

Coping with Change

The world seems to be changing at an extraordinary pace. We get used to the way things are, and then they shift. That change can be unsettling; even positive change can throw us for a loop.

As soon as something nudges us out of our regular routine, or challenges our understanding of how the world works and where we fit into it, we're likely to experience a deluge of feelings, including fear, anxiety, overwhelm, excitement, distraction or denial.

In turn, those feelings can manifest in behavior. You may, unconsciously, act out with aggressive or passive-aggressive communication. You may push yourself to overwork or take the opposite approach and procrastinate, avoiding what's on your plate.

Your self-care may suffer. You may reach for unhealthy substances or behaviors, get less sleep, skip meals or overindulge. You might cut yourself off from friends and family and spend more time alone or with people who have unhealthy habits.

The Impact

Stress from both positive and negative change can have immediate and long-term effects. Stress inhibits digestion and absorption of nutrients, impairs your body's ability to ward off germs, can cause insomnia and worsen pre-existing health conditions. If you're also engaging in unhealthy behaviors and poor self-care, you're at an even higher risk for illness or injury.

Mental abilities can be affected, as well. When you're preoccupied, worried and focused on the future instead of the present, it's much harder to concentrate and/or apply your brainpower to what's in front of you.

Great leaders are admired for their serenity and confidence in the face of uncertainty. For many of us, though,

when change is afoot, serenity is far from our reach. Instead, emotions are much closer to the surface and can flare up at inopportune times. Whether you lash out, cry or pound on your desk, it's uncomfortable to feel out of control.

How to Cope with Change

Here are five strategies to help you face change:

- 1. Take care of your body.** Eat well, sleep well, exercise to discharge stress and refrain from harmful habits, such as smoking, excessive drinking, recreational drugs or other risky behavior.
- 2. Take care of your mind.** Stay in the present moment by practicing deep breathing and/or meditation. Challenge your negative thinking and keep things in perspective.
- 3. Express your emotions in healthy ways.** Share them with your therapist and people you trust. Vent your negative feelings by pounding on a pillow or banging on a drum.
- 4. Treat others well.** Strengthen your good relationships so you can draw on their support, and work at your challenging relationships so they don't add to your stress.
- 5. Take charge.** Be proactive and prepare the best you can for the changes that might come, but then accept the reality of the moment. Think back to other challenges you've come through and remind yourself that everything will work out okay this time, too.

Into every life change will come, but its lasting impact doesn't have to be harmful. Change also has a way of opening new and rewarding doors. Bottom line, let change be the catalyst for better self-care, which will feed you in all times, stable and uncertain. *

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10 Ways to Cope with Change

All change carries with it the risk of the unknown and the unexpected. Some find this exciting and welcome the challenge. Others go down the path of change reluctantly, dragging their heels all the way. But, as the saying goes, the only thing that's permanent is change. Here are 10 ways to help you deal with it.

- 1. Understand your response to change.** Do you tend to leap before you look or to imagine the worst?
- 2. Take responsibility for your reaction to change.** You may not be able to control the events, but you can control your reaction to them.
- 3. Keep other changes to a minimum.** Coming to terms with major changes is physically and emotionally taxing. Conserve your energy.
- 4. Look to others.** Those who have undergone similar changes can serve as models for how you might better cope.
- 5. Ask for help and support.** Talk to reliable friends and/or outside professionals. This isn't the time to "go it alone."
- 6. Let go of "the way things used to be."** Instead, move into "the way things are."
- 7. Choose your company carefully.** You may need to avoid or reassure those who are threatened by your change.
- 8. Be real.** Both positive and negative changes can bring mixed feelings. Don't deny them.
- 9. Take a break from the situation.** Rest, regroup and regain a sense of balance.
- 10. Create your own rite of passage.** Ceremony and ritual help with transitions. *

A Letter From

Michaela O'Toole, PhD



How To Get A Better Night's Sleep

Sleep is essential for optimal health and well being. Many of us don't get our 8 hours and are walking around sleep deprived. This is either due to initial insomnia (trouble falling asleep), or intermittent, or early waking during the night. Poor sleep results in daytime sleepiness, poor concentration, and interference with learning, work problems, or accidents. Cognitive-Behavioral therapy can help by enabling people to identify and change their thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Studies have shown that CBT is more effective at reducing sleep problems than sleeping pills.

