

# ***FEAP NEWSLETTER***

*A Series of Educational Articles from your Faculty and Employee Assistance Program*

## **COPING EFFECTIVELY WITH CHANGE**

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**Man, alone of all the creatures of the Earth, can change his own pattern. Man, alone is the architect of his destiny. The greatest discovery in our generation is that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives. -- William James, The Principles of Psychology**

The one constant in our lives is change. Our ability to adapt to change and cope with transitions greatly affects our well being, overall happiness and satisfaction with life.

All change can be stressful. Most of us realize that certain changes have the potential to knock us off our feet – situations like divorce, death, job loss, illness, etc. But even more “positive” or sought after changes can result in stress and uncertainty. A hard won promotion can leave some people feeling insecure and unsure of their abilities. The birth of a baby, while generally a joyous occasion, is also a change that can leave us feeling scared, anxious, and overwhelmed.

One very common roadblock people encounter when dealing with change is one’s own thinking. How we view and perceive a situation greatly influences how we will respond and react to that

situation. Our thinking can help us through a difficult transition, or it can hurt us. If we can learn to recognize those thoughts that get in the way with successful coping, we can learn to change, or modify our thinking in a more productive way.

For example, suppose Sally Smith’s youngest child is going to be a Freshman in college, and is leaving home to attend school 500 miles away. Sally may have several thoughts, or “beliefs” about this transition. She may believe that she is losing her role as mother, since there are no more children in the home. She may think that being a mother is the only thing she is really good at and it is what defines her as a person. These beliefs are probably going to contribute to some difficulty in adjusting to this change. She may start to question her whole self worth, may get depressed, or may start overeating as a way of trying

to deal with her painful feelings.

However, Sally could instead recognize her beliefs as “faulty” and may make a choice to ‘challenge’ those thoughts. She may say to herself “Yes I am a good mother, and my role as mother is not going away altogether, it is just changing. Now is the time to look into going back to school and taking those computer classes I’ve wanted to learn. This will be a good opportunity for me to start learning new things and finding out what I like to do.”

It’s obvious that challenging her first thoughts about this change will result in Sally having a much more positive and realistic experience with this transition.

Here are some other examples of thoughts/beliefs that can get in the way when we are in the midst of change in our life.

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## **Thoughts That Cause Problems During Transitional Change**

- Change is terrible – this is never going to work out.
- I have got to be strong always and not show my feelings.
- I must learn everything new immediately
- The world ought to be fair.
- Things should always run smoothly or, else I mismanaged.
- I need to eat more or drink more in order to cope.
- I should be able to please everybody all the time.
- It has always been done that way.
- If others criticize me, I must be to blame.
- Strong people do not ask for help.
- It is terrible when things go wrong.
- I should not feel sad for the past.
- No one is feeling the way I am feeling.
- I will never be able to adjust.
- I must be a bad person for feeling angry...insecure...scared.

When you find yourself struggling with changes occurring in your life, ask yourself “What is the message/belief I am telling myself? Is it accurate? Am I missing an opportunity to look at this situation in a different way?”

When we are in a period of transition, we can spend a lot of physical and emotional energy in dealing with the changes. It is important that we develop ways to replenish ourselves spiritually, emotionally and physically. Below are some examples of methods you can adopt to cope with the stress that transition has created in your life.

### **Physical**

- ❖ Cardiovascular & flexibility exercises
- ❖ Proper diet & nutrition
- ❖ Conscious muscle relaxation
- ❖ Breathing Exercises
- ❖ Maintain erect posture

### **Mental-Rational**

- ❖ Goal & priority-setting
- ❖ Good decision-making
- ❖ Plan rather than worry
- ❖ Seek knowledge to overcome your fears
- ❖ Choose life-enhancing friends and actions
- ❖ Develop a positive belief system, health concepts
- ❖ Be realistic in your attitudes & expectations of yourself, tools and others

### **Emotional/Spiritual**

- ❖ Develop strong religious faith and positive moral code of living
- ❖ See life as a challenge, not a threat
- ❖ Practice detachment
- ❖ Meditation
- ❖ Prayer
- ❖ Read good literature
- ❖ Quiet music
- ❖ Solitude
- ❖ Quiet hobbies
- ❖ Fellowship – help someone

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Sometimes, changes occur in our lives that may overwhelm us and may require some outside assistance. Here are some warning signs that may indicate that normal coping strategies are not working.

