

Blog post

Does change stress you out?

Life is full of change. Some of it's great and some of it's difficult, but almost all of it can be stressful. One way to better manage stress levels in your life is to look at how you react to change.

For example, maybe your clergyman or a favorite doctor is retiring. Maybe you have new responsibilities at work. Or perhaps you're moving to a new neighborhood. Changes like these can be a big deal!

Bon Secours Mercy Health just happens to have a team of change experts, and their in-depth knowledge of change in the workplace can help you in your personal life, too.

The three stages of change

You've probably heard about the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Similarly, there are emotional stages that people experience when faced with change:

1. Denial "It will never happen."
2. Resistance "I don't want to change."
3. Adaptation "Maybe this will be okay after all."

The tricky thing about these stages is that you probably won't move smoothly from one to the next. You might feel hopeful one day (adaptation), then refuse to believe what's happening the next day (denial). You might feel accepting of the change at one moment and ready to reject it the next.

That's okay.

"People often feel that they should progress from denial to resistance to adaptation, and then they're done," explained Helen Young of the culture and learning design team. "But what we know from research is that we tend to bounce back and forth from day to day or even moment to moment. It's all part of the process. It's good to think of change as a journey."

The stages are not good or bad. They're not right or wrong. They just *are*. But it's helpful to know that they can impact the way you feel — both physically and emotionally — and even the way you act.

"Everyone reacts to change differently. If you know that you're the type of person who tends towards initial denial, you can consciously work through it by gathering good information from reliable sources and journaling/reflecting on your thoughts related to the change," said Lauren White of the organization effectiveness and change team. "Or if you know that you're going to react by feeling overwhelmed, you might want to go a little easy on yourself for a while and cut back on commitments while you explore what the 'new normal' looks like."

Change leads to transitions

As you experience denial, resistance and adaptation, you'll also be transitioning to your "new normal." How are transitions different from change?

[William Bridges](#), author of the best-selling book *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, defined change as something external that happens to you. Transition, on the other hand, is internal: the psychological process you go through when adapting to change.

So how do you transition to your new normal? Here are some tips.

- Are you feeling a sense of loss? Think about what you're gaining that will balance out anything you're losing.
- Try new things and new routines. Give yourself permission to explore what your new normal looks like.
- Consciously think about what's going well and what has improved since the change.
- Set short-term goals for yourself, so you have opportunities to celebrate often. This will help your transition feel less like a marathon and more like a sprint.
- Are other people going through this experience with you? Share your feelings and support one another!