

Managing *life transitions*

An introduction



Life transitions are periods in life involving changes to your lifestyle. They might also be a result of important events that make you stop and re-evaluate your life. Life transitions may run smoothly alongside your life causing few ripples. However, it is not uncommon for people to struggle to adjust to change, and many find these periods of life highly stressful and perhaps distressing.

Life events that people commonly struggle to adjust to are: reaching a significant age, e.g. 30, 40, etc; getting married; becoming a parent; leaving university; changing/losing their job; becoming ill; developing a disability; being bereaved; retiring; changing working patterns/styles, i.e. becoming part time, starting to work from home, or transitioning from homeworking to workplace working.

In this guide, we take a look at some of these common transitions. We explore some of the issues that may arise and look at how you can make the change more comfortable.

Why do we find transitions difficult?

Throughout our lives, we have been conditioned and educated to curate routines and establish familiarity in our lives that will benefit us. Brush your teeth in the morning and at night, make sure to get to bed each night at an appropriate time, do your homework each evening, take your daily 30 minutes of exercise. We have learned to expect the expected, however when a transition happens, whether positive or negative, we no longer have the predictable to fall back on. Our routines and schedules may be thrown out of the window and this can leave us feeling anxious.

In the 1980s, psychologist William Bridges wrote a famous book called *'Transitions'*. In it, he explained their challenging nature. He argued that transitions begin with an ending and end with a beginning. In between each ending and beginning is a challenging no man's land, where things are uncertain, unpredictable, and can often feel unstable. It is this middle ground between the end of something and the beginning of something else that we find so challenging.

Bridges argues that the fundamental challenge with transitions is that they change our circumstances of expected and routine into something we never expected and feel ill equipped to manage. It is this move away from the expected that we find so challenging.

In this guide we will look at both positive and negative transitions – from the death of a loved one, to starting a new and exciting job. Both transitions are different in the emotional response they may create, but both are similar in that they move us away from our established routines. They alter our perspective of what we know. This can be very difficult to manage.

What's more is that transitions are complex. They require huge cognitive and behavioural adjustments for us to be able to manage them effectively. In his book *'Transitions'*, Bridges states that there are four main tasks that people must enact if they are to manage the end of something and the beginning of something else effectively.

1. Disengagement

There must be a process where the individual is able to separate themselves from the familiar. For example, when someone leaves a job to start a new one, this transition can only be managed effectively if that person is able to detach themselves from their previous employment. Continuing to work or answer emails for their old employer when in their new job would not be effective.



In between each ending and beginning is a challenging no man's land

2. Dismantling

This is a process of letting go of what is no longer needed. For example, upon making the transition from high school to university, someone might be focusing on history for their degree. It would not be helpful for them to still be doing maths or chemistry homework. That would make their transition to studying history much harder.

3. Disenchantment

There may have been principles and skills you learned from your old job that you no longer require in your new job. There needs to be a process of disenchantment to enable a smooth transition to your new role.

4. Disidentification

Bridges argues that the process of changing identity is vital. For example, it may be necessary for a person who has been promoted to manager in their workplace, to take on a new identity within the workforce in order to deal with the transition between their old and new roles. A manager has responsibility over other people and is expected to hold a higher standard of professionalism. This results in a need for that individual to establish disidentification in order to manage this transition effectively.

Once these steps are experienced and considered, and once the initial transition is managed by the individual, people often go through what is called an 'in between section'. Where the ending of something old and the beginning of something new has happened and the person is left in a kind of grey area, trying to figure things out. Again, this is why transitions can be so challenging, not only are they difficult to accept at times, they are complex and continuous. Even after the initial transition is made, people still have to manage the after effects, or the 'in between section'.

For example, if you have ever experienced a big transition, such as moving to a new city or country, having a child, or getting married, you'll know that although the transition is exciting, there is a lot to get used to. Often that can leave people finding these transitions challenging. Settling into a new city is difficult for example and it takes time, sometimes a lot of time, to familiarise yourself with your new home and community. The difficulties with transitions are not just immediate, they can be prolonged. For example, the death of someone you love is incredibly challenging to manage in the immediate moment, but often can be just as challenging months and even years down the line as the person experiencing the transition tries to manage a new life without that person.

“Even after the initial transition is made, people still have to manage the after effects, or the ‘in between section’.”

