

# The Art of Adaption to Change



By Joy Quanrud Grimsley, LMFT, Individual, Couple & Family Therapist

**N**ever before have we been faced with so many disruptive changes in the way we live. That's where the art of adapting must come into play. Adapting is a skill, which, like any other skill, can be improved upon. It's the ability to change our perceptions, approach, and actions to accommodate our new situation. Here are some tips to help you adapt to change.

**Keep something predictable:** We enjoy certainty and predictability in life, and we can thank our brains for that. When we listen to the predictive rhythms of a song, we feel pleasure. When we expect that the sidewalk is flat, it allows our brain to focus on other things. It's how our brain works. Conversely, our brain perceives uncertainty as a threat. The more unpredictable the situation, the brain is on high-alert. We inherently avoid uncertainty, and it may be the reason we find 'changing' a difficult task. To help us manage uncertainty, we must keep something routine-oriented.

**TIP:** Reinstate a routine that you have disregarded or create a new one this week. It will give you a sense of normalcy and predictability. Dr. Indumathi Bendi said, "Carrying out routine activities reduces stress by making the situation appear more controllable and predictable."

**You're more resilient than you think.** Our thoughts shape how we feel, what we think about ourselves, and what actions we take. In the morning, we can prepare our mindset with life-affirming, goal-directed reflections. It will influence how our day goes. We need to consciously avoid ruminating over negative experiences and destructive self-talk.

**TIP:** Take a moment to remember two times when you overcame and adapted to an unexpected change or significant challenge. Ryder Carroll, creator of the Bullet Journal said, "No matter how bleak or menacing a situation may appear, it does not entirely own us. It can't take away our freedom to respond, our power to take action."

**Be flexible.** If we choose not to be flexible, we deny ourselves the opportunity to learn and grow as a person. Being open to grow can increase our resiliency. As parents, we can be examples to our children of how to roll with the punches life can bring. We can teach them to be adaptable, so they not only survive, but thrive in challenging times.

**TIP:** Take a moment to think about something specific that needs your flexibility. This is a quality that has helped Floyd Mayweather, Jr. who said, "A true champion can adapt to anything."

**Be informed.** Change is certain, and it often demands we get out of our comfort zone. Being unwilling to feel uncomfortable, places us in a reactionary mode, which increases our irritation and distress. We haven't felt in control during the pandemic, but we can choose to learn the science or medical aspects of the virus, and how to best manage the impact it has on our lives. We have a choice to let fear get the best of us, or we can intentionally focus on having an informed mindset which will help us feel more in control. Elon Musk said, "Some people don't like change, but you

need to embrace change if the alternative is disaster."

**Connect with others.** 'Social distancing' rubs me the wrong way, and I prefer 'physical distancing', because we need social connections! Studies show that a lack of social connection is a detriment to health, longevity, and psychological wellbeing. When we connect with others, we can reduce our anxiety and depressive symptoms. We may be spending more time evaluating our family's connectedness or lack of it. Some couples may realize they haven't been nurturing their love.

**TIP:** Spend a moment to think about how you can improve an important relationship in your life so that it's more fulfilling. Ronald Reagan once said, "All great change in America begins at the dinner table."

**Have a tenacious attitude.** While persistence may insist on pushing one idea forward, tenacity keeps trying various approaches in order to achieve a goal.

**TIP:** Take a moment to assess whether you are demonstrating a can-do, tenacious attitude during tough times, because this type of thinking will help you deal with adversity. Maya Angelou was an example of that, and once said, "If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude."

**Change your perception.** Adaptation is a quality that is essential to life. The first step in adaptive change is superficial, temporary, and less sustainable. For example, marital fighting can be reduced by doing more or less of something in a progression of small changes. However, true and lasting change occurs when our perceptions about someone or a situation shifts. Then, we behave, think, and feel differently. When we perceive that change is meaningful and necessary, our behavior will follow, and it will be transformational.

**TIP:** Reflect on the perceptions you hold dear, and ask yourself if they're working for you. Do you need to shift something to adapt and thrive? Famous psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, Viktor E. Frankl once said, "When we are no longer able to change the situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

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