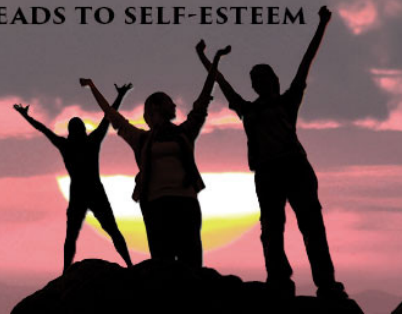


FEELING GOOD ABOUT YOU

THE JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY
THAT LEADS TO SELF-ESTEEM



Module 5 – Worksheet 2

Transition, Grief, and Loss

"Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future."—John F. Kennedy

Transitions (changes) and the resulting losses are a normal and frequent part of life. Transition can be defined as anything that temporarily or permanently disrupts your normal routine and creates change in your life. It can be anything from a child starting school in the fall, to a job promotion, moving to a new home, the birth of a baby, loss of a friend or even death. The perception you have of a transition or loss is often related to how you feel about yourself and your ability to deal with it.

Although many people use them as synonyms, there is a difference between change and transition. A change is situational. It's the move to the new house, the shift in relationships or responsibilities, or the retirement of your spouse. The transition is psychological, and is the emotional process people go through when responding to a change.

Change can be both positive and negative. It may include your reactions to anything, from the achievement of a long-term goal such as graduation or marriage, to the loss of a special person or place in your life. The change may be the result of your choices, or maybe unwanted occurrences over which you have no control. Some might represent the final closing of a chapter in your life, while others may be more temporary. Whatever the change, you will go through a phase of transition that will require you to let go of an old established pattern of acting, and learn ways to deal with whatever the new situation may be. This requires flexibility, emotional growth and willingness