

INSIGHT



Positive Change Can Be Just as Stressful **10** Ways to Engage Your Heart in Your Healing

The world has seen unprecedented change in the last two years. It's been unsettling, to say the least. For some, it's been devastating.

But even "positive" change—a new job, a baby, marriage—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 of Change

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 cope with 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. *

When working through issues or recovering from trauma, it's helpful to engage your heart and unconscious mind. Here are some creative pursuits for assisting the healing process.

- 1. Dance.** The body has a wisdom all its own; moving it according to inner impulses helps access new information.
- 2. Singing.** Singing can be a balm to soothe hurts or a loudspeaker for the soul. Open up your voice and see what comes out.
- 3. Visual art.** Painting, sculpting, drawing...all can give shape to the images in your unconscious.
- 4. Drama.** Dialogue with inner characters to discover their motives. Role-play to gain insight into the stories of your life. Create new outcomes to empower your new, emerging self.
- 5. Collage.** This is especially helpful for creating the vision of who and how you want to be.
- 6. Poetry.** Poet Mary Oliver says that a poem is "like a coiled spring, waiting to release its energy in a few clear phrases." Poetry can crystallize feelings that lie under the surface.
- 7. Music.** Playing an instrument, no matter how well, can be meditative, relaxing and emotionally soothing.
- 8. Play.** Try imaginative play with figurines, improv games, or laughter for no reason at all. Playing can release stuck energy and open up channels for healing.
- 9. Creative writing.** Write stories about your life—or journal—to uncover how you really feel and imagine new possibilities.
- 10. Mask-making.** What do your inner characters look like? Mask-making can bring them to life, allowing you to interact with them. *

A Letter From *Cherie R. Weiss*



The course of human events, especially over the past two years (as well as our own lives), proves the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus right when he said that nothing endures but change.

Yet, despite our experience with change, we still sometimes underestimate its impact. As the cover article explores, change, and its resulting stress, can have a profound effect on our bodies and emotions. We need to take extra care of ourselves—not push ourselves harder—during times of upheaval.

There are few things more horrific than the sexual abuse of a child, and its damage often extends into adulthood. But, as the article on page three explores, it is possible to heal. The article addresses some ways that, in addition to seeking therapy, the survivor can aid the healing process.

Also in this issue are 10 creative approaches to healing that you might like to try, as well as the quiz, which asks if you fight fairly. Rounding out this issue is an article about what to do if your partner has “checked out” of your relationship. It underscores the value of reconnecting and mutually supporting one another.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. If you have questions about any of the articles or would like more copies, please don’t hesitate to call.

Best wishes for a year of increasing happiness, self-acceptance and harmony.

Is Your Conflict Style Harmful?

Most of us would avoid fighting if we could. After all, it’s not very comfortable. However, personal growth is often attained through some kind of challenge. Fighting fairly and skillfully is the key to allowing conflict to serve us rather than do harm. Answer the following questions to discover if you are fighting fairly.



True False

Set 1

- 1. When people hurt me or make me angry, I’m likely to fight back or be defensive.
- 2. If someone brings up a subject I don’t want to discuss, I ignore him or her, or refuse to talk about it.
- 3. I tend to build up resentments over time, and then let them all out in one big blow-up.
- 4. I sometimes cut people out of my life when they don’t agree with me or give me what I want.
- 5. I’ll be taken advantage of or hurt if I show any vulnerability.
- 6. I withhold love and connection when I don’t get my way.
- 7. I try to get more support for my point of view by getting others on my side.
- 8. I have a tendency to “leak” my resentments rather than being open and direct about my feelings.

Set 2

- 1. I use “I” statements to express my feelings and thus avoid blaming and telling the other person what he or she feels.
- 2. I am committed to listening and being open-heartedly curious when quarreling so that I can truly understand what the other person is feeling, thinking and experiencing.
- 3. I am able to express my anger, and I hold a safe, respectful space for others to express their anger towards me.
- 4. I consciously create time and space for resolving conflicts rather than arguing when either of us is in the midst of other things.
- 5. Resolving conflicts successfully often leads to greater intimacy and authenticity.
- 6. It’s important that the other person and I each have time to share our feelings without being interrupted.
- 7. I avoid holding grudges by expressing my feelings as soon as possible—that way resentments don’t build up.
- 8. I try to find a win-win solution in any conflict; I’m willing to negotiate until both of us are satisfied.

If you answered true more often in Set 1 and false more often in Set 2, you may want to learn some communication skills to help you fight more fairly and do less harm. Please don’t hesitate to call if you’d like support in exploring this further. *

From the Darkness of Sexual Abuse to the Light of Healing

While the topic of child sexual abuse has opened up in recent years, it's still one of the most prevalent public health issues facing society today.

An estimated one in 10 children will be victims of sexual abuse before they turn 18, and 42 million adult survivors live in the United States today.

The sexual abuse of a child is a profound betrayal of trust. Well into their adult life, survivors typically experience a wide variety of persistent and often debilitating symptoms.



In addition to suffering from the actual physical sexual abuse, the survivor

often carries the painful burden of the terrible secret and/or internalized shame.

