



MANAGING CHANGE



ZEVO[®]HEALTH

1. What is change?

Change is anything where we “make or become different.” A variation from our usual way of doing things. Change is a part of human experience. Whether we like it or not change is often out of our control, an unavoidable part of life. It is something many of you experience regularly at work; new team members, policy updates, being moved to new queues, changing mealtimes, the list of small changes you adapt to on a daily basis is endless. We process these smaller changes easily with the ability to add them in to our daily routine without too much extra energy.

However, some changes take more of our physical, emotional and mental energy. Leaving a job to move onto new things is one of those big changes. Big situational changes like this often require support to help us transition mentally and physically from the old to the new.

2. Why change can be difficult

There are several reasons why change can be tough! Amongst the reasons outlined here, there might be 1 or more that you can relate to, whatever the case be kind to yourself around this time. Change is hard, it is completely normal to feel scared, out of control and down when going through life changes. Being able to relate to the examples below and know why you are feeling this way about change is helpful when it comes to coping and transitioning.

1. Uncertainty and Lack of Control

- a. Most humans do not like uncertainty or feeling like parts of their life are out of their control. However, some personality types struggle with this part of change more than others. Leaving the safety of a well-known routine behind for something new and possibly unknown can feel threatening. Thoughts like “What if I can’t find a new job? Or What if I don’t like my new job? What if the people aren’t nice?” are completely normal. The unknown can seem scary.

2. Sense of Loss

- a. Leaving a job can bring a sense of loss. Loss of co-workers who you got on well with, loss of routines and habits that felt safe, loss of a role you enjoyed and loss of a part of your identity. The last one can surprise people, but we spend over 1/3 of our waking hours in work per week, so what we do often becomes part of our identity over time. Leaving this role can feel like a loss of that part of your identity.

3. Discomfort and Stress

- a. Change requires us to exert effort on things that may be outside of our comfort zone and so change is nearly always accompanied by a level of emotional and psychological discomfort and stress.



4. Fear of Regret

- a. When making an active decision to change it can lead to worry about regret. Fear of making the wrong decision particularly regarding an important part of your life like work is normal. However not letting this fear of regret take over is key to positive outcomes and transitions following the decision for change. We can never be certain that our decisions will go the way we hope and accepting this is important in managing any feelings of regret.

5. Anger

- a. Some people experience anger as part of change. It is normal to feel angry at others, yourself or the circumstance, especially if you feel the change happening is unfair or out of your control. Know that this feeling of anger is normal but try to manage it through talking to others, problem solving and acceptance.

How to manage change

Change is the physical situation i.e. leaving your current job. Transition is the emotional and psychological processes we need to go through to cope and positively manage change. The tips below go through the 3 stages of transition. Be aware that it is not easy. Be kind to yourself and don't judge yourself for getting stuck at step 1 for a little while, letting go of the past is often the most uncomfortable and emotionally challenging.

Step 1: Ending, Losing and Letting Go

"Of course there is no formula for success except, perhaps, an unconditional acceptance of life and what it brings." – Arthur Rubinstein

- Trying to have an ending you are happy with is an important part to leaving the past behind and moving towards the future. Having a chance to say goodbye to all friends and colleagues at work, resolve any issues that remain with Team Leaders and check in with the wellness team for any worries about leaving, is a good way to bring your time here to a conclusion in a positive way.
- Acknowledge and respect for the past is important. Try and practice gratitude for the positive things this role brought you, the opportunities you had to make a difference, to meet a diverse group of people, learn new skills...anything at all you are grateful for from your time in the role. This action may be done through writing down what you are grateful for or just taking a couple of quiet minutes to think through these things daily when you first leave your role.

- Letting go is difficult, but we cannot transition to a new stage if we are still stuck in the past. If you find your mind is constantly going back to thoughts of your old job try and transform these into more helpful thoughts such as, “I am grateful for what I learned in that role and excited for the future.” One thing ending means the beginning of something new.
- Radical acceptance. Learning to accept reality as it is rather than spending time wishing/regretting for the past is not easy. However, knowing that certain things are out of your control and accepting this wholly in thought and actions will make transition easier. Acknowledge and respect the past, take gratitude from it, let go of that time and accept your new reality.

Step 2: The Neutral Zone

“A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty”- Winston Churchill

This is a period of uncertainty for many. It is a time of both “what was” and “what will be.” It is normal to feel worried, nervous or a bit lost during this stage. However, this is a great time for opportunity and growth. During this time of change it can be helpful to reflect on the skills you’ve developed and experience you have and think about the opportunities that await in the future.