The stress reactions below are presented in categories so that they may be more easily recognized and understood. There is no

magic number of these symptoms that suggest difficulty in coping, rather it is the extent to which the noted reaction is a change, that is, different from a person's normal condition that makes a reaction potentially important. Further, it is the combined presence of symptoms that determines the potency of the problem. Indicators may be isolated reactions

or combinations among the three categories listed below. Finally, it is their duration (how long the symptoms have been present/how long they last), the frequency of such incidents (how often they happen) and the intensity (strength) with which they are present that suggests the severity of the difficulty in coping.

## **Emotional**

### *Apathy*

- The “blahs”
- Recreation is no longer pleasurable

### *Anxiety*

- restless
- agitated
- insecure
- feeling of worthlessness

### *Irritability*

- overly sensitive
- defensive
- arrogant/argumentative
- insubordinate/hostile

### *Mental Fatigue*

- preoccupied
- difficulty concentrating
- inflexible

### *Overcompensation (denial)*

- exaggerate/grandiose
- overworks to exhaustion
- denies problems/symptoms
- suspicious/paranoid

## **Behavioral**

### *Withdrawal (avoidance)*

- social isolation

### *Work-related withdrawal*

- reluctance to accept responsibilities
- neglecting responsibilities

### *Acting Out*

- alcohol abuse
- gambling
- spending spree
- promiscuity

### *Desperate Acting Out*

(getting attention – cry for help)

### *Administrative Infractions*

- tardy to work
- poor appearance
- accident prone

### *Legal Infractions*

- indebtedness
- shoplifting
- traffic tickets
- fights
- child/spousal abuse

## **Physical**

*Preoccupation with illness* (intolerant of/dwelling ailments)

### *Frequent illness – actual*

*Physical exhaustion*  
*Self-medicating*

### *Somatic Indicators*

- headache
- insomnia
- initial insomnia
- recurrent awakening
- early morning rising

### *Change in Appetite*

- weight gain
- weight loss (more serious)
- indigestion
- nausea
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- constipation
- sexual difficulties

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If you recognize some of these indicators in your own life, it is probably a good idea to consider seeking some outside

resources, such as the Employee Assistance Program. Sometimes getting an outside, objective, professional

opinion can help get things “back on track”. ***You can contact your EAP at (434) 243-2643 or 1-800-847-9355 (24 hours a day).***

It is always good to remember that we have choices in our lives, and while we cannot control all the changes that occur, we can control how we choose to respond to them when they do occur. When we are in the middle of stressful times, it may be helpful to remind ourselves that:

## **JUST FOR TODAY**

1. ***JUST FOR TODAY*** I will try to live through this day only, not tackling my whole life problems at once. I can do something at this moment that would appall me if I felt that I had to keep it up for a lifetime.
2. ***JUST FOR TODAY*** I will try to be happy realizing that my happiness does not depend on what others do or say, or what happens around me. Happiness is a result of being at peace with myself.
3. ***JUST FOR TODAY*** I will try to adjust myself to what is and not force everything to adjust to my own desires. I will accept my family, my friends, my business, my circumstances as they come.
4. ***JUST FOR TODAY*** I will take care of my physical health; I will exercise my mind. I will read something spiritual.
5. ***JUST FOR TODAY*** I will do somebody a good turn and not get found out – if anyone knows of it, it will not count. I shall do at least one thing I don't want to do, and I will perform some small act of love for my neighbor.
6. ***JUST FOR TODAY*** I will try to go out of my way to be kind to someone I meet; I will be agreeable; I will look as well as I can, dress becomingly, talk low, act courteously, criticize not one bit, not find fault with anything and, not try to improve or regulate anybody except myself.
7. ***JUST FOR TODAY*** I will have a program. I may not follow it exactly, but I will have it. I will save myself from two pests – hurry and indecision.
8. ***JUST FOR TODAY*** I will stop saying, “if I had time”. I will never “find time” for anything. If I want time, I must take it.
9. ***JUST FOR TODAY*** I will have a quiet time of meditation wherein I shall seek serenity, truth and acceptance of myself and of my neighbor.
10. ***JUST FOR TODAY*** I shall be unafraid. Particularly, I shall be unafraid to be happy, to enjoy what is beautiful, and what is lovely in life.
11. ***JUST FOR TODAY*** I will accept myself and live to the best of my ability.
12. ***JUST FOR TODAY*** I choose to believe that I can live this one day.

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