

Dealing with Transitions

“Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.” -Maria Robinson

This is a time of the year when many transitions are taking place, not least the change in light and how that impacts on how we think and feel. Transitions include change of home, starting a new school, college or university, children that had left home returning and changing jobs. On top of that some situations are imposed on us – finding out that a loved person is ill, not getting the job that was really needed, a sudden layoff from a job, unwanted and uninitiated breakups in relationships and so on.

All these transitions have an impact on our emotions and our coping abilities. The following areas tend to be disrupted when we go through transitions: Routines, Roles, Reactions, Relationships, and Reflections about ourselves. The September article looked at the first two of these areas and suggested some coping strategies. This article will look at the next two areas and suggest some strategies that you could try to help make transitions an easier process for you.

Reactions

When transitions are occurring, people can behave and react in different ways to those we are accustomed to. These new reactions can impact on our emotions, behaviour and self-concept (how we see ourselves). The change from expected reactions to actual reactions can reduce our confidence and lead to high levels of uncertainty. As a result of this, we may become defensive, get angry or withdraw from certain people or social / work situations to minimize the impact on us. If you want to change your reactions, try the following strategies and see what happens:

- ◆ Gain an understanding of the other person’s reaction by learning about their perception of the situation.
- ◆ Identify anyone who can help you make sense of the unexpected reactions. Sometimes this might be a friend or teacher or work colleague who can see things from a different perspective without judging anyone or the situation itself.

- ◆ Read some information / attend a course on developing better communication skills if you feel this is something you would like to improve anyway.
- ◆ Give yourself time to understand the new reactions and accept that some of them are here to stay. For example, if someone starts working after being a parent at home for many years, they simply can't do everything that they used to do at home as well as go to work.
- ◆ Remind yourself of the other person's strengths and what you value about them so that the new reactions and behaviours can be put into perspective.
- ◆ Talk through the impact that both of you / the team are having on each other and try to work out a solution that enables all of you to reach a better understanding and move forward with acceptance.

4. Relationships

As part of our basic psychological needs, relationships are crucial to our wellbeing. During times of transition, some relationships may drift apart, while others may blossom from the distance. New relationships can produce positive feelings such as joy and satisfaction, while changes in existing relationships can result in worry, guilt and a sense of loss.

During times of transition, relationships serve as a function of support and therefore become even more important especially as some transitions involve less contact or no contact with children, colleagues, neighbours, partners and family as they move away.

Try the following strategies and see what a difference it makes for you:

- ◆ Decide which are the most important relationships for you and find ways to maintain them (e.g., through letters, telephone calls, email, text messages and cards). The important task is to ensure that regular communication takes place.
- ◆ Keep an open dialogue about your hopes, needs and concerns within existing relationships and listen to the other person's views as well.

- ◆ If your transition involves a specific issue or concern, find out if there are local communities or on-line support networks of people going through similar experiences who can give you an emotional boost, as well as some practical tips.
- ◆ Be proactive in making new connections and building a new support network. Sussex provides us with so many opportunities to join new clubs and groups and it is often just our own mind-set that prevents us from building new connections.
- ◆ Can you find any examples of people who inspire you to sail across a challenging period in life? There are other people that will have experienced significant transitions in their life and listening to their stories could make a huge difference to how you view your own situation and manage it better.
- ◆ Can you think of people in your life who have faith and optimism and live their lives with hope and if so, can you spend some time with them to gain your own optimism and hope?

The November edition will deal with reflections about yourself during times of transition. Until then, try to make the most of the light and sun and seek solace in nature whenever you need to. It is a wonderful example of our world which is in constant transition but always steadfast and present for us all at the same time.

“I suppose whenever you go through periods of transition, or in a way, it's a very definite closing of a certain chapter of your life - I suppose those times are always going to be both very upsetting and also very exciting by the very nature because things are changing and you don't know what's going to happen.”- Daniel Radcliffe