

# Health & Wellbeing

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## Coping with Change

The one constant in life is change. That doesn't mean we ever get used to it or fully embrace it though. Over the last year we have all faced disruption, change and uncertainty. Some people deal with change well and even embrace it, but I think for most of us we can easily get caught in a spiral of "what ifs." In the last 12 months change has come thick and fast, almost daily at times. There are, however, ways we can manage and cope with change in our lives.

### 1. Acknowledge that things are change

Sometimes we get so wrapped up in fighting the change that we can put off dealing with it. Perhaps stepping outside of our denial and acknowledging that things are going to change and it is ok, can reduce the stress.

### 2. Realise that even good change can cause stress

It is not uncommon that when people go through a positive life change like having a baby, moving house, starting a new job, they still feel stress. Remember that positive change can cause stress too. Stress is just your body's way of reacting to change. It is ok to feel stressed when something good happens - in fact it is normal.

### 3. Keep to your regular schedule if possible

The more that change is happening the more important it is to try and keep as much of your daily routine the same as possible. Having some things the same, like walking the dog at the same time gives us an anchor. An anchor reminds us that some things are still the same and gives your brain a rest.

### 4. Try to eat as healthily as possible

When change happened, a lot of us tend to reach for carbs (I certainly do!) This is because carbohydrates boosts serotonin - a chemical that is depleted when you undergo stress (change). It is ok to sooth yourself with comfort foods but try to make sure it is in moderation. Maybe keeping a track of what you are eating will help you keep a check on how much you may be relying on those comfort carbs!

### 5. Add some exercise

If exercise is not already part of your routine, then try adding it. Exercising two or three times a week has been found to significantly decrease symptoms of depression. Even just going for a walk around the block can help you feel better. Often motivation can kick in while we are being active.



### 6. Seek Support

No one gets through life alone. We need to remember that it is ok to ask for help, it shows that you know yourself well enough to realise that we might need some support. Think about who might be your trusted people (friends, family, work colleagues) - the chances are they will be so willing to help.

### 7. Write down the positives that have come from this change

Often when change happens we focus all the things we have lost or left behind, but we forget to explore the positives that this change may have brought. Maybe through the change you have been able to meet new people, spend more time with family, created healthier habits. Maybe the change has or will help us to prioritise what is important to us. Change presents us with the opportunity to grow. Write down the positives that the change brings!

### 8. Get Proactive

Being reactive means you wait until something has happened and then take action. Being proactive means looking at what is coming and making some choices and decisions before entering into the new or the change. Look at how you can be proactive in the change.

### 9. Vent, but to a point

Having a supportive group of people around that you can vent to can help. However, if this group becomes solely for the purpose of venting - that feeling of frustration can catch - it is really contagious. Try to make those conversations focused on action - what can be done to make things better or different. Being creative in new ideas can be contagious too!

### 10. Back away from social media

When we go through change we tend to gravitate to social media and focusing on what is going on in other people's lives. It is important to be calm when you post - and keep in mind that what you post never really disappears. When we are feeling stressed about our own changes it can impact how we view what is going on in other people's lives. Everyone is battling their own changes. Step away from social media if you are starting to compare your life to others in an unhealthy way.

**Give yourself a break** - In a time of change, it is ok to feel a little out of control. Remember at times it is ok to do less. Take a break, we don't have to function at 100% all of the time.

## Ready, Set, Go!

People make mistakes - it's one of the things about being human. It's learning from mistakes that really counts. Think about it like this, there are no mistakes - only stories for later!

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# Change can be tricky for all of us so it is important for us to help teach our children to navigate change too.

## CHANGE IS HARD

*But we can find ways to help*

Big life changes are inevitable, but that doesn't make them any easier for children (or adults) to manage. Structure and stability feel safe for children, so new experiences can be scary. As we face changes, we develop the skills of resilience. By navigating and growing from these experiences, we strengthen and train our "resilience muscle." Children sometimes need help to strengthen that resilience muscle, especially if they are experiencing big life changes.

