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## EC80-552 Change : An Opportunity for Growth

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Sally VanZandt

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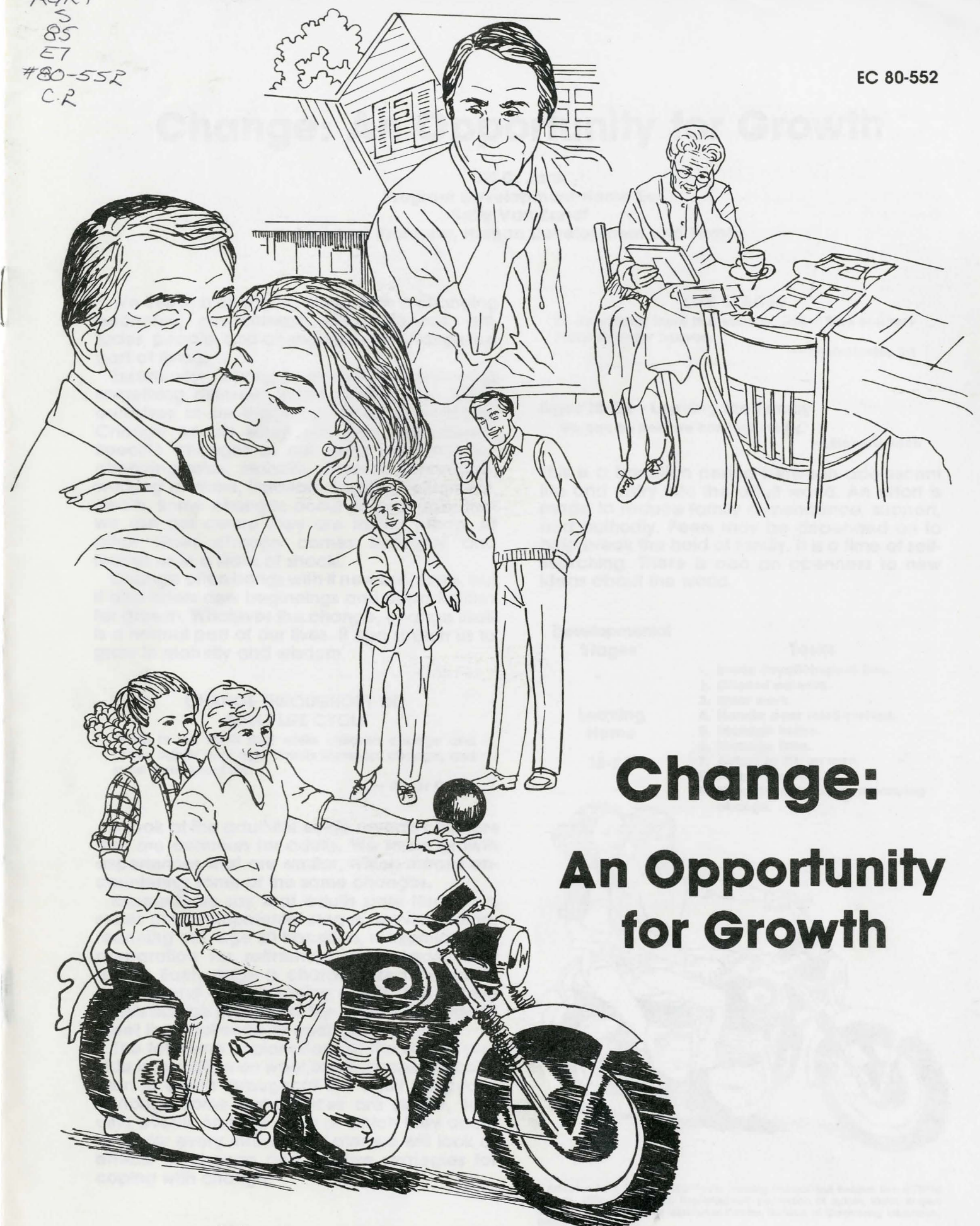
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# Change: An Opportunity for Growth



EXTENSION WORK IN "AGRICULTURE, HOME ECONOMICS AND SUBJECTS RELATING THERETO,"  
THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES,  
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN, COOPERATING WITH THE COUNTIES AND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
LEO E. LUCAS, DIRECTOR



# Change: An Opportunity for Growth

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We live in a changing world, with a changing economy, environment, circumstances, attitudes, people, and changing lives. Change is a part of living.

Essentially, change means experiencing something different. It may come from within ourselves or be triggered by outside factors. Change occurs when our lives are altered. Specific changes in our daily lives include: changing roles, mobility, divorce, remarriage, working mothers, inflation, careers, retirement, death. Some changes occur so gradually that we are not aware they are taking place. At other times change comes suddenly and leaves us in a state of shock.

