

“The only thing that is certain... is change.”

By Stephen Yarnall MD

Certainly not all change is welcome or pleasant, but if we can learn to rise above the “flood waters” or at least “tread water” until the flood recedes, we’ll be free to create new goals, make new choices and get most out of life.

When things don’t go our way, we typically go through **10 stages** which are a normal part of the coping and healing process.

1. **Denial:** “It can’t be” “It can’t happen to me” “It’s not true”. The first stage of reaction to any sudden, unexpected, unpleasant event tends to be denial. Denial is normal if it lasts a short time, but persistent denial is unhealthy because it blocks further growth and healing.
2. **Anger/Blame:** “Whose fault is it?” “This makes me mad” “This isn’t fair” “Why me?” The second stage of reaction looks *backward* in hopes of finding the cause and someone or something to blame it on. Although nothing can be done at this point to change the past, it’s nevertheless a normal response. Like the stage of denial before it, the anger/blame is unhealthy if it persists for an unreasonable amount of time.
3. **Despair:** This stage tends to be characterized by tears, negative and hopeless/helpless thoughts and a feeling of total emptiness and loss. Sleep and eating disturbances are common as the “reality” of the situation sets in. Relationships with other people become more difficult at this time, but understanding and compassion must be given and accepted if one is to move beyond this stage.
4. **Perspective:** At this stage, the individual begins accepting the change and is no longer caught up in denial, anger, blame or despair. The problem is seen in its proper perspective. Although the sense of loss may be significant. The individual does not feel that “all is lost”.
5. **Relationships:** Coming out of the withdrawal and isolation that is inherent in the previous stages, the individual is able to talk and relate to other people and participate in normal activities.
6. **Spiritual Changes:** The individual’s relationship with the spiritual side of life is strengthened as a result of having lived through and survived the experience.
7. **Acceptance:** This stage involves the restoration of self-esteem and the acceptance of the consequences and boundaries of the new reality.
8. **Humor:** Smiles, laughter and a sense of humor return to the individual and help in the healing process. There’s a renewed sense of joy in life.
9. **Activity & Action:** Where once the individual had been restricted or immobilized by this change, he or she now returns to activity, action and renewed productivity.
10. **New Goals:** In this final stage, the individual is able to focus on the “positive” aspects of whatever change occurred, and on new goals and activities. He or she takes comfort in Ashleigh Brilliant’s line “I may not be totally perfect, but parts of me are excellent.”

When faced with an unexpected, unpleasant change, you may not go through all 10 stages in this order, but it helps to keep them in mind. While it can seem if life changes nearly drown us at times, by and by we see that it’s only through meeting the challenges of changes that we can grow.

“Something Good Always Comes Out of Something Bad”

Sybil Rosalie Levine