

Coping with Change

Change is an inevitable, natural part of life. Whether we make changes ourselves or they arrive unexpectedly, we can learn from it on every occasion.



What is change?

Change can be viewed as an opportunity or a challenge – either way it provides us with the chance to see new ways of being or doing things. But sometimes change can feel threatening because it forces us to face unknown situations or accept unfamiliar outcomes.

Changes at work

Change is part of working life as organisations evolve to remain competitive. Changes to our job roles and responsibilities, work demands, work relationships, career moves and redundancy can be unsettling and distressing.

Often, we like things to stay the way they are because it gives us a sense of structure, control and continuity. It also provides a sense of security both emotional and financial. However, when change happens at work, it can help to us to adapt, be flexible or explore new options.

Planning for change

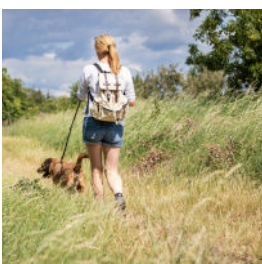
Some change, by its very nature, is unpredictable. However, many aspects of change can be anticipated, such as increased financial demands at Christmas, children leaving home or deciding to change your job. When possible, learning to properly prepare in advance can reduce the impact of change and affirm to ourselves that we have control over our own decisions.

Managing Change



Acknowledge that things are changing

It is possible to become so focused on fighting change that we put off dealing with it. Denial is a protective factor, but it can prevent us from taking the steps needed to deal with the change. Putting a plan of action in place can be less stressful than putting it off.



Maintain your usual regular activities as much as possible

When change is occurring staying with as many regular activities and routines becomes important. Routines, such as walking the dog in the morning, provide a sense of familiarity and comfort and offer the brain a time to rest. Strategies such as writing down activities and planning out the day can reduce what the brain needs to think about and hold in your head.





Positive thinking

A lot of what we dislike about change is based on fear of the unknown. However, we can learn to choose between fear, worry and acceptance, helping us to face the reality of each new situation. It's easy to be negative sometimes, to retreat into a cycle of blaming others or avoiding responsibility. By remaining positive we can consider what is in our control, assess all the options and make rational choices.



Physical health

Maintaining physical health is an important part of dealing with new challenges. Looking after ourselves with a balanced diet, regular exercise, adequate sleep and an appropriate work/life balance makes a significant contribution towards a positive outlook.

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Figure 1 shows 'The Change Curve' which represents the sort of phases we can go through, particularly if we experience significant and unwanted changes.

In more detail, these are:

- **Shock and numbness** - the aftermath of the loss or change, where we feel numb to what's happened
- **Denial** - this happens as we fail to accept the situation or the consequences of the situation
- **Anger and hostility** - these occur when we emotionally express the affect the change or loss has on us
- **Uncertainty or depression** - this affects us as we question the change or loss and we may experience depression
- **Bargaining** - this emerges as we start to take on board what has happened
- **Acceptance** - this enables us to come to terms with the change, accept the changes and live our lives again

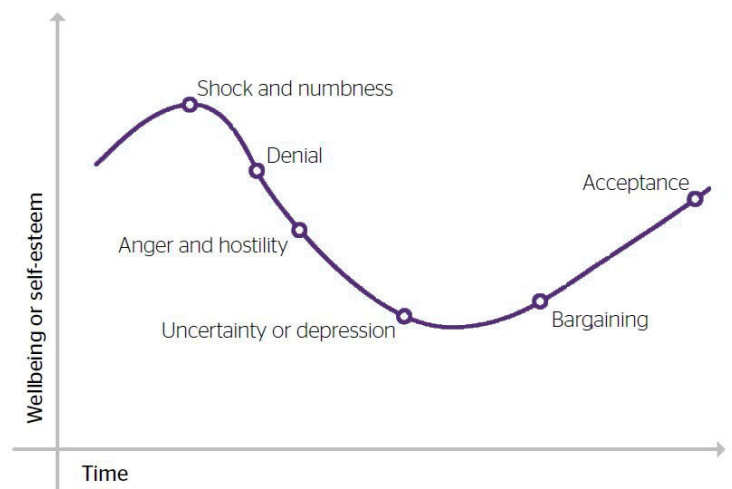


Figure 1. The Change Curve
(Based on Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, 'On Death and Dying' 1969, New York, Macmillan)
www.ekrfoundation.org

You may also find the following websites useful:

Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

The HSE is responsible for enforcing health and safety legislation in the UK.

www.hse.gov.uk

Citizens Advice

The Citizens Advice can provide practical advice when change effects your job status

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/leaving-a-job>

ISMA

International Stress Management Association (ISMA) promotes sound knowledge and best practice in the prevention and reduction of human stress

www.isma.org.uk