

Adapting to Change:

Why It's Important and Tips to Do It

If change feels like an uncomfortable process, you're certainly not alone. We asked a few experts on how to cope. Change, as they say, is inevitable. Life is always shifting in one way or another, whether it's a new baby or a new job, a death, or a divorce. It's understandable to feel resistance toward new changes, but there are several ways you can learn to adapt.

What is the Ability to Adapt to Change?

Adaptability is the ability to integrate new information and circumstances, then adjust your behavior accordingly, says [Nick Bognar](#), a licensed marriage and family therapist in Pasadena, California. "There may be a certain innate quality to it, but I believe it is accessible to virtually all of us, and therefore I would consider it a skill," he explains.

Why is it important?

Learning how to adapt to change has many benefits, says Bognar. "It's advantageous to be adaptable because the world is highly unpredictable," he says. "We often find ourselves in situations where we have little to no control over most of the variables that affect our choices."

Instead, when you learn to cope and you focus on what you can control, it leads to [personal growth](#). Change can be the starting point for:

- building resilience
- enhancing your emotional well-being
- expanding your skill set
- honing your problem-solving abilities
- improving your self-esteem and confidence
- increasing opportunities (work, relationships, etc.)
- preserving your resources
- developing an internal sense of safety, rather than relying on external factors

Why is it Hard to Adapt to Change?

As humans, we tend to seek out safety and familiarity. Many people are hesitant to change, as it can cause great discomfort to let go of the reins and enter uncharted territories, says Sue English, a licensed family therapist in Naperville, Illinois.

“Humans, as well as mammals, are biologically wired to detect and respond to potential threats within our environments,” she explains. “Until we allow ourselves to build trust in our [new] environment, we might regress to maladaptive patterns of avoiding change.”

These maladaptive patterns may include defense mechanisms such as:

- projection
- denial
- splitting
- repression

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In most cases, change is out of your control, but how you respond is up to you.

Try to Give Yourself Time

You're a human being, not a light switch. You likely can't go from one mode to the other in an instant — and that's OK. When change comes, try to take a moment to process it, says Bognar. "We might need to give ourselves a little time to grieve," Bognar explains. "It's important self-care to accept our unpleasant feelings and make room for them."

Consider Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive restructuring, or changing your negative thoughts, is a useful way to help you accept what is out of your control, says English. "The trick is to maximize the value of adjusting to new environments rather than desperately clinging to familiarity," she says.

Change (out of our control)

Cognitive restructuring (in our control)

<p>Now that we're broken up, I don't know who I am anymore.</p>	<p>Now I have the capacity to discover new interests and reconnect with old friends.</p>
<p>This company takeover is screwing up my entire workflow.</p>	<p>I'm learning new programs and expanding my skill set. Soon, I'll qualify for a better-paying role.</p>
<p>If I would've noticed that bump earlier, Fido would still be here.</p>	<p>I had no way of knowing my dog had cancer. He would be so proud of me for <u>how strong I've become</u>.</p>

Try to Increase Your Self-Care

In some cases, change can be a positive thing. Getting that new promotion, moving into a new house, or welcoming a new baby — all these changes can be exciting. But when the change is difficult or uncertain, it can have an impact on your mood, energy levels, and sleep. When that happens, try to take it a bit easier on yourself.

“Change can naturally cause you to feel upset, anxious, and off balance,” says Katie Ziskind, a licensed marriage and family therapist in Niantic, Connecticut. “Choosing effective, healthy behaviors through self-care practices can help you problem solve even better.”

Some Self-Care Practices May Include:

- a warm bath
- a massage
- [nature walks](#)
- regular exercise
- crafts or puzzles
- reading
- socializing and connecting with others

Consider a Mindfulness Practice

Change can create a lot of fear and a “what if” style of thinking.

You may find it useful to try a practice that helps you:

- stay in the present moment
- prevent [irrational thoughts](#)
- change [cognitive distortions](#)

Some Examples of Helpful Practices May Include:

- [guided meditation](#)
- gardening
- [reflective journaling](#)
- [tai chi](#)
- [walking meditation](#)
- [yoga](#)
- [mindfulness](#)

Perhaps Work with a Mental Health Professional

You don't have to do this alone. If changes in your life feel overwhelming, you may find it helpful to work with a [mental health professional](#) to find out why that might be.

“Adapting to change can be more difficult for people who are neuro-atypical, have [ADHD](#), have [autism](#), or have had [traumas](#) around changes in the past,” says Ziskind. “A therapist can help you develop positive coping strategies to adapt to change and be more positive with your mindset about the change as well.”

Let's Recap

It's OK to be fearful of change, but that doesn't have to rule your experience. “The only thing predictable in life is change,” says Ziskind. “The more you mentally resist the change, the more emotionally painful it may become.”

You may find it helpful to carve out some time to process your feelings, increase your self-care, and try reframing your thoughts in a way that highlights the positive gains. Ziskind also suggests reading books rooted in Buddhist philosophy to learn more about going with the flow and being flexible in the midst of change.

Some Helpful Titles May Include:

- [“When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times”](#) by Pema Chödrön
- [“No Mud, No Lotus: The Art of Transforming Suffering”](#) by Thich Nhat Hanh

- [“Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy”](#) by Sheryl Sandberg and Adam M. Grant
- [“Who Moved My Cheese? An A-Mazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in Your Life”](#) by Spencer Johnson