### 1. Give Them Time to Prepare

With some changes, like the unexpected death of a loved one, preparation isn't possible. But when preparation is an option, give your child plenty of warning that a major change is coming. This allows them time to process and begin to accept the change. It also gives you time to familiarise your child with the unfamiliar.

### 2. Listen to Their Concerns

While you'll want to focus on the positives associated with the big life change, also take time to address your child's questions and concerns. Help them work through the emotions that they're feeling. Often, children simply want empathy and understanding. Acknowledge and validate their feelings without being too quick to distract them or try to shield them from their emotions. Coaching children through their feelings is a vital learning experience.

### 3. Read Books About Big Life Changes

There are plenty of children's books written to help kids cope with major life changes. Here are a few examples.

#### **Divorce:**

It's Not Your Fault, Koko Bear by Vicki Lansky  
Two Homes by Claire Masurel  
The Invisible String by Patrice Karst

#### **New Baby:**

You Were the First by Patricia McLachlan  
Babies Don't Eat Pizza  
One Special Day: A Story for Big Brothers and Sisters by Lola M. Schaefer

#### **Moving:**

Moving to the Neighbourhood (Daniel Tiger's Neighbourhood) by Jason Fruchter  
A Kiss Goodbye by Audrey Penn  
My Very Exciting, Sorta Scary Big Move by Lori Attanasio Woodring



### 4. Keep Routines the Same

When a major change happens, it's important to give your child as much consistency and stability as possible. Do your best to stick to your usual schedule and routines, and don't facilitate any additional changes that may further upset your child. For instance, don't move your child from the crib to a new bed while they're already feeling anxious about becoming an older sibling. Bedtimes and mealtimes, in particular, should remain consistent. The structure feels safe for children, so provide as much of it as possible to restore a sense of safety. If you're moving to a new house or if your child will be spending time at a second home after a divorce, try to set the room up like the child's room at home. Give your child time to play with the same toys, read the same books, and do any family rituals that you enjoy. Plus, getting plenty of rest and continuing to eat a nutritious diet helps your child feel better, happier, and calmer.

### 5. Provide Connection and Play

Another thing that should remain consistent is your child's connection with you. Make sure your child knows that no matter what else changes, you aren't going anywhere, and neither is the bond you have with your child. You may be coping with the new changes and the extra stress that comes with it, but set aside even 10 minutes each day to give your child your undivided attention. Make eye contact, put the phone away, and be playful and affectionate.

### 6. Give Them Choices and Ask for Help

During a big life change, children feel that they have no control over their lives. Give some sense of ownership by allowing your child to make choices. The same goes for asking your child for help. Children like to contribute and feel valuable, responsible, and helpful. Ask your child if they have suggestions for the new baby's name or provide input on choosing a new house. Depending on the child's age, they can help move boxes, pack items, and otherwise assist with a move. And there are plenty of ways big brothers and sisters can feel special and important by helping with a new baby. Your requests can be simple for young children, like bringing you the baby's blanket or helping you sing a lullaby (even if they don't really know the words). Right now, your child probably feels helpless. Address this feeling by providing opportunities to be helpful and to make decisions.

### 7. Talk About Other Changes

Discuss or even sketch your child's life path so far. What changes have already happened? Talk about why these changes happened. What was good and not so good about each change? What did your child learn from each experience? How did they get through it, and what coping skills have they learned? Discuss the idea that every time your child experiences a big change, they're stronger and more prepared for the next one. Similarly, your child can draw a "Before" and "After" picture illustrating a change they previously coped with successfully. Talk about the experience of that change using the same questions described above. By now, these once terrifying changes are probably a normal part of life that no longer feels scary or overwhelming. Discussing the changes that are now in the past can help put the current situation in perspective.

The Big Life Journal ([www.biglifejournal.com](http://www.biglifejournal.com)) has some excellent practical resources for children and parents in this area.

*"To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly."*  
Henri Bergson