Change often brings with it new problems, but it also offers new beginnings and opportunities for growth. Whatever the change, change itself is a normal part of our lives. It can stretch us to grow in maturity and wisdom.

## CHANGE THROUGHOUT THE ADULT LIFE CYCLE

Gone is the myth that while children change and grow, adults only age. Adults develop, change, and grow throughout life.

— Roger Gould

A look at the adult life cycle reveals changes that are common for adults. We share growth experiences that are similar, which means encountering some of the same changes.

Researchers say that adults pass through a series of developmental stages: leaving home, reaching out, age 30 transition, reexamination, preparation for retirement, later years, and death. Each stage is characterized by stable periods and critical turning points. The turning points can be predicted. We need to change to meet the challenge of each stage.

The following explanations of the stages provide information on what experiences are common to adults throughout the adult life cycle. Although some experiences are similar, specific events and the ages at which they occur differ for every individual. Later we will look at effects of change and positive strategies for coping with change.

## LIFE STAGES

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.

— Ecclesiastes 3:1

### Ages 18-22 - Leaving the Family

We can be free, we can learn to fly.

— Richard Bach

This is a transition period between adolescent life and entry into the adult world. An effort is made to reduce family dependence, support, and authority. Peers may be depended on to help break the hold of family. It is a time of self-searching. There is also an openness to new ideas about the world.

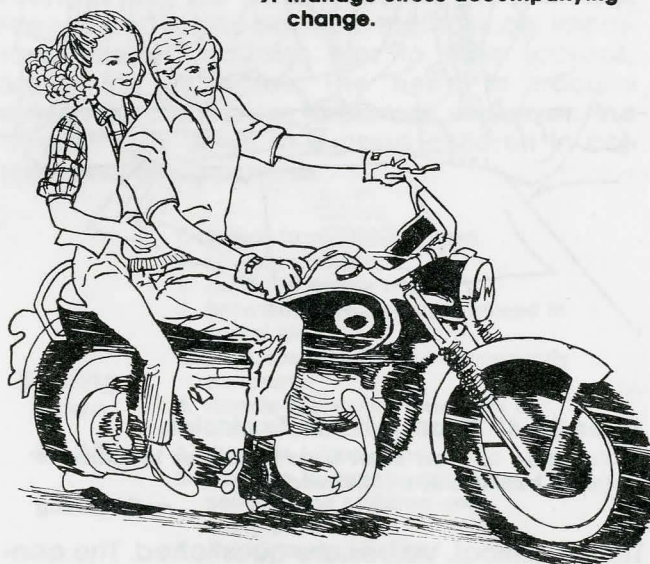
## Developmental Stages\*

### Leaving Home

18-22

## Tasks

1. Break psychological ties.
2. Choose careers.
3. Enter work.
4. Handle peer relationships.
5. Manage home.
6. Manage time.
7. Adjust to life on own.
8. Problem solve.
9. Manage stress accompanying change.



\* Adapted from the Adult Life Cycle: Training Manual and Reader. University of Kansas, 1978, pp. 13 & 14. Reprinted with permission of author, Vivian Rogers McCoy, Ph.D., Adult Life Resources Center, Division of Continuing Education, University of Kansas.