Tips To A Good Night's Sleep

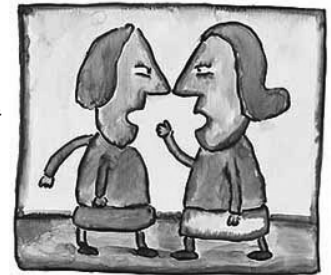
- Develop a bedtime routine. Go to bed at the same time each night. People who sleep 8 hours with inconsistent bedtimes don't feel as rested as those who use the same bedtime.
- Avoid caffeinated beverages after 2 p.m., and limit to 2 cups of coffee.
- Keep bedroom quiet, dark, and on the cool side to sleep better.
- Limit alcohol to 2 drinks, before 8 p.m.
- Avoid watching stimulating television, news, or using computer before bedtime.
- Run a warm bath, drink calming tea or warm milk to wind down for night.
- Limit naps to 30 minutes during the day.

Dr. O'Toole can be reached at 818-771-8020 for appointments or consultations.

How Well Do You Handle Conflict?

It's a fact of life in our world today—conflict, like taxes, is inevitable. This isn't all bad. Naturally, people are going to have differing points of view. Sometimes conflict, and the resolution that comes from it, can result in a closer bond between two people or more complete understanding of a situation by a group.

Conflict may arise over small issues or major problems. And sometimes, because of the way individuals handle conflict, those small issues are transformed into Major Problems.



The bullies of the world seem to enjoy conflict, coming at it headlong. They're aggressive on the freeway, surly to service people and argumentative with co-workers. Other people avoid conflict at all costs, never speaking up for themselves, always backing down. They are the doormat everyone walks upon. Take a look at the following questions to find out how you respond in conflict situations.

True False

- 1. When confronted by an angry or hostile person, I take a moment and consider my response, rather than react in kind or defensively.
- 2. I try to see my part in the situation and am willing to take responsibility for it instead of blaming others or denying any responsibility.
- 3. During a conflict, I stay with the issue at hand rather than bringing up the past or changing the subject.
- 4. I'm open to exploring different options for resolution instead of insisting on having my way. I listen to what others say with an open mind.
- 5. I pay attention to what's being said behind the words spoken, which might have nothing to do with the issue at hand. I ask for clarification when I don't understand something.
- 6. I establish boundaries during conflicts and don't allow anyone to verbally or physically abuse me.
- 7. When a resolution can't be reached by those involved, and "agreeing to disagree" isn't an acceptable solution, I'm willing to consult with a neutral person to help resolve the situation.
- 8. When conflict occurs, I clam up and become non-communicative, quiet and passive, hoping it will dissipate.
- 9. When confronted, I try to divert the disagreement and focus it on what the other person did wrong.
- 10. I tend to go "out of my body" during conflicts. I can't think straight, I'm spacey, and I get afraid of the intense emotion.
- 11. Whenever conflict arises, I get sick. The bigger the conflict, the more drastic my symptoms become.
- 12. I try to avoid conflict by saying there's no problem or that nothing's wrong, when asked. I downplay even small problems.

Your approach to conflict resolution can make life easier or tougher for you. If you answered "true" more often in questions 8–12 and "false" more often in questions 1–7—and you would like to explore other ways to handle conflict in your life and relationships—please don't hesitate to call. ✱

Bounce Back! Developing Emotional Resilience

Major disruptions are a “gotcha” we all experience at one time or another in our lives. For some, these hard times come frequently – the impact is overwhelming and recovery, if it comes at all, can be painfully slow. Others show resilience and are admirably able to glide through these times fairly easily, bouncing back to a normal life again quickly. Resilience—the strength required to adapt to change—acts as our internal compass so we can resourcefully navigate an upset.

When unexpected events turn life upside down, it’s the degree to which our resiliency comes into play that gives these “make-or-break” situations the opportunity for growth. The good news is that each of us has the capacity to reorganize our lives after a disruption and to achieve new levels of strength and meaningfulness. In fact, life disruptions are not necessarily a bad thing because they help us grow and meet future challenges in our lives.

It’s easy to feel vulnerable in the midst of chaos because of not knowing what lies ahead. But learning how to adapt during chaos strengthens your ability to meet stresses in the future. It’s a lot like a bone that was once fragile or broken, and is now strong from being used.

So how can you learn to become more resilient? Learning how to put closure to previous life experiences is often key for bouncing back. In addition, developing resilience depends on many factors. Let’s take a look at 7 key characteristics of people who demonstrate resilience during life’s curve balls.

A Sense of Hope and Trust in the World

Resilient people rely on their belief in the basic goodness of the world and trust that things will turn out all right in the end. This positive attitude allows them to weather times when everything seems bleak and to look for and accept the support that is out there. This approach toward the world gives them the ability to hope for a better future.