- Make a list of things you want to do going forward. They might not be work related and may be centered around spending time with family and friends, further studies, relaxation, reading etc. Having a list of things to hand can help you remain focused and positive about the future as well as prevent boredom and isolation.
- Set some goals. Think of a few short-term goals to work towards during this change period. Make sure they are specific and achievable. A goal such as “Learn guitar” is too broad if you’ve never played an instrument before and don’t even own a guitar! A more achievable and specific goal might be start guitar lessons or learn a specific song.
- Talk to those who have been through a similar experience before. If possible, take time to talk to past colleagues or friends who have transitioned from a role like yours. You will feel better and less isolated in your experience and might even get some ideas about next steps, or ways to manage the transition from this role.

Step 3: The New Beginning

“Do not wait until the conditions are perfect to begin. Beginning makes the conditions perfect”- Alan Cohen.

The final stage of transitioning is beginning to move into a new routine and leaving the past role behind. This involves new behaviours and new thinking. It might involve applying for and starting a new job or applying to go back to education. Whatever the new beginning might be you know you have reached this stage when you are fully absorbed in the new activity and are no longer thinking frequently about your past role, the content, the policies or the routines.

Strategies for self-care during transition

1. Take things one step at a time

Be realistic that you will not adapt overnight. Adjusting to change can take time. Try and be present to each stage and experience. If you are having a tough day accept that but know that tomorrow might be better. Looking to the future and setting realistic goals and plans is helpful, however, it is important to respect where you are at in the moment. Don't be hard on yourself and feel like you should be at step 3 if you haven't passed through 1 and 2.

2. Routines

During change we often feel like our whole lives are turned upside down. Try and keep as much of your normal routine as you can during this transition time. Whether this is picking your kids up from school everyday like you always do or going to a local café every morning for a coffee, try to maintain the regular routines you enjoy. This will allow continuity and stability in other aspects of your life despite the change.

3. Talk to those you love

Tapping into our support network during times of change is helpful when we are feeling stressed and overwhelmed. Talk to a close friend, family member, member of the wellness team or another healthcare professional if you are feeling down or worried about the transition. We often create problems in our heads that don't exist in reality. Talking to someone about how you are feeling and what you are thinking can help make these worries more manageable.

4. Get the basics right

Sleep, movement and nutrition. During periods of change and stress we often put some of our basic needs to the bottom of our priority list. Really during times of stress we need to prioritise getting our basic self-care right. Getting enough sleep, doing some type of exercise everyday (even a brisk 30-minute walk!) and consuming a healthy diet are self-care strategies that are essential for our ability to cope with life's challenges. Make sure you look after these 3 pillars during your transition from your role.

5. Relax and Enjoy

Try and make time in you week just for you. Whether it is a yoga class, a bath, an hour of your favourite TV show or a long walk. Everyone has different activities where they can relax and enjoy the moment. It is so important to keep these activities up when you are stressed or transitioning. They both recharge your batteries and help keep your sense of self-worth high. You deserve that time, so insure to schedule it in every week when things are going well and when things are tough. Making time for yourself is essential.



External resources/access to psychological support

If you are finding things tough and feel that you are stressed, down and worried 2-4 weeks after leaving your job and that your worries and mood are stopping you from doing the things you usually do or enjoy doing, it is a good idea to talk to a health professional. The access to services in Ireland is below.

G.P.

If you are not feeling yourself go to your local GP and ask them to refer you to a primary care psychology team. Once referred you will be put on a waiting list to see a consultant psychologist. Although the waiting list may be long, the service is free and waitlist initiatives are run by many services.

Private Counsellor/Psychotherapist/Psychologist

Contacting a licensed and registered professional is a good step towards accessing support. Counselors, psychotherapists and psychologists are all slightly different. However, all 3 are trained to provide support related to stress, worry, low mood and any other emotional difficulties you might be having. Find a registered professional at the Irish Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy www.iacp.ie Costs vary between €60 to €120 per hour.

Aware- Life Skills Online

Aware run a free 8-week online course that helps in reducing negative thinking and behaviours that are fueling your mood or worry. You can register for this course once you are 18+ here www.aware.ie/education/life-skills-online-programme/

Samaritans

Samaritans are a voluntary organization that provide phone, text, email and face-to-face support to anyone with emotional difficulties. They are a listening, non-judgmental and confidential service. You can contact them by calling or texting 116 123 and emailing jo@samaritans.org You can also call in to talk to someone face-to-face anytime between 10am and 10pm 7 days a week at 112 Marlborough St, North City, Dublin (or at any of their other branches).