Common transitions relating to a change in working life

We spend a large part of our lives working, therefore changes that affect how or whether we work can have a major impact on our wellbeing overall. Some of the most common types of change include:

- being made redundant
- retiring
- starting a new job.

However, while we may not immediately consider it, changing your style of work such as transitioning to homeworking from workplace working or vice versa can also significantly impact your life and wellbeing.

Redundancy

Redundancy can clearly be a challenging transition. What's more, it is seldom a transition that an individual makes themselves, or one that they think is in their best interests. Leaving one job for another or obtaining a promotion is a challenging transition of course, but these transitions are often fueled by excitement and an ambition for progression. Redundancy can feel very different and as a result can be particularly challenging to face.

Numerous challenges will result from redundancy. For example, you may feel abandoned. It may feel your employer has totally ignored you, not considered your needs, and not thought about the impact that the redundancy might have on you or your family. This makes things all the more challenging. In addition, it might feel quite isolating. We spend a large amount of our lives at work and it can be really hard when it just stops one day. We might also feel directionless. Again, redundancy isn't usually a choice. When someone leaves work of their own accord, it often means they are exploring a new venture. While this in itself can present challenges, they are not the same situation as someone who has been made redundant who may question what is next for them. Those feelings of abandonment, isolation and lack of direction are all difficult but perfectly normal when it comes to redundancy.



Redundancy: It may feel like your employer has not thought about the impact redundancy might have on you or your family

Managing uncertainty

One of the biggest challenges with managing any form of transition is dealing with uncertainty. One of the cornerstones of anxiety is the intolerance of uncertainty. Not knowing what is about to happen can terrify us and drive our anxiety. There are few situations in life that fuel as much uncertainty as redundancy. What will we do next? What will happen to our finances? When will I next get paid? These are just a few of the questions we may ask ourselves following a redundancy.

One of the most effective ways of managing any form of uncertainty is taking control of the things you can control and recognising and accepting the things you cannot. It is the attempts to control the uncontrollable in uncertain situations that can create distress. It's human nature to try and bring certainty to situations, even situations that we have no control over. However, try to avoid this as much as possible. Take control of things that are within your control. For example, although getting your old job back is not an option right now, you can work on your CV and look for a new job. You can control your outlook for the future. How do you want your career to develop from here? What might you like to do in the future? When we accept the things we cannot control, we have more energy to devote to the things we can control. It is by no means easy, but it is vital to ensure you manage this challenging transition as best you can.

Try not to take it personally

You might be asking questions like: Why me and not them? What have I done that others haven't? What did they do that I didn't? Redundancy can feel like a personal attack. It makes sense in some ways. The company have had to let people go. You are one of those people and others get to keep their jobs. However, it's important to remember that it's not personal.

Redundancy is the inevitable outcome of financial issues within a company. The decisions a company makes are based on the company's needs. It's important to remember this as it will help you move forwards. Thoughts of not being good enough or not being effective at your job can seriously impact your confidence.

“One of the most effective ways of managing any form of uncertainty is taking control of the things you can control...”

Retirement

Retirement can be a massive transition for anyone. After years of working and building a career, all of a sudden you stop. Perhaps your work was a huge part of your identity. Perhaps work gave you the opportunity to meet people and socialise. Perhaps your work was your family's main source of income. Perhaps work gave you a daily and weekly routine that you were comfortable with. Whatever work meant to you, suddenly no longer having it can be difficult to manage.

Learn to establish a new routine and structure

Managing a new routine and creating a structure is one of the keys to managing the retirement transition. Psychological research illustrates time and time again that people are creatures of routine. We need routine and structure in order to function effectively and to be happy.

Take some time to establish a new post-retirement routine. What kinds of things would you like to invest your time in? Use a diary to create some structure in your days and weeks. Establish a routine of the new things you want to get involved in.

Be aware that you will experience a range of emotions

This is so important to consider. Retirement is subjective. Maybe you are very excited to be finish work. Maybe retirement is something you have planned for years and can't wait for all the free time you are about to have. Or perhaps retirement is something that brings a great deal of apprehension. Perhaps you are dreading the thought of not having work to wake up to each day and not having the normality of your routine.

