

Coping with Change

The world seems to be changing at an extraordinary pace. We get used to the way things are, and then they shift. That change can be unsettling; even positive change can throw us for a loop.

As soon as something nudges us out of our regular routine, or challenges our understanding of how the world works and where we fit into it, we're likely to experience a deluge of feelings, including fear, anxiety, overwhelm, excitement, distraction or denial.

In turn, those feelings can manifest in behavior. You may, unconsciously, act out with aggressive or passive-aggressive communication. You may push yourself to overwork or take the opposite approach and procrastinate, avoiding what's on your plate.

Your self-care may suffer. You may reach for unhealthy substances or behaviors, get less sleep, skip meals or overindulge. You might cut yourself off from friends and family and spend more time alone or with people who have unhealthy habits.

The Impact

Stress from both positive and negative change can have immediate and long-term effects. Stress inhibits digestion and absorption of nutrients, impairs your body's ability to ward off germs, can cause insomnia and worsen pre-existing health conditions. If you're also engaging in unhealthy behaviors and poor self-care, you're at an even higher risk for illness or injury.

Mental abilities can be affected, as well. When you're preoccupied, worried and focused on the future instead of the present, it's much harder to concentrate and/or apply your brainpower to what's in front of you.

Great leaders are admired for their serenity and confidence in the face of uncertainty. For many of us, though,

when change is afoot, serenity is far from our reach. Instead, emotions are much closer to the surface and can flare up at inopportune times. Whether you lash out, cry or pound on your desk, it's uncomfortable to feel out of control.

How to Cope with Change

Here are five strategies to help you face change:

- 1. Take care of your body.** Eat well, sleep well, exercise to discharge stress and refrain from harmful habits, such as smoking, excessive drinking, recreational drugs or other risky behavior.
- 2. Take care of your mind.** Stay in the present moment by practicing deep breathing and/or meditation. Challenge your negative thinking and keep things in perspective.
- 3. Express your emotions in healthy ways.** Share them with your therapist and people you trust. Vent your negative feelings by pounding on a pillow or banging on a drum.
- 4. Treat others well.** Strengthen your good relationships so you can draw on their support, and work at your challenging relationships so they don't add to your stress.
- 5. Take charge.** Be proactive and prepare the best you can for the changes that might come, but then accept the reality of the moment. Think back to other challenges you've come through and remind yourself that everything will work out okay this time, too.

Into every life change will come, but its lasting impact doesn't have to be harmful. Change also has a way of opening new and rewarding doors. Bottom line, let change be the catalyst for better self-care, which will feed you in all times, stable and uncertain. ✧

10 Ways to Get the Most Out of Therapy

Getting the most out of your therapy sessions starts with showing up! Below are additional ways to be proactive in your own growth and development.

- 1. Know your objectives.** How do you want to feel? How will you know you're improving and growing, or when you're ready to stop?
- 2. Write your history.** Come to your first session with the history of: your life, any problems, relationships, substance use, hopes, dreams, etc. You'll be able to focus on the therapy faster.
- 3. Be honest.** Yes, with your therapist. But most importantly, with yourself.
- 4. Write in a journal.** Journaling helps you process your sessions and bring new material to the surface.
- 5. Prepare for appointments.** What's changed since your last session? Reflect on any insights, and bring them with you.
- 6. Give details.** Just telling your therapist, "We had a fight," doesn't uncover the dynamics in the relationship.
- 7. Notice patterns.** When things recur in your life, they are big clues and shouldn't be ignored.
- 8. Act on your insights.** Putting new insights into action makes great therapy sessions stick.
- 9. Take responsibility.** Your therapist is there to support you while *you* do the work of healing and transformation.
- 10. Be patient.** Change happens over time. With patience, you CAN shift to a place of greater peace. ✧

A Letter From

Jason Saffer, MFT, Co-Director



At our counseling center, we believe that every situation, every experience —no matter how difficult, painful, or “stuck” it may be—holds within it the opportunity for creative growth. If you are reading this message, we figure you’re interested in learning how to do just that!