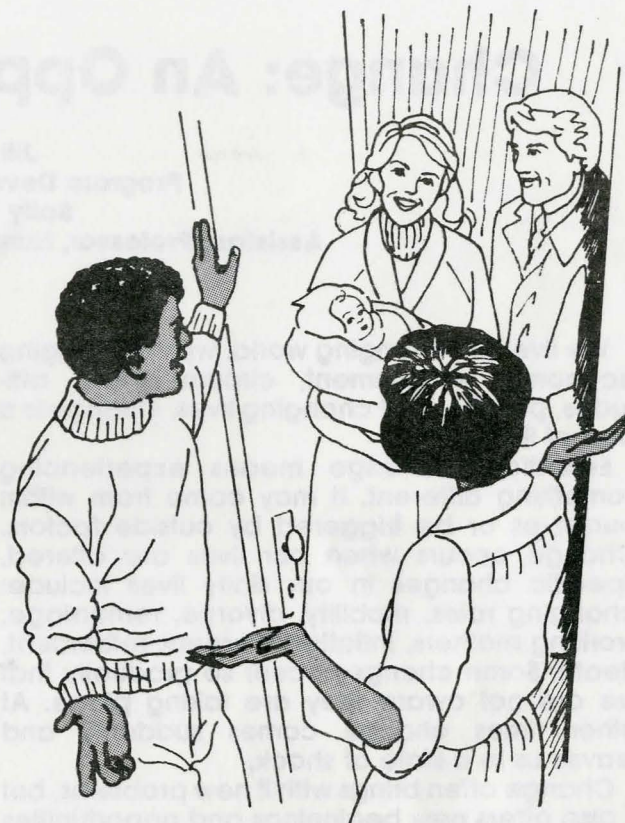
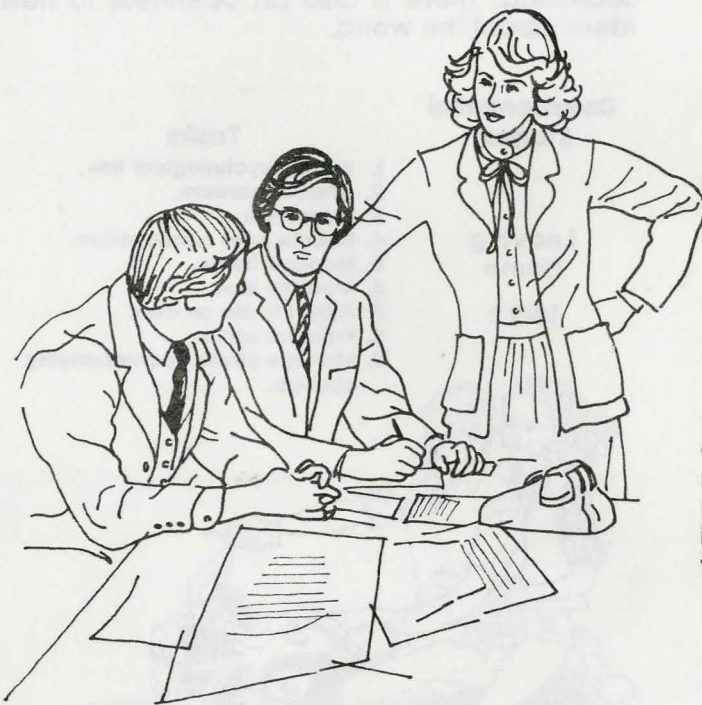
## Ages 23-28 Reaching Out

It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.  
— Kahlil Gibran

A shift is made from being family centered to establishing one's own home and adult life. Initial choices are made; mate selection takes place, a home purchased, and parenthood may begin. The young adult becomes competent in the real world, growing professionally and personally. Social interaction and community involvement occur.

### Reaching Out 23-28

1. Select mate.
2. Settle in work, begin career ladder.
3. Parent.
4. Become involved in community.
5. Consume wisely.
6. Homeown.
7. Socially interact.
8. Achieve autonomy.
9. Problem solve.
10. Manage stress accompanying change.



## Ages 29-34 Transition/Questions

May the outward and inward man be at one.  
— Socrates

In this stage assurance wavers and self reflection occurs. The transition may take the form of confusion and struggle or quiet reassessment. The question is asked "Why can't I be accepted for what I am instead of what someone else expects me to be." Marital satisfaction appears to decline. Children take on a more significant role in their parent's lives. A need to make more money and upward mobility at work become important. There is an inner push to be something more.

### Questions/ Questions 29-34

1. Search for personal values.
2. Reappraise relationships.
3. Progress in career.
4. Accept growing children
5. Put down roots, achieve "permanent" home.
6. Problem solve.
7. Manage stress accompanying change.

## Ages 35-43 Boom/Midlife Explosion

To refuse to grow older is as foolish as to refuse to leave behind one's childhood.

— Carl Jung

Time is critical. Values are questioned. The concern is expressed, particularly by men - "Is there time to change? This is my last chance to make

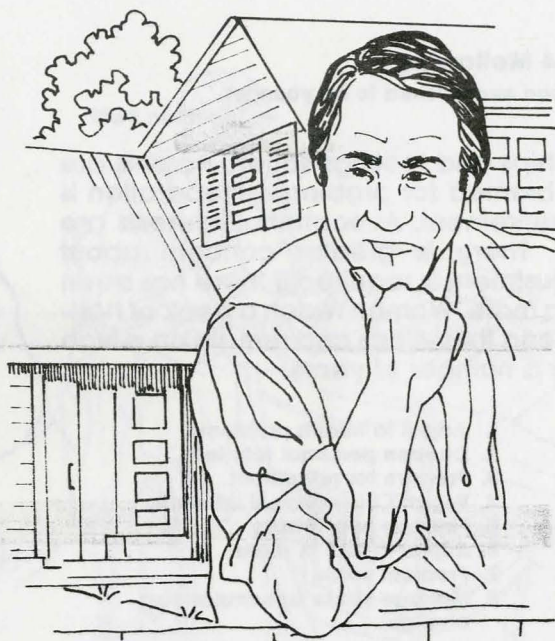


it big in my career." There is a realization that time is running out and death will occur. Parents are blamed for personality problems. A desire to overcome dependency on other people's approval is important. Marital comfort remains at a low level. However the mid-30's to mid-40's may be a suprisingly problem free period for women.