Regardless of how you feel going into retirement, understand that you will likely experience a range of emotions, and that's OK. People often feel a sense of freedom. You now have the opportunity to do all the things you've always wanted to do. Eventually however things will become slower paced, you may even experience levels of boredom. You may even feel guilt for not being grateful for your retirement and extra time, or you may feel shame that you haven't made the most of your free time. Regardless, it's normal to go on a bit of an emotional roller-coaster with retirement. Accept these different and wide-ranging emotions during this challenging transition. Psychological and mental health research suggests that suppressing emotions and not allowing ourselves to fully experience our emotions can lead to unhealthy coping behaviours.



Retirement: regardless of how you feel about retiring, you may experience a range of emotions as you adjust to your new life

Seek out healthy ways to manage these emotions. Talk to a love one, invest in some exercise, speak to a therapist, or try some journaling. There are plenty of really helpful coping behaviors to help you through the transition and a vast array of emotions when it comes to retirement.

Grow your social network

As we said earlier, work is often the environment where people socialise and spend time with others. When retirement comes, the social side of work, as well as the work itself, is removed. So it is vital to invest in other means of socialising and being around others. Human beings need human interaction to maintain mental wellbeing.

Often a great way to establish more interactions with others is to take up some new activities. Perhaps there have been some activities that you have always wanted to invest in but never had time. Or perhaps there were things you used to do before you became so busy with work. Retirement allows you the time and place to invest in these things. It also gives you the opportunity to be around other people, and that is vital when managing the transition to retirement.

Starting a new job

Starting a new job is always a daunting and challenging transition. From leaving one place where we are familiar with the work and the people in the organisation, we rapidly make the transition to a new environment, with new people and new expectations for our work.

Fear of the unknown

We are exposed to the unknown, the uncertainty and to unfamiliar circumstances and this can feel scary. Fear is a normal reaction which tells us that something has changed.

People like to know what they are getting themselves into -- we are creatures of habit. A new job throws things up in the air a bit. You don't know what to expect, may ask yourself if you can do the job, or you may wonder if the other staff will like you. These are all perfectly normal thoughts and they help you become aware of, and prepare for, what you may face.

“People like to know what they are getting themselves into – we are creatures of habit.”



Starting from the bottom...again

Perhaps in your previous role you knew exactly what was expected of you. You may have done that job for a number of years. You knew your team and knew your objectives and expectations within your role. Even if you are transitioning to another job where you are doing something similar, there is a lot you will need to learn and get familiar with and this often can lead us to feel like we are starting at the very bottom of the ladder again. This feeling is very common and it's simply about familiarity. As people, we like to 'fit in'. When we start a new job, we often feel like we don't fit in. It takes time to build familiarity with the job and the new people and for them to get used to us.

Make the effort to get to know people in your new place of work. It's easy to focus on getting familiar with the job at hand, but we sometimes forget to immerse ourselves in the new working culture. If we don't do this then we may feel very isolated. So, make sure that you connect with your new team and get to know your new colleagues.

New job: starting a new job can sometimes feel like you're starting at the very bottom of the ladder again

Change in style of working – working from home

When you choose or need to work in a different way to your normal working style, this can throw up some unexpected issues. Transitioning to homeworking is a good example of this.

Maybe you've just started a new job that requires a certain amount of homeworking, maybe working from home has become a necessity for you due to having to care for members of your family as you work, or maybe working from home has come about due to major life or societal events such as the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

Key things to consider and potential challenges

Things will not be as rosy as you may think

While the connotations of homeworking are positive, it's important to realise that there are also plenty of challenges that come with it.

Manage expectations

You may experience changes in expectations from your employer when you start working from home more. Working from home has wrongly been associated with a reduction in productivity. As a result, some employers may feel the need to compensate and may request their employees to do more work than they would usually do in the office. You need to be aware of what is expected of you normally and if you feel that this has increased as you make the transition to working from home then be sure to flag this up with your manager. It's important to look after your wellbeing as you transition to a new style of working.

Lacking interaction could make things challenging

One of the biggest challenges people face when they start to work from home is the lack of social interaction. When you were working in the workplace you may have taken the interaction you had with colleagues for granted. As you start working from home, you will perhaps realise just how valuable that interaction was. A lack of social interaction and connection can be really challenging and at times detrimental to mental wellbeing, so it's vital that you prepare for this. Plan in some time each week to meet colleagues, friends or family - either online or face to face.

