

Managing your emotional well being in difficult times

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In adverse times it is natural to quickly fall into a defensive mindset. A feeling of helplessness and hopelessness can become a dangerous companion in times of uncertainty and difficulty. The following strategies have been adapted from various resources including, William Bridges' book, Transitions. I hope that the readers will find these to be informative.

- 1. Slow your head and your heart:** Anxiety, uncertainty, and frustration can lead to a racing heart and head. Slow down the overwhelming emotions and catastrophic thoughts. Don't let your negative thoughts and feelings run away with your imagination. Many times our assumptions and expectations of the outcome are far worse and catastrophic than reality. It is useful to do some reality testing of what you are feeling and thinking. Slowing down your thought process and managing your emotional reactions can lead to clear headed thinking. You will be able to make better decisions.
- 2. Hold onto something solid temporarily:** When the world around you appears to be falling apart and everything feels chaotic, it helps to find some solid ground in your life. Pay attention to aspects of your life that are not directly related to the changes you are facing, keep some semblance of normality in your daily routine. Focus on tasks and relationships that you can control.
- 3. Think before you leap:** Sometimes people act for the sake of action because they feel that they must do something, anything. This is a typical reaction to feel a semblance of control during difficult times. This may not necessarily be the best option. It helps to conserve your emotional and physical energy for actions that are well thought out and relevant to the circumstances that you face.
- 4. Discover your discomfort:** In times of adversity our old fears surface with great strength. Many times people who are dealing with change are not as concerned about the actual change as they are afraid about security, attachment, identity, and self worth. It is very important to separate the actual sources of emotional discomfort from the perceived sources of discomfort.
- 5. A little goes a long way:** Take care of yourself in small ways. These can be as simple as taking a long bath, reading the newspaper, drinking your coffee, spending time with loved ones, paying attention to personal appearance, and allowing yourself small but important leisure and comforting activities.
- 6. Every cloud has a silver lining:** While this cliché is quite common, it is also very true. By its very nature change and adversity has hope built into it. Many a times our attention is focused solely on the negative aspects of change and the psychological pain and suffering associated with it. This hinders us from looking at the other side of change, adversity, and life.
- 7. Share your heart's burden:** It helps to talk to others about what is going on in your life, particularly if others are sharing the adverse circumstances. Starting a small support group, finding a few different people to talk to and sharing your thoughts and feelings go a long way in reducing the emotional burden.
- 8. Explore possibilities:** This is the hardest thing to do because adversity can envelop and overwhelm one's hope and ability to get excited about possibilities that result from change. Pay attention to what positive possibilities could result for you individually as a result of change and adversity.