How to Thrive During Times of Change When You Have ADHD

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ADHD and Change

Change can be rough, and depending on the scope of the transition, it can seem like your entire world is falling off the hinges. When you have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), the overwhelming feelings can threaten to push you into shut down mode.

Why Is Change So Difficult for Those With ADHD?

Those of us with ADHD love our routines. Sometimes they might be hard to stick to, but change is just not handled well by our beautiful brains.

Transitions can be overwhelming and stressful because those with ADHD struggle with focus, managing emotions, regulating actions, and getting started.

Switching from one activity to another, not to mention being expected to do so quickly, can cause overwhelm and a tendency to shut down completely.

Small transitions, such as coming home after work, getting back from a vacation, or having your focus interrupted by the phone, children or co-workers can all cause negative symptoms to show up.

While a break in routine may interfere with our coping strategies, it is also important to note that some people with ADHD seem to thrive with rapid change. A certain amount of stress and chaos may be normal for us, and some are better equipped to handle that stress.

But what about those of us that have a hard time with the transition?

Tips to Help You Through Times of Transition

- **Be kind to yourself.** Show yourself some love by getting enough rest, exercising, eating healthy food, and doing things that make you happy.
- **Create temporary coping strategies.** When you know what routines are going to be interrupted, think of ways you will be able to accomplish all you need to do in your new circumstances. Make lists. Post reminders. Set alarms. Use productivity apps.
- **Don’t be afraid to ask for support!** Your loved ones would be more than happy to help you out or just listen to you express your feelings.

Not All Transitions Are Simple

Sometimes the changes we are going through are more complicated than shifting from the office to home or stopping work to go to lunch. Sometimes life throws significant changes our way.

We get married, have children, become caregivers, move across town or the country, or we change jobs or start a new career. Those things required much more planning and sustained mental focus to ensure it all goes smoothly.

I am in the midst of a huge transition. I've been working the same job for a long time, and the business is closing. I don't know what next month is going to hold as I continue to search for a new job.

As a single mom of a child with mental health needs, I'm scared stiff. My current job has always given me the flexibility to take care of my daughter, so I pushed back having a "real career" to take care of her.

But what do I do now? A new job will bring new hours and too many unknowns. The future is uncertain, and that makes me anxious.

I'd like to say I'm pulling these awesome coping strategies out of my bag of tricks, but that isn't so. I'm usually pretty good with the small daily changes that come my way, but this is throwing me for a loop.

So what do we do when a big change is upon us, and we find our anxiety levels soaring? How do we stop the spin cycle and get back on track? How do we become productive, functioning adults once again?

It took me a few days to realize I was spinning out of control. My heart rate was up, my head was pounding, and my blood pressure was climbing. I wasn't sleeping, and all I could think was, "What am I going to do now?" I was cranky, and not giving my best to my daughter. Even worse, was how my anxiety-fueled her own, and her symptoms of depression, PTSD and anxiety were growing.

I am the only one with the power to reign in my emotions and put my focus where it belongs.

What to Do When You Are Faced With Major Life Changes

- **Evaluate how much control you have.** Don't focus on trying to change what you can't control. Instead look for opportunities to work with the things that are in your power.
- **Acknowledge your grief, your loss, or what you are gaining.** What skills did you learn from the job you are transitioning away from? What are your best memories of your lost loved one? What did they teach you? What can you take with you from the situation you are leaving behind or the situation you are forming that is going to help you succeed?
- **Where is your head? It can be easy to become irrational during times of intense transition.** We might see only the worst and forget that we've made it through transitions before. Practice mindfulness. Slow down your mind, evaluate the change, and feel more in control of it.
- **Focus on your strengths.** Remember how resilient you have been in the past. Write it down if necessary. Remember challenges you've tackled before, and write down how you dealt with them.
- **Find your priorities.** Decide what is most important to you right now and focus on that. Assess your goals and values and prioritize. Make an action plan for tackling one thing at a time.
- **Be present.** The future will come no matter what. Practice being present in each day and noticing all that is going on around you. Don't focus on the mistakes you might make tomorrow or next week. Be there for today.

Putting It All Together

Remembering that I had weathered storms before was extremely helpful.

I made a list of things I'd accomplished over the past few years or things that had seemed insurmountable and scary at the time. From that list, I made a new one with the traits and actions I'd had to implement to get through. It was really eye-opening to see accomplishments I hadn't given a second thought to in black and white.

I had to let go of the idea that I had any control at all. I can't change that my job is ending. I can only control what I do next.

Making a list of my priorities and realizing I wasn't true to myself and it kind of put me in my place.

I talked to my daughter and told her that no matter what, we'd get through. I thought about it and realized that even in the worst case scenario I could find a job with horrible hours that I hate, but it was all temporary. I promised her, and myself that I would spend the next few months creating new opportunities for us. And I will.

Change? I'm ready.