

EmployeeCare News

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Change and the Effect on the Psyche

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According to our old friend Merriam Webster, definitions for change include:

- to make radically different
- to undergo transformation, transition, or substitution
- to give a different position, course, or direction

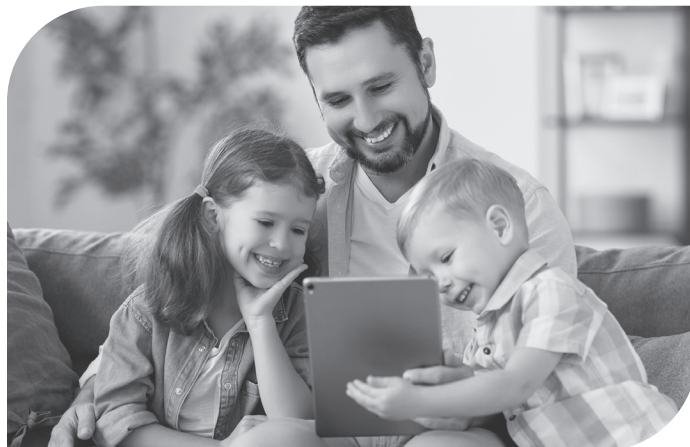
Change implies making either an essential difference, often amounting to a loss of original identity, or a substitution of one thing for another.

Most of us would agree that the last 18 months have definitely changed the world for most people. It might be harder to agree on how these changes have affected our personal psyche (our psyche represents the human mind, soul, and spirit).

We often find it difficult to adjust to big changes in our life, even positive ones. This difficulty is often expressed through emotional distress. Some events that can trigger distress include:

- Illness, injury, or a chronic medical condition
- A new job, job change, or a job loss
- A relationship break-up
- A change in living conditions
- A change in family make-up

And of course, the changes brought about by COVID-19 and the political, economic, and cultural unrest we are currently experiencing. Emotional distress can cause a variety of physical symptoms, such as headaches, insomnia, digestive problems, muscle tension and backaches, depression and anxiety, irritability, changes in appetite, and substance abuse.



It is sometimes difficult to assess the psychological impact of change because we all handle change differently, but most people tend to go through a similar process.

Step one is DENIAL. The first response is often to deny or minimize the change. People may act like nothing happened, and from the outside they look like they are doing just fine. The truth may be that they simply don't want to face the change they are experiencing.

Step two is ANGER. After the reality of the change sinks in, people often demand to know, "Why is this happening to me?" This is the step where people can experience uncertainty and self-doubt and get stuck in self-defeating behaviors. Anxiety and depression are commonly experienced in this stage.

Step three is LOOKING FORWARD. This is when people begin to look forward and focus on the good that may come from the change and what opportunities may present themselves in the future.

Step four is ACCEPTANCE. In this final stage, people have developed new goals and discovered new self-confidence. Although the past is not forgotten, there is a renewed focus on today, as well as excitement about what lies ahead.

It's important to find healthy ways to deal with change-related stress, such as:

- Recognizing that change is a part of life
- Anticipating change and expecting that it will happen over and over again
- Practicing flexibility and resilience

Wikipedia states that psychological resilience is the ability to cope with a crisis mentally or emotionally or to return to pre-crisis status quickly. One way to build psychological resilience is to think critically about our emotions and to ask ourselves:

- Is my reaction justified by the facts and would more information help me to better cope?
- Am I overreacting or misinterpreting?
- Is there an opportunity here I may be missing?
- Are there parts of the change process I can control?

By effectively developing and utilizing psychological resilience, we can ensure that we are making positive choices in the midst of change. We can learn where and when to take control and when it's time to let go. Remember, we can't control other people's thoughts, words, actions, feelings, or behaviors, but we can control our own

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thoughts, words, actions, feelings, and behaviors. We can resist “victim thinking” and instead realize that positive thinking will help steer us in the right direction.

Another successful technique is to utilize the “FIVE R’s” for dealing with change-related stress:

RELAX: Find ways to relax. Try deep breathing, meditation, and exercise. Commit to a healthy lifestyle that includes good nutrition and plenty of rest.

REFLECT: Don’t discount your feelings. Seek support from others and utilize all available resources to help you sort out what you are going through.



REASSESS: Assess your feelings. Let go of rumors and misinformation and create a new version of yourself that focuses on the positives.

REHEARSE: Do you need to deal with something stressful? Rehearsing helps lower stress and anxiety.

RITUALIZE: Maintain your routine and seek comfort in family activities and those things that have not changed. The familiar can be an instant stress manager.

Stephanie Sarkis, PhD, gives us 10 ways to cope with big changes:

1. Acknowledge that things are changing
2. Realize that even good change can cause stress
3. Keep up your regular schedule as much as possible
4. Try to eat as healthy as possible
5. Exercise regularly
6. Seek support
7. Write down positives that have come from this change
8. Get proactive
9. Vent, but only to a point
10. Back away from social media

Finally, none of us can stop change. We experience changes every day. They might be a trivial annoyance, like finding the exit you use on your drive to work closed for construction, or something life changing, like losing your job or the loss of a loved one. It’s important to remember that **EMPLOYEECARE** has counselors available to listen to your concerns and help you cope with the changes you are experiencing.

Sources:

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