### Midlife Explosion

35-43

1. Search for meaning.
2. Reassess marriage.
3. Reexamine work.
4. Relate to teenage children.
5. Relate to aging parents.
6. Reassess personal priorities and values.
7. Adjust to single life.
8. Problem solve.
9. Manage stress accompanying change.



### Ages 44-55 Stabilization

He that has seen both sides of 50 has lived to little purpose if he has not other views of the world than he had when he was much younger.

William Cowper

Stabilization occurs and there is an acceptance of life. Consequences of earlier decisions must be lived with. Children are launched and there are adjustments to the empty nest stage. Women may question their existence when they outlive the purpose of mothering. But they rally and a sense of accomplishment becomes important. Emphasis on work and achievement brings exhilaration. For women a firm sense of identity—independence and strength may be established for the first time. Friends and family become increasingly important. Married couples turn to their spouses. Social life increases. The need to acquire money becomes less important. However, the budget may need to support children in college and ailing parents.

1. Adjust to realities of work.
2. Launch children.
3. Adjust to empty nest.
4. Become more deeply involved in social life.
5. Participate actively in community concerns.
6. Handle increased demands of older parents.
7. Manage leisure time.
8. Manage budget to support college-age children and ailing parents.
9. Adjust to single state.
10. Problem solve.
11. Manage stress accompanying change.

### Settling Down 44-55





### Ages 56-64 Mellowing

No wise man ever wished to be younger.

— Jonathan Swift

Relationships and feelings soften. Parents are no longer blamed for problems. Preparation is made for retirement. Avocational interests are expanded. There is greater concern about health. Adjustment is required if there has been the loss of a mate. Women reach a peak of happiness beyond their fifties and remain on a high plateau for a number of years.

#### The Mellowing 56-64

1. Adjust to health problems.
2. Deepen personal relations.
3. Prepare for retirement.
4. Expand avocational interests.
5. Finance new leisure.
6. Adjust to loss of mate.
7. Problem solve.
8. Manage stress accompanying change.



### Age 80+ Old-Old

Aging is the turning of the wheel, the gradual fulfillment of the life cycle in which receiving matures in giving and living makes dying worthwhile.

— Nouwen & Gaffney

Frailty may describe many who pass 80 years of age. The generations need each other. Children need the contact with parents, grandparents and great-grandparents in order to get a realistic view of life in all its stages.

Erik Erikson states that "before we die we may develop wisdom - a detached concern with life itself, in the face of death itself."



### Age 65-80 Retirement/Young-Old

As a man advances in life he gets what is better than admiration - judgment to estimate things at their own value.

— Samuel Johnson

Retirement from work occurs. There may be a search for meaning and new achievement outlets. Finances are reassessed. There is concern for personal health care. Adjustment is made to the constant companionship of a spouse or to the single state. A reconciliation occurs in accepting the eventuality of one's own death.

#### Retirement

##### 65-80

1. Disengage from paid work.
2. Reassess finances.
3. Be concerned with personal health care.
4. Search for new achievement outlets.
5. Manage leisure time.
6. Adjust to more constant marriage companion.
7. Search for meaning.
8. Adjust to single state.
9. Be reconciled to death.
10. Problem solve.
11. Manage stress accompanying change.



Aging does not need to be hidden or denied, but can be understood, affirmed, and experienced as a process of growth by which the mystery of life is slowly revealed to us.

— Nouwen & Gaffney

## OLD-OLD \*\*

80+

1. Accept and adjust to a debilitating body.
2. Develop leisure time activities to meet changing abilities.
3. Learn to accept more than one is capable of giving.
4. Make necessary dietary adjustments.
5. Adjust to changing environments, including housing.
6. Modify individual self concepts.
7. Accept a different role in the family circle.
8. Adjust to widowhood if it has not occurred before.
9. Make arrangements for death.
10. Problem solve.
11. Manage stress accompanying change.

Two tasks were identified as being present throughout the stages. These were problem solving and managing stress. As we deal with change we find ourselves actively solving problems. In our attempt to cope we manage stress. To work through these tasks, we need knowledge, skill, flexibility and personal adjustment.