How to make it a successful transition

Be aware of your environment

Unlike your usual working environment, your new working environment is also the place where you eat, sleep and relax. Therefore it's important

“A lack of social interaction and connection can be really challenging and at times detrimental to mental wellbeing...”

to ensure you make the distinction between normal home life and work so that the lines between the two don't become blurred. Look at it this way, if you slept, ate and relaxed in your office environment, woke up the next morning and worked in the same environment, would you feel very relaxed? Would you feel very productive? Probably not. Therefore it's really important to create distinct environments for home and work life even when your home and work life will take place in the same place.

Select a space in your home to use for work. This is not the place to be relaxing with family, nor is it the place to be watching TV. It is the place for work. Be sure to identify it as that. You might want to make it look a bit like a work environment. This is subjective of course, but anything you can do to make the environment identifiable as a working environment is positive. This way, all other environments in your home can be separate and available for relaxation time.

Making this distinction in environments between home life and work life is one of the best things you can do for your productivity and mental wellbeing during the transition to working from home.

Schedule a real working day

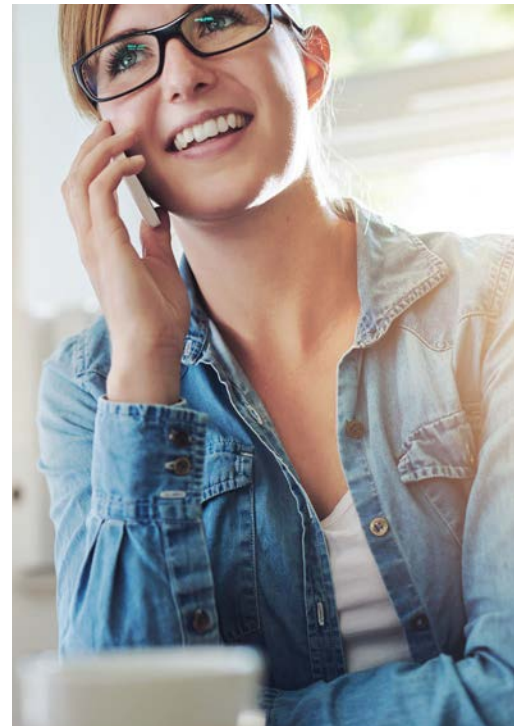
When you're at home, it can be really easy to get distracted by non-work things. In truth, this is part of the benefit of working from home, it gives you the opportunity to manage a household as you work. You can get a wash on or pay the bills when working from home. However, it can make things a little challenging. It can be tempting to put work to the side at times and get on with those odd jobs.

As a result, it's vital to schedule a real working day. Set aside an appropriate time to get some of the house jobs done, but also ensure that you schedule your time effectively enough to get your work done. Feeling productive is really important for overall wellbeing.

Think about it, don't you feel better after a day of productive work than a day where you really didn't get anything done? Be sure to structure your working day to ensure you are as productive as you can be while working from home.

Allow yourself some flexibility to enjoy the perks of working from home. It's really easy to focus on work productivity when discussing the transition to working from home. However, it's just as important to consider your own mental wellbeing, and part of the way in which we do that is by enjoying the benefits. There are so many ways in which working from home can be a positive thing:

- You can manage your own working timetable. If you start early, you can finish early and be available to pick the kids up from school.



Working from home: allow yourself some flexibility to enjoy the perks of working from home

- You can occasionally take a longer lunch if you make up your working time elsewhere.
- You can create a more personalised working environment that you enjoy being in. You are not at the mercy of the office layout anymore.
- You can wear more comfortable clothes during your working time.
- You can listen to your favourite music as you work without worrying about bothering other colleagues.
- You can spend a little extra time with family during the working day.
- You can spend time exercising or socialising instead of travelling to and from work.

It's so important to enjoy all of these things about working from home. By enjoying them you really do make the transition to working from home much easier on yourself.

Plan your lunches and go outside for them

Lunches are very important during the working day, because as well as nourishing our bodies, they provide a sense of freedom. When working from home, it's important to implement a bit of a routine. Try and set your lunch time to the same time each day. You should also try to get outside for a bit. This is just as important whether you're working in an office/ workplace or at home – it's not healthy to be stuck inside in the same environment for an extended period of time and it's good to move your body too.

Reach out to others

At any time, working from home can feel isolating and lonely. This is inevitable. Maybe you're coming from a packed office environment, or you're used to seeing clients face to face, or used to having people pop in and out of your office throughout the day. All of that will change when working from home.