To help you learn and practice creative growth in your own life, our Center provides counseling services for individuals, couples, families, one-day workshops, and therapy groups. Our therapists bring to their work a commitment to your unique process and a deep understanding of the principles of growth and change. We help you remove the blocks to living your life fully.

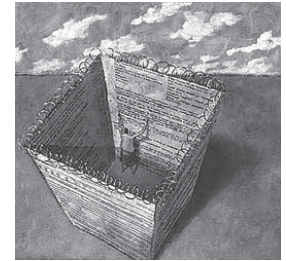
Here are some of the issues that we help people address and resolve. If you’re interested in learning more, give me a call at 510/527-2100, extension 5, or e-mail me at jasons@creativegrowth.com.

- creating intimacy and trust
- overcoming codependency
- self-esteem and healthy boundaries
- loving without addiction
- depression, anxiety, stress
- grief, loss, loneliness
- career conflicts
- sexual difficulties
- childhood wounds related to alcoholism, incest, other traumas
- incorporating therapy into your 12-step program
- effective communication and anger release
- the ability to express emotion
- money and power struggles
- addictions and compulsive behaviors
- exploring purpose, meaning, spiritual growth
- clarifying commitments
- freeing creativity, spontaneity and joy

Mention you heard about us through this newsletter, and your first in-person session will be free!

How Well Constructed Are Your Boundaries?

Boundaries are those invisible lines around yourself that let people know the limits of what they can say or do around you. Make your boundaries too solid and you build walls, too weak and you allow others’ actions to harm you.



True False

- 1. I start statements with “I” rather than “you” or “we.” This lets me own what I say and is less defensive than “you,” and cleaner than “we.”
- 2. My boundaries are specific and clear: “I don’t accept phone calls after 10 p.m.,” rather than the vague and mushy: “Don’t call me too late.”
- 3. I’m consistent when I create boundaries. If I say “no phone calls after 10 p.m.,” I don’t make exceptions unless the situation is exceptional.
- 4. When people attempt to cross my boundaries, I don’t assume the worst (they don’t care, they weren’t paying attention, they’re selfish and inconsiderate); I simply restate my position.
- 5. As soon as I realize I’m in a situation that might be headed for trouble, I quietly announce my boundary: “I won’t continue talking with you if you raise your voice at me.”
- 6. I try to avoid situations and people where I know my boundaries will be continually tested.
- 7. I don’t take responsibility for how others respond to my boundaries. If someone feels resentment because I didn’t wait when she was 20 minutes late for our appointment, I don’t try to make it okay for her.
- 8. I respect others’ boundaries and ask for clarification when I’m not certain of limits. “May I talk to you about business after hours?”
- 9. When people refuse to respect my boundaries, I walk away rather than get into a situation that could escalate. I say why I’m leaving.
- 10. I let people know when I have reconsidered a boundary. “It used to be okay for you to be late, but now...”
- 11. I believe that everyone has to create his or her own boundaries. What’s okay for me might not work for someone else.

Boundaries held firm can help make life easier, reduce conflict and improve relationships. Plus, they’re a real self-esteem booster. If you answered true to fewer than six of these questions, you might need some help with boundaries. Please don’t hesitate to call. *

The Do's and Don'ts of Dating After Divorce

Angie is 47 and recently divorced. She married her high school sweetheart and hasn't been on a date in 25 years. Toward the end of her marriage, there certainly weren't a lot of romantic sparks, so she feels completely out of touch with her sensual side. She's dabbled in online dating and been on a few fix-ups, but couldn't enjoy herself. She felt so nervous about doing or saying the wrong thing, she was convinced she would never get a second date. Her low self-esteem showed, and she wasn't able to make a strong connection with anyone.



Whether you're male or female, if you can relate to Angie's struggles with dating after divorce, try these tips to dip a toe back into the dating pool. Before you know it, you may be diving right in.

DO Explore Your Playful Side

After divorce, your self-confidence may be low and you may not feel attractive. A great way to reawaken your senses is to explore your playfulness. Put yourself out there, engage with your social network in a light way. Focus on eye contact and open body language. Laugh readily and re-learn how to have fun.

