Accepting Change

As we transition from summer to fall, children return to school, and we buckle back down at work. With so much change happening, it’s a good time to look at how we handle these life transitions, the good changes... and the difficult ones.

As the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus said “change is the only constant in life.” Some changes are major, like moving or starting a new job. Other changes are minor and might not even register on your radar, like traffic being rerouted on your way to work or rearranging your furniture. Certain changes stir us to smile (best friend moves close by), while others are very difficult (partner is laid off). What we may not realize is that all change impacts us, and even positive changes can result in stress.

Why are we so affected by change? It’s primarily because our brains are wired for routine. We are truly creatures of habit. We feel comfortable with what’s predictable and consistent because it makes us feel like our environment is safe and stable. When change occurs things become less predictable and we begin to fear the unknown. With that sense of fear, our bodies go into fight or flight mode, and next thing we know, we’re irritable, can’t sleep, are short of breath, are highly distracted, have headaches, and the list goes on.

There is, however, good news for the ever present experience of change: You have incredible power over how you react to change. Here are some suggestions for when change knocks on your door, whether invited or uninvited:

- Allow yourself to fully experience your emotions. Suppressing feelings causes them to grow stronger and your body will find other ways to express those feelings (e.g., through insomnia, irritability, down mood, issues with digestion, etc.) Suppressing your feelings is very draining on your body.
- Strive to notice your thoughts. Are you catastrophizing at all? Are you engaging in all-or-nothing thinking? For example: “Oh, this is going to be the worst. I bet I’m not going to like any of my new coworkers.” So, first notice what thoughts your mind is generating, and then you can choose which thoughts to believe and how to react to them.
- Be patient and compassionate with yourself. Recognize that change is difficult and there will be a period of adjustment before what is new becomes familiar.
- Take special care of yourself when you notice symptoms of stress. Incorporate healing choices into your day such as: being in nature, light exercise, enjoy a meal in a calm environment, take 3 minutes to be fully present with your breathing, read, play, talk with a friend, etc. As always, try to get plenty of rest.
- Reach out to people who care about you. Be with them, unplugged from everything else. Connection is incredibly grounding at all times and, during times of change, we absolutely need to feel grounded.
- Develop a new routine. Since reactions to change are often based on fear, bring yourself a sense of control by adopting a new routine. This can help anchor your day and reduce worry and fear.

If you’re experiencing or preparing for a personal or professional life change of any size, you may need some help along the way. Please call the Family Services EAP for free, confidential counseling for you and member of your household and immediate family. We are here to support you. Contact: 978-327-6666, info@FamilyServicesEAP.org, or submit an online inquiry today.