One of the best things you can do is to ensure you are getting some form of interaction with others. Usually, when working from home, that means relying on technology. You could organise an online morning meeting each day with colleagues, or check in with your manager via video call, or call your partner or best friend during your lunch break. However you do it, make sure to increase your options for social interaction.

- Set yourself weekly goals
- Watch your productivity – no one wants to be viewed as the person who is skiving at home

“At any time, working from home can feel isolating and lonely.”

Other changes to style/working pattern

Of course, our working patterns can change in many other ways, not just via working from home. Perhaps you have experienced some of the following when it has come to work pattern changes

- A move to shift patterns that include night shift
- Moving from part time to full time working
- Obtaining a promotion at work
- Moving location for work

All of these transitions can be challenging in their own right, but how do we manage them? Well, like any other transition we have to address some of the inevitable challenges that may arise. Let's take a look at each of the scenarios that we have listed above.

A move to shift patterns that include night shifts

This can be a really difficult transition to manage. It's one of those transitions that not only includes new working routines but also a new life routine altogether. One week, you have a normal shift pattern and the next you have to sleep during the day and wake up at night. Psychological research has found that drastic work pattern changes can have real impacts on our mental wellbeing, so it's important to manage these correctly.

The first thing to consider is your sleep pattern when moving to shifts and potentially working nights. One of the best ways to manage your sleep pattern is to invest in a calming and relaxing environment. If you start working some nights, then that means at times you will have to sleep during the day. So, invest in some blackout curtains or blinds to ensure the right light for optimal sleep.

The circadian rhythm and the release of melatonin as we sleep is vital not only for high quality sleep but also good mental wellbeing. Research has demonstrated the correlation between poor sleep quality and mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety. You might also want to ensure that your sleeping environment is fresh, clean, and distraction free. These small changes and considerations can really make a huge difference when it comes to ensuring you get a good night's sleep.

Remember that your social life is important too. Structure your waking times to catch up with friends and family. That might just be for breakfast or for a coffee, but it's vital that you get the opportunity to feel connected to others.



Promotion: obtaining a promotion at work may mean we have to change how we interact with colleagues

Moving from part time to full time

Moving from part time to full time work is another work pattern transition that can be difficult to manage. Of course there are benefits, more money, more opportunity perhaps, but it's important to also recognise the ways in which this transition can be tough to manage at first.

Use your weekends and time off wisely

Perhaps when you were part time you had a little more time to socialise or do the things you enjoy. That time is a little tighter when you're working longer hours, so try and maximise your time doing the things you enjoy. That might mean catching up with friends in the evenings, spending time with your family at the weekends, or investing in your hobbies when you have time off.

Enjoy the benefits of working full time

Go out and treat yourself to something you have been waiting to buy for a while. The move to full time work will be made all the easier when you enjoy the benefits.

Obtaining a promotion

Being promoted is a great achievement, but one that can come with some unexpected issues. For example, you may find that your relationships will have to change. You can't be one of the team anymore and that can be a difficult thing to deal with, especially if you're all good friends.

Decide how you wish to relate to your team

You may also feel that you yourself have to change how you behave. As with all transitions, the early stages can be tough. People might not accept your authority and may challenge your decisions. It will take time for everyone to come to terms and get used to the changes. It may be helpful to think about how you would like your relationship to be and focus on achieving this during the transition period.

Continue to socialise with your team but set a limit

You may wish to continue to socialise with your team, but you're no longer one of them and you may have to make tough decisions and reprimand them in the future. Socialising is fine. It helps to build the team, but go for one or two drinks and leave. You need to set a distinction between you and them.

Moving location for work

Many of the issues you will face will be the same as those experienced by people leaving home for the first time or starting a new job. (See pages 7 and 14)

“Go out and treat yourself to something you've been waiting to buy for a while.”

Transitions relating to a change in circumstance

There are a number of changes that occur in our lifetime that are usually (although not always) related to our age and stage in life. Common examples of this include:

- Leaving home or going to university
- Getting married
- Becoming a parent
- Reaching a significant age

In addition to the changes mentioned above, anyone can experience a rapid change to their circumstances brought about by:

- the ill health of ourselves or a partner/family member
- the death of a loved one

Whatever the change and whether expected or sudden, all such transitions can give rise to issues that we need to be aware of.

“All transitions give rise to issues that we need to be aware of.”

Leaving home for the first time

For anyone, the first time you leave home is one of the biggest, scariest and most challenging transitions you will ever make. The new freedom and independence, the need to fully take care of yourself, and the fear of ‘messing it up’ – leaving home is both exciting and anxiety provoking.