Boost your confidence by making an extra effort with your appearance. Most of all, think of this as an experiment and the whole world as your laboratory.

DO Leave Your Baggage at the Door

Approach each new person as a beginning. Don't ignore warning signs (see below), but do take the time to find out who someone really is.

Focus your attention and conversation on your own interests and the positive aspects of your life. Avoid talking about the divorce or your ex.

DO Use Your Common Sense and Be Safe

Find out as much as you can about the person before you meet. Plan a short, daytime meeting for your first date, and arrange for your own transportation. If anything about the person or the date makes you uncomfortable, cut it short and move on.

DON'T Ignore Red Flags or Warning Signs

If your self-confidence is low you might think you don't deserve a fulfilling relationship or that you won't be lucky enough to find someone who likes

you. Don't let those feelings gloss over any red flags about a new romantic interest.

If you find yourself thinking, "Well, I guess I can live with that," or "I can change him/her," stop and consider whether you would want to be with that person exactly as he or she is. Remember, those traits will only be amplified as that person becomes more comfortable with you.

DON'T Take Everything Too Seriously

Don't put too much importance on any one date (especially at the beginning). Focus on having fun and deciding if you like this person enough to get to know him or her better.

DON'T Involve Children Too Quickly

Don't introduce your children right away. Of course you shouldn't keep them a secret, and you can answer any questions honestly, but focus more on who you are as an individual and how the two of you might fit. If there's no fit, the rest won't matter.

How to Meet Someone New

1. Follow your interests. Volunteer or take a class. You'll make new contacts in a circle of people who share common interests and values. Plus, you may add fulfillment and purpose to your own life while helping your community.

2. Ask for referrals. Let family and friends know that you're dating. An introduction from someone you both know doesn't guarantee a fit, but it takes away some of the risk, and there's greater potential that you'll have something in common—if only the person who

introduced you!

3. Go online. There are plenty of websites—free and for a fee—specifically for dating. Or, explore your shared interests with people on other sites. This can lead to new friends who could be potential romantic partners or introduce you to one.



This is an exciting time, and you're bound to have some fears. But if you keep things light and use these experiments as a way to improve your fun-loving abilities, dating after divorce may just be your next great adventure. *

Things to Say to Your Partner

Too often, communication between long-term couples can devolve into the logistics of life: Can you pick up the dry cleaning? Did you take out the trash? Loving relationships need—and deserve—so much more.

Deeper communication may require an intentional shift or willingness to expose vulnerability. But isn't your happiness—and your relationship—worth the risk? Here are some ways to begin:

Thank you for... Everyone likes to be acknowledged and appreciated for what they do. Thank your partner for more than just what you asked him/her to do. For example, you might thank him or her for being a great parent, for always making time for the children.

Would you please... Expecting your partner to read your mind is expecting the impossible. Say

what you want and need. When you articulate your wishes clearly, resentments don't have time to build up, and you can also work together to find win-win solutions.

How do you feel about...

Ask, and then listen to your partner's response, withholding judgment or any need to change or fix the feelings.

I feel... State your feelings and tell the truth. Notice the difference between "I think" and "I feel" statements.

I'm sorry... Admit your mistakes and apologize for them. You may feel vulnerable, but your honesty is likely to inspire the same in your partner and open the door for closer connection.

I forgive you... Accepting apologies for mistakes your partner makes is a way of letting go of resentments, and that frees you both.

I appreciate your... Shine the light on your partner's qualities. You'll create an arena of goodwill that shines back on you.

What I hear you saying... Listen, really listen, and let your partner know he/she has been heard.

I agree with you because... Validating your partner's point of view and perspective helps him/her feel heard and understood.

What are you reading? Open up communication on an intellectual level and you may feel the warmth of common views—or sparks of difference—that drew you together in the first place.

Where do you see yourself in five years? Listen to your partner's vision, and then share your own. The question may inspire a new, shared plan or uncover the need to build a bridge between your dreams.

I love you... Find your own variations on the words; you can't say them too often. *



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