getting married |
| • Serious illness | Buying or selling a house |
| • Changes in relationships | Changing or losing job |
| • Having traumatic experiences | Retirement |
| • Leaving for college | Social or political change |

Transitions in Development

- Goals in Developmental Stages of Erik Erikson (Also see <http://support4change.com/stages/cycles/Erikson.html>)
- **Infancy: Birth to 18 months** - to develop trust
- **Early Childhood: 18 months to 3 years** - to develop autonomy (doing things for ourselves, building self-esteem)
- **Play Age: 3 to 5 years** - to develop initiative for exploring the world using imagination and creativity
- **School Age: 6 to 12 years** - to develop industry (new skills and knowledge to gain feelings of competence)
- **Adolescence: 12 to 18 years** - to develop an identity, deciding what to do as social interactions and moral issues get more complicated

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- **Young Adulthood: 18 to 35 years** – to develop intimacy and harmony by finding mutually satisfying relationships
- **Middle Adulthood: 35 to 55 or 65** – to develop feelings of being productive, making society better, sharing family values, caring for others, and staying active
- **Late Adulthood: 55 or 65 to death** – to look back on our lives with happiness, and finding meaning and purpose

Other Transitions: Family Life Cycles

- Mastering the skills and milestones of each stage allows you to successfully move from one stage to the next
- The transitions may not always be smooth – Illness, financial problems, or loss of a loved one can have an effect on how well you pass through the stages
- The challenges cause you to develop skills to work through the changes that nearly every family goes through
- If you miss the skills you need in one stage, you can learn them in later stages, but with more stress, and more difficulty with relationships

Family Life Cycles

- See online reference at <http://www.peacehealth.org/xhtml/content/special/ty6171.html#ty6172>)
- **Independence** – in young adulthood, developing your own identity separate from your family, along with supporting yourself emotionally, physically, socially, and financially. Developing intimacy and shared emotions
- **Coupling or marriage** – committing to a new family and way of life. It is important to have good communication and response to needs of the other person. But boundaries should still be maintained.
- **Parenting (Babies through adolescents)** – Becoming a parent is very challenging. Your ability to communicate well, maintain your relationships and solve problems is tested, and your roles are changed. Caring, compromise, and flexibility are valuable skills.

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- **Launching adult children** – Begins when your first child leaves home and ends with the “empty nest.” Developing adult relationships with your children is key.
- **Retirement or senior years** – Many changes happen in later years as you welcome family members (through marriage or new grandchildren), or see others leave through divorce or death.
 - Support other family members, but take care of your own physical and emotional needs as well.
 - Enjoy your new family and social roles after retirement.
 - Reflect on your life and experiences during your family life cycles and developmental transitions.

How Do Transitions Affect Us?

- Moving through transitions does not always happen in this order – people can go back and forth in stages:
 - Negative feelings like anger, anxiety, confusion, numbness, self-doubt
 - Loss of self-esteem
 - Begin to accept the change
 - Need to let go of the past and accept the future
 - Begin to feel hopeful about the future
 - Increased self-esteem
 - Positive thinking

Ways to Cope With Transitions

- **Look at life transitions positively.** Even if they are difficult, they are a chance to learn and grow
- **Accept that change is a normal part of life,** and don't try to avoid it
- **Learn to identify and express your feelings** – Don't push away feelings of fear and anxiety, but write them down or talk about them
- **Think about how much you learned** from other life transitions in the past
- **Don't try to rush** – it takes time to adjust to the new reality. Expect to feel uncomfortable and insecure for a while

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- **Stay sober** – Using alcohol or drugs during the confusing transitions can only make it more difficult
- **Take good care of yourself.** Even happy times can be very stressful. Get plenty of rest, exercise, and eat well
- **Build your support system** by seeking support from friends and family members. A mental health professional can also help make the transition safe and give you support
- **Think about what you are leaving behind** – Before you can welcome the new, let go of the old
- **Keep your daily routine consistent** if you can
- **Take one step at a time**, to regain a sense of power
- **Take advantage** of the “fork in the road”

Protective Factors in Transitions

- **Financial security** – having enough money/resources
- **Emotional security** – supportive partner, stable childhood, openness
- **Good health** – physical fitness, healthy lifestyle, leisure
- **Transition skills from past** – positive transition experiences, clear goals
- **Supportive environment** – high respect, good teamwork, clear role with life/work boundaries
- **Transition support** – monitoring, practical planning, and counseling

Inspire Yourself for Healthy Transitions

- Healthy transitions help us cope with change by changing our thinking rather than denying the change
- Recovery can happen within a few weeks with a creative, and optimistic search for new meaning that adds the new reality
- “To see a person transforming their life is like watching a flower open”
- “New beginnings start with endings”

Goals for Coping with Transitions

- To let go of the past person, thing, job, or value
- To take hold of a new thing, value, or relationship
- To manage stress, anxiety, depression, grief, or self-pity

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- To develop new coping skills
- To allow the passing of time to regain self-confidence and self-esteem
- To look to the future with hope
- Set new goals, make plans, and take action

Case Study for Adults

- Lisa was sweeping the porch, thinking about her husband being gone again – He worked long hours and she was alone a lot of the time.
- She loved him, and longed to have more intimacy in their relationship, but felt “stuck” and lonely.
- She decided to talk to him about staying home more and starting a family.
- They both knew becoming parents could be overwhelming, but they still wanted children
- Together they began to prepare themselves and their home for the transitions.
- By thinking positively, they were able to function as parents, while managing changes, stress, and hard times as they came.

Case Study for Teens

- After finishing 8th grade, Kira was worried about going into high school. She felt awkward, clumsy, and unsure of herself because of the physical, social, and emotional changes she was going through.
- She was afraid of being picked on and teased by older students, having harder work, getting lower grades, and getting lost in the big school.
- Her mother reminded her that several of her friends would be in the new school with her. She took Kira to visit the new school and talk to some of the staff there.
- Because she was more prepared for the transition to high school, she felt safer, and ready for the challenge.

Discussion

What are life's transitions?

Making Healthy Transitions

Are transitions good or bad? How do they make you feel?

What is a protective factor you have for managing transitions?

Discuss a coping skill that can help you grow and learn during the transitions in your life.

Change is hard. But the skills you need to make your transitions healthier can be learned.

- To help lower your stress, remember that transitions are a very common part of being human.
- Prepare for predictable transitions to help you cope with your family and life stages, as well as other transitions that can't be predicted.
- Find the help and support you need to solve problems and cope with transitions for a successful recovery.

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