Isolation

The feeling of isolation is commonplace for anyone leaving home for the first time. You may have been used to being around other people or being in a certain environment or context. All of that changes when you leave home. Feeling isolated is totally normal. Part of finding new independence and autonomy is going out on your own, trying to find your feet and attempting to construct your own routine and your own life.

Combat this feeling of isolation by settling yourself into your new environment as much as you can. Familiarise yourself with your new local area. Get to know the people that you are living with or the people that live near you. We can often feel isolated when things are not familiar to us, so go out and familiarise yourself as much as possible.

You can also manage isolation by establishing a routine and a sense of structure. Going into a transition, such as leaving home for the first time, and not being familiar with your context, the people around you, and not having a routine will only serve to perpetuate that feeling of isolation. Establish a routine that includes when you wake up, when you go to sleep, when you socialise and when you work. You'll feel much more secure and less isolated once you've established a new routine and structure.

Fear of the unknown

Much like any change, or new set of circumstances, the unknown is the thing that can cause us the most anxiety and fear. As people, we are programmed to fear the unknown. We worry about what might happen and we enjoy the predictability and comfort of our current situation. As a result we get scared when things change.

When it comes to leaving home for the first time, there is so much still to understand and get familiar with:

- Paying bills
- Organising food for the week
- Being fully in control of your own routine and schedule
- Ensuring you are able to provide for yourself.

One of the best ways to manage fear of the unknown is to talk about it. Speak to a friend or family member about how you are feeling. Let them know your fears and concerns. They may be able to reassure you and provide some tips for managing things.

You can also make things easier by creating some familiarity and structure.

For example, when leaving home for the first time it can be a really helpful step to take pictures of family members and friends and put them up around your new house to make yourself feel 'at home'. You might also find it helpful to call or meet up with family and friends during the transition, although be aware that you need to give yourself time to meet and get to know new people too!

Creating a routine and structure for yourself that is partly one you are familiar with and partly new will help you settle into your new environment. For example, you may have to get up at a completely different time, but you could have your favourite breakfast and listen to your favourite music. Mixing old habits with new routines can provide comfort when things are in transition.

When you first leave home and move somewhere new, set out a routine for your first few weeks. What kind of things do you want to do? When will you

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do them? When will you socialise and do leisure activities? Consider all of these things and implement them into your new routine and the fear of the unknown will hopefully reduce.

Remember to do some research before you move. What sorts of things are in the area? Give yourself time to explore. Walk around and find your bearings. It's amazing how helpful this can be.

If you're starting a new job or a new course, take some time to plan your route there from your new home. There's nothing worse than arriving on your first day – stressed out from getting lost and feeling overwhelmed. A bit of planning will help prevent this happening.

And don't forget who you are! When you go somewhere new, perhaps away from your friends and family, you may be tempted to re-invent yourself. While it may be refreshing to start anew – nobody to know about your past – you are still you! Think about what you enjoy doing. Join a few clubs or societies and meet some like-minded people. There's nothing wrong with taking up a new hobby, but it's helpful to create some stability too. If you love playing tennis, find out what the opportunities are like before you move. Are there any local tennis clubs or courts? How can you join/play?

The secret to a big move is to embrace the new opportunities while also retaining the bits of your life that you enjoy. The familiarity helps anchor you as you find your feet in your new surroundings.

Leaving home: the first time you leave your parental home is one of the scariest and most challenging transitions you will ever make.

Getting married

Getting married is one of the most exciting and happy times of a person's life. However, the challenges brought by the major transition made in marriage can be difficult. People's expectations that those getting married will be happy and excited, can make the difficulties of the transition all the more challenging.

People expect you to feel positive when you are about to get married. That makes sense of course, however it does not take away from the inevitable difficulties of this life transition.

Some of the main transitions involved in marriage include:

- Another person needing to be considered
- Lifetime commitment to one individual
- A limitation on independence
- A change of living situation (in some cases)
- Managing finances together

So, how do we actually go about trying to manage the inevitable transitions brought on by marriage?

Communicate with your partner

Don't be afraid to talk about the challenges of this transition with your partner. You'll be surprised how much these concerns and fears are reciprocated.

Additionally, bottling up these fears will only make the situation worse and more difficult.