It is important to remember that we develop at different paces and the age at which change occurs depends on our personality, experiences, lifestyle, and environment. Yet, the sequence of change appears to be very similar for people in general. Perhaps someday, the threatening 30's and the mellowing 50's of the adult life cycle will be as well known as the terrible two's and the trusting three's of childhood.

...these are only some of the themes that enliven the years of adulthood and that call forth a continually changing sense of self and a changing set of adaptations. As time passes, life becomes more complex, not less; it becomes enriched rather than impoverished.

— Bernice Newgarten

## Effects of Change

We can never be really prepared for that which is wholly new. We have to adjust ourselves. Every radical adjustment is a crisis in self-esteem...It needs inordinate self-confidence to face drastic changes without inner trembling.

— Eric Hoffer

\*\*Adapted from Barrett, James H. Gerontological Psychology. Springfield, Ill. Chas. C. Thomas. 1972.



Many of us react to change with considerable reluctance. One explanation for this is that we have our minds set on how we think things should go and have preconceived ideas about the way things should be. Then when something happens that breaks our preconceived pattern of thinking, we resent and resist it. Change conflicts with our expectations. Our equilibrium (self-confidence) is disturbed and it takes energy to reconstruct it. Channeling our energies in a positive and creative way becomes life's challenge in response to change at every adult stage.

## Positive Strategies for Coping With Change

Progress is impossible without change; and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.

— George Bernard Shaw

Changing, adapting, and growing help all of us live our lives to the fullest capacity and enjoyment. Yet even predictable change catches many adults off guard because they haven't prepared strategies for coping with change. Lack of preparation can result in mental anxiety, lowered body resistance and an increased risk of a major change in health status. Here are some suggested strategies for adjusting to and coping with change.

1. **Recognize that change is normal.** Everyone experiences change. As the life cycle stages indicate, you are not the only one affected.

2. **Anticipate and plan for change.** James Birren suggests that although you may have little



control over some changes, you are probably aware that they will take place. Instances of such change would include children growing up and leaving home, divorce, job change, and retirement. If you can anticipate future change, the harshness of its impact can be reduced.

If possible try to regulate major voluntary changes that will affect you. For example, if a close family member is very ill, postpone moving to a new location. Too much change in too short a period of time can take its toll, physically. Whether you're anticipating the birth of a baby, a new occupation, surgery, children leaving home, retirement, plan for it mentally and physically.

**3. Keep change in perspective.** Weigh the benefits of change against its cost. By looking at a particular change in relation to other changes throughout life, its significance may be diminished or increased. The point is to keep it in perspective.

**4. Develop a positive attitude toward change.** Try to make the best out of every situation. If you expect to be able to cope with change you're a long way toward being able to handle it. Look at change as an opportunity for growth and renewal.

**5. Identify resources to help you cope with change.** Human Resources — A support system of friends and colleagues can help you deal with stress which accompanies change. Identify friends you can confide in. They can become confidants you can count on in time of crisis. Perhaps a clergyman or counselor could assist you in working through adjustments that change requires.

Other Resources — Be aware of kinds and amounts of other resources available. Consider such resources as time, energy, education, skills, community resources, money, credit, and insurance. These tools can be used effectively in helping cope with change.

**6. Look at change as a stimulus for creative response.** As discussed earlier, many of us react to change with reluctance and find the experience painful. An alternative to becoming disturbed and upset is to focus our energy on constructive actions.

Creative thinking and innovation expand alternatives for constructive action. Change can bring about innovation. Actually, we cannot help but innovate. Have you ever tried to do the same thing twice? The next time the prospect of change confronts you, respond in a way that challenges you to grow. Practice on insignificant changes. Remember, "We are more ready to try the untried when what we do is inconsequential." —Eric Hoffer. By practicing creativity

and innovation, our pattern of coping can make it easier to adapt to more significant changes.

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Positive strategies provide us with tools to cope with changes that occur throughout life. It takes self-confidence and energy to adjust to change. Our energy needs to be channeled in a positive and creative way so that we are challenged to grow. Change to a certain degree can be predicted and research on stages in the adult life cycle suggest what changes we can expect. Change is a normal part of our lives and through it we are stretched to realize our full potential.

We are not unlike a particularly hardy crustacean. The lobster grows by developing and shedding a series of hard, protective shells. Each time it expands from within, the confining shell must be sloughed off. It is left exposed and vulnerable until, in time, a new covering grows to replace the old. With each passage...we, too must shed a protective structure. We are left exposed and vulnerable—but also yeasty and embryonic again, capable of stretching in ways we hadn't known before.

— Gail Sheehy

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