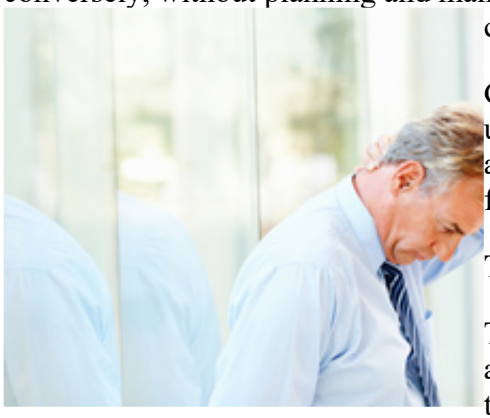
Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Transition shock: dealing with changes in our work and personal lives

From the time we are infants, routine and familiarity can bring feelings of comfort and security. And conversely, without planning and management, periods of change can be disturbing and cause considerable stress.



Given that transitions are an inevitable part of life, it's important to understand why we may respond negatively to periods of change, and recognize the warning signs. Understanding is the first step to finding the tools to manage transition shock.

Tips and tools you can use

Transitions are a period of moving from one stage in life to another. As with any stage of growth—which is ultimately what transition can lead to—there will be growing pains. These can include:

Personal transitions. These include marriage, returning to work after childbirth, or lifestyle or location changes. Personal transitions can also be unplanned, which may include instances of elder care responsibilities, your own illness or disability, or mandatory retirement.

Professional transitions. These include taking on a new job, a new career, moving from full-time to part-time hours or vice versa, or from employment to working from home. Professional transitions can also be forced upon you, such as with downsizings, mergers, site relocation, or the addition of new bosses or job responsibilities. It's important to recognize that personal transitions inevitably impact upon your professional life and vice versa. Even if you choose a path of change, you may still suffer transition shock.

Causes of transition shock

Both personal and professional transitions can be caused by a number of triggers. These may include:

- Unrealistic expectations
- Disruption of routine
- Overload of work and/or family demands
- Fear of negative consequences
- Unwillingness to adapt
- Inadequate skill base, or
- Poor fit with the new culture or role

Warning signs

If you are concerned that you or someone in your life is going through a period of transition shock, here are some signs and symptoms to look out for:

- Sleeping problems and appetite changes

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- Increased irritability or anger
- Lethargy or difficulty concentrating
- Feeling blue
- Feeling overwhelmed and helpless
- Unexplained headaches and backache
- Turning to alcohol or drugs
- Increasing lateness and absence due to illness
- A sinking feeling when you wake up to face the day or approach the office

Dealing with change

When it comes to getting through a period of transition and associated stresses, you'll always be well served by trying to remain positive.

In situations of professional transition, review things that could realistically be improved within the situation. For example, could you learn required skills? Work with your boss to adjust duties? Change job hours to spend more time with a baby? If you are simply a poor fit with a new workplace environment or job, and have given it a fair trial, start looking for a new job while you are in your current position.

In situations of personal transition, consider whether extended family members could share personal responsibilities. Also, reflect on whether a change in attitude is required, and consider how you can become more adaptable to embrace the change.

With today's quick-paced lifestyles, change is the only constant in our personal and professional lives. This means, as difficult as it can sometimes be, that we need to be prepared to embrace change and effectively deal with any consequences it may bring. Fortunately, recognizing the types of change and symptoms of transition shock in advance will help to become more accustomed to deal with the negative effects that change may bring.