Focus on the good things about marriage

There is so much to celebrate when it comes to getting married. At times though, focusing on the fears and concerns can overshadow these positive things. One way to remember and focus on the benefits is to write them down and reflect on them.



Getting married: People expect you to be positive when you are getting married, but there are inevitable difficulties with this life transition

Becoming a parent

One of the biggest transitions we can make in life is the process of becoming a parent either by having a baby or adopting a child. This extensive transition may take the form of physical changes to the body, emotional changes, mental changes or environmental changes. Whichever apply to you, becoming a parent is a massive transition.

It's about someone else now, not you

One main aspect of this transition is the process of your attention and time being diverted to someone other than yourself each day. Your time is now dedicated to ensuring that your child is safe, secure, and happy.

If you have recently had a baby, this transition is made all the more challenging by the fact that your routine and schedule is now fully in the hands of your baby. Your baby doesn't care if you are hungry or tired or needing a rest or needing to get some work done. Your baby cares about what it needs in the moment...and you can be sure that you will be informed of this by way of crying.

Accepting and understanding this is important. Appreciating that your little one is simply trying to communicate with you in the only way he/she can will help with the management of this transition. Recognise that it's OK that the world no longer revolves around your needs, and instead revolves around the needs of your baby.

Your schedule does more than just change

One of the biggest transitions about becoming a parent is the altering of your schedule. Your schedule doesn't just change, like it does when an unexpected meeting is arranged during your working day. Your schedule is totally turned on its head.

At any point, day or night, your baby could decide that he/she is hungry, needs a nappy change, or wants to get up and play. Before your baby arrived, you had real ownership of your schedule. This is not the case when you are a parent.

How to make it a successful transition

Set up a routine

It's going to be tough but setting a routine, as best as you can, is vital to managing what can be a challenging life transition. Establishing loose



Becoming a parent: this extensive transition can take the form of physical changes to the body, emotional changes, mental changes and environmental changes

feeding times, sleep and nap times as these can help you feel more in control of things.

And the routines aren't just for children. Create some structure for yourself too. Perhaps you could build in a ten minute meditation session or a short workout at some point during the day, or you could structure your day to allow time to cook an evening meal.

Whatever you can do to establish some routine for you and your new child, is worth doing.

Know that this won't last forever

For parents of newborn babies, your routine, schedule, and the structure of your day is really all about your baby in the initial weeks and months. That's totally normal. At times it can feel pretty overwhelming and challenging. However, it's important to keep in mind that this won't last forever. Eventually your baby will establish a routine and you will have some time for yourself.

Find the joy in it

With all the chaos that ensues when bringing a new child into your home, we can often forget to find the joy that this brings. When managing the challenging transition to parenthood, finding the joy in your child is key. Take some time each day to play with them or simply soak up their cuteness as they sleep. There are so many amazing things about being a parent. Make an effort to enjoy them.

Do the small things for your partner

Focusing on life outwith your baby, when you get the chance, is really important. Doing something for and with your partner is a great way to manage the transition to parenthood.

Anything you can do to ease the challenge of being a full-time parent is beneficial. Think about having a nice meal together in the house when the baby gets to sleep. Watch your favourite movie together, or once your child is old enough, get a grandparent to look after them and have a night in or out with just the two of you. Plan these things in advance and really try and make some time for each other.

Learn to be flexible

Accepting that your schedule and routine is going to change is a big part of managing the transition to becoming a parent. Learn to 'go with the flow' in accordance with your child's routine and demands.

“When managing the challenging transition to parenthood, finding the joy in your child is key.”

The ill health of ourselves or a partner/ family member

There are many transitions in life and many of them are exciting while also creating a level of natural concern about the transition that is to follow. However, ill health of people we love, or ourselves, is a transition filled with difficulty and challenges. Our ill health or the ill health of the people around us can totally turn our lives upside down. For example, ill health can:

- Require us to accept care, or become carers
- Change our future plans and goals
- Place our careers and education on hold
- Put additional strain put on our relationships with those closest to us
- Create financial challenges

So, how can you manage the difficulties brought by this transition?

Focus on the things that won't change around you

It's so important to focus on the consistent things in your life. This often means the close relationships with the people around us. Their support is vital when dealing with the challenges of ill health.

Talk about how difficult the transitions have been

Often when experiencing our own ill health or the ill health of others, it can feel inappropriate to discuss how difficult we are finding things. However, keeping these things bottled up inside will only make the situation more challenging for you and for others. You need to be honest with others.