Interpreting Experiences in a New Light

The ability to look at a situation in a new way (a skill called “reframing”) can minimize the impact of a difficult situation. Resilient people take a creative approach toward solving a problem, and don’t always use an old definition for a new challenge.

A Meaningful System of Support

One of the best ways to endure a crisis is to have the support of another person who can listen and validate



your feelings. Knowing that others care and will come to your support lessens feeling isolated, especially when tackling a problem alone. It’s important to choose people you trust. Don’t be surprised if it takes several friends, each of whom can provide different kinds of support. Resilient people aren’t stoic loners. They know the value of expressing their fears and frustrations, as well as receiving support, coaching, or guidance from friends, family or a professional.

Mastery and Control Over Your Destiny

You may not be able to predict the future, but you can tackle a problem instead of feeling at the mercy of forces outside of your control. Resilient people know that ultimately their survival and the integrity of their life values depend on their ability to take action rather than remain passive. Tough times call for you to tap into your own sense of personal responsibility.

Self-Reflection and Insight

Life’s experiences provide fertile ground for learning. Asking yourself questions that invite introspection can open a door to new understanding and appreciation of who you are and what you stand for. Giving voice to your thoughts and feelings can invite insight and help transform the meaning of a problem into something useful. Resilient people learn from life situations, and they do not succumb to punishing themselves because of decisions made in the past.

A Wide Range of Interests

People who show resilience in the face of adversity are those who have a diversity of interests in their lives. They’re open to new experiences and ideas. Because their lives are rich, they can use their variety of experiences to find relief from the single-mindedness and worry which often accompanies a crisis.

Sense of Humor

Have you ever had a wry laugh during a difficult situation? The ability to see the absurdity, irony, or genuine humor in a situation stimulates your sense of hope and possibility. Humor has both psychological and physical benefits in relieving stress because it encourages a swift change in your perception of your circumstances—and when your thoughts change, your mood follows. *



Make Your Worrying Work for You

Worrying may have a bad rep, but worrying, if it's done right, can actually be helpful.

Effective worrying can anticipate—and avoid—problems, devise artful solutions and expand creative possibilities. It leads to constructive action.

On the other hand, ineffective worrying is what keeps us awake at night, distracts us during the day and gives our physical systems a workout they don't need.

When you find yourself in bed at night, tossing and turning, plowing the same field again and again, you're in the midst of worry of the worst kind: self-perpetuating. The more you worry, the more stress chemicals feed back to the brain, telling it to worry more.

If you find yourself mired in this worry bog, try some of these actions to put your worries to work for you:

• **Get physical.** Get up, move around. Action will temporarily relieve the worrying. When you come back to the problem, you may have a better perspective on it.

• **Take a walk, work out, go for a bike ride or a run.** Exercise increases blood flow, meaning more oxygen to the brain. Exercising regularly means you will probably worry less.

• **Write down your worries in a journal.** Simply writing your fears and concerns down takes some of the power out of them and gives you a

sense of control. Writing your worries also gives you an opportunity to write possible solutions. Try this: write down the worry and, without thought to how workable or realistic the solutions are, write them down as fast as they come to mind. Don't stop to think, just write idea after idea.



Given this creative outlet, the same brain that was nagging you with worries, can offer ingenious and often elegant solutions.

• **Tell a friend.** Ask for feedback, another perspective. Or someone to simply listen. Giving voice to your worries can take some of the wind out of their bedraggled sails.

• **Make gratitude lists.** Oprah Winfrey isn't the only one to recommend them. A gratitude list doesn't have to be long or well thought out. In your journal or on a sheet of paper, jot down several things you're grateful for. They don't have to be big deals—the way the sun falls on the roses in the morning is just fine, if that's what you thought of.

It certainly is not as simple as the song, "Don't Worry, Be Happy," makes it sound, but somewhere underneath its whining, nagging voice, worry might have something important to tell you. *

is available at www.porthfoundation.org for Cancer Patient Advocacy. More information is also a cancer advocate with the Porth Foundation of physical illness, specifically cancer. Dr. O'Toole experience working with the psychological aspects and other problems. She also has interest and self-regulation training, relaxation, concentration, patients with issues of ADD/ADHD, stress, also utilizes biofeedback in her practice to help hypnosis at UCLA School of Medicine. Dr. O'Toole depression, she has also been trained in clinical usual therapeutic issues seen, such as anxiety and child, and couple counseling. In addition to the and psychologist for 18 years. She does individual, Michaela O'Toole has been a practicing therapist

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