If this is part of your story, know that the journey of healing from sexual abuse always begins with telling the truth—firstly to oneself, then to another. Tell a trusted friend. Tell a therapist.

Moving Forward with Professional Support

Talking to an empathic professional, especially one who specializes in recovery from sexual abuse, is an important step towards healing. Bodywork can also be helpful for healing trauma that has lodged in the body as chronic pain or habitual patterns. You may also want to join a therapy group with other survivors. Sharing stories with others who have had similar experiences dispels the illusion that you are alone in your suffering.

Moving Forward On Your Own

In addition to receiving professional guidance, here are some things you can do to foster wholeness:

1. Take time to nurture your relationship with your body.

Survivors often feel loathing for, or dissociation from, their bodies, so an important step can be to tenderly befriend your body again. Light a candle and rub your feet with oil; sit in front of a mirror and stroke your face, slowly, lovingly; look at your hands and marvel at all the things they can do.

2. Consciously claim your body as your own. Find a safe place where you can shout, expressing all your power, until you feel complete, "This is MY body!" You may want to add, "It's not YOURS, _____" adding the name of your perpetrator(s). If you want

someone with you for support, ask a friend, or do this with your therapist.

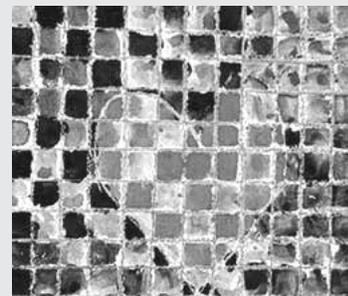
3. Find ways to nurture yourself. Getting in touch with the wounded parts of yourself can be scary. Feelings of fear, anger and sadness can seem huge if they've been suppressed, but loving attention to yourself brings wholeness.

- Let yourself cry. Find a safe place to speak out loud to yourself, reassuring yourself that you deserve caring.
- Be aware of when pleasure is felt. It is not only the negative emotions that get lost when we shut down parts of ourselves, but also the joyful, powerful parts of us. Welcome them.

4. Be creative. Creativity is a great way to access unconscious feelings and to explore and express the feelings that arise.

- Use pastels or crayons and just "mess around," allowing your hand to move freely. Or start with a feeling you already have (shame, anger, joy) and just let yourself express it.
- Write. Start anywhere. Use single words or write what you feel right now. Begin with "I feel..." or "I remember when..." Or write down a negative belief you have about yourself, and then explore the answer to the question, "What would I rather believe?"

5. Welcome your triggers. These automatic responses may



feel uncomfortable but need not be avoided. See them as emotions that invite your attention, as opportunities to heal by integrating unresolved feelings. Experience the feelings with support. Draw them. Write about them.

6. Read books written by or about survivors of sexual abuse. Reading portrayals of your experiences by people who have found a path for healing can offer a model of recovery. *The Courage to Heal* by Laura Davis and Ellen Bass has helped millions of survivors, and has just been updated in a new edition. *Miss America for a Day* was written by Marilyn Van Derbur, a former Miss America who survived 13 years of incest.

There is light at the end of the tunnel for survivors. Commit to your wholeness and, as the past is healed, a life of healthy balance, choice and pleasure unfolds. *

Partner Not Engaged in the Relationship? Try These...

These days, when Yolanda comes home from work, Terrence has already eaten dinner.

He doesn't join her in the kitchen, ask her any questions about her day or talk to her about what's going on in his life. If she tries to start a conversation, his answers are short and his attention is divided between her and the TV or computer. She sorely misses the times when they used to sit over dinner, discussing everything that happened during their days.

There could be many reasons why your partner has "checked out" of your relationship, no longer participating in a meaningful way. Those include boredom, a major life event, heavy workload, exhaustion, illness, or even substance abuse, Internet or

sex addiction.

Keep in mind that besides the effect those issues are having on you and your relationship, your partner is likely suffering as well. So before you jump to blame, accuse and demand, remember to understand, question and work together.

Addiction is a serious problem, and you should seek out specialized help to address it. But if other reasons are contributing to the distance in your relationship, consider these tactics:

Defend date night.

Make sure that you have time alone together on a regular basis. Reinforce your commitment to each other by booking a babysitter, clearing your calendars and treating the date as a crucial appointment that

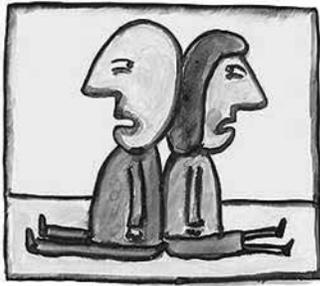
you cannot miss.

Add some pizzazz. Skip the dinner and movie routine and do something unusual. Try salsa dancing or rock climbing, or something you've always longed to do. You'll help reignite the spark between you and your partner, and bring excitement back into the relationship.

Tackle something together. Complete home renovations you've been putting off or take a class together. You'll feel like a winning team, gratified by your accomplishment.

Spice it up solo. If your partner isn't willing to do any of those things, do them alone or with other friends. You'll fulfill your own needs, and your partner will see what he or she is missing and may just come around!

Honeymoons aren't meant to last forever. But bringing back into your relationship that oh-so-sweet spice and connection is worth the effort. ✨



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