Ill health: ill health in the family can have a huge impact on every family member

The death of a loved one

When someone we love dies, we can feel a multitude of different emotions: isolation, loss, depression, grief. All are legitimate feelings, and all create challenges in transitioning to life without that person.

Grief

Grief is a challenging and abstract concept which enables us to come to terms with what has happened. We will experience many different stages within the grief cycle, such as bargaining, depression, anger and acceptance. You can find out more about grief and the grief cycle in our booklet at:

<https://www.firstpsychology.co.uk/files/grief-booklet.pdf>

Feeling left behind/isolation

Feeling abandoned is natural when experiencing the death of a loved one. Often we can feel isolated and alone when someone is taken from us, whether it has happened over a long period of time or unexpectedly.

Allowing yourself to talk to people you trust about the person you lost can be a really helpful process in easing this natural feeling of isolation. When you feel comfortable and ready, talk to close family and friends. You can even have pictures of the person around the house. This will help you manage this difficult transition.

Things feel unfinished

Much like feeling isolated and alone, the feeling of things being unfinished can also be difficult when you lose a loved one. This can particularly be the case when people have not had the opportunity to say goodbye.

In such circumstances, it can be helpful to write a letter to the person you have lost. You could tell them how you feel, how things feel unfinished for you, and anything else you would like to say or tell them.

Key steps in managing after a bereavement

Remember the person

Take steps to remember the person you have lost. Put up pictures of them around the house and talk to family and friends about them.

Allow yourself time to grieve

It's important to give yourself the opportunity to grieve. Preventing yourself doing this may make things easier to manage in the short term, but will often make the transition to life without that person more challenging in the longer term.

Think about the future...when the time is right

As difficult as it may seem to accept in the moment, life has to go on after the death of someone close. It is an important part of the grieving process to accept this. Thinking about the future, when the time is right for you, can be a helpful way of managing what is a challenging situation.

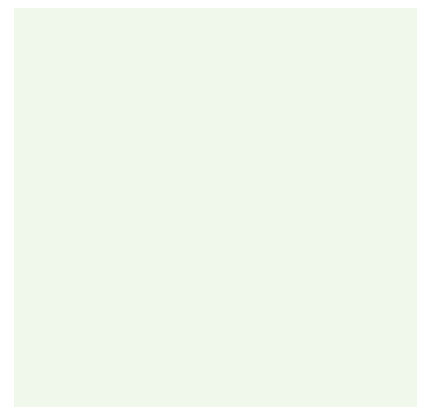
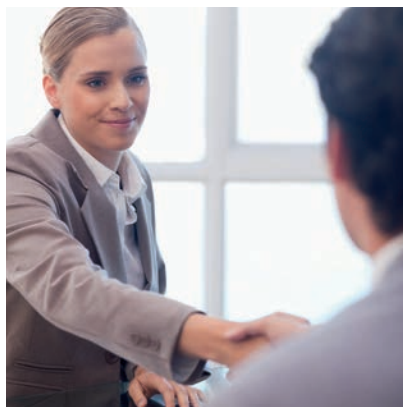
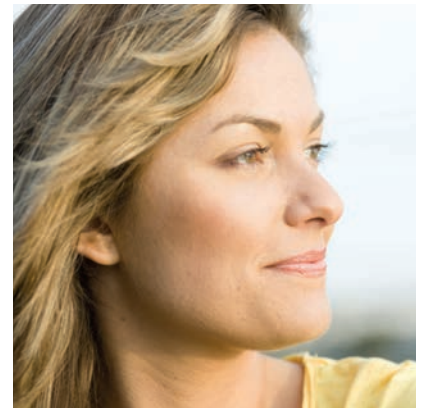


Our highly qualified and experienced team at First Psychology Scotland offers a variety of therapy services and works with people with a wide range of issues and problems including issues relating to life transitions.

We provide:

- Therapy and coaching services for women, men, couples, children, young people and families.
- Employee counselling, CBT & psychological therapies; promotion of wellbeing in the workplace; and rehabilitation and personal injury support.

All First Psychology practitioners have excellent qualifications and experience, so you can come to us knowing that you will see an experienced professional.



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Therapy & coaching services for women, men, couples, children, young people & families.

Employee counselling, CBT & psychological therapies; promoting wellbeing in the workplace; and rehabilitation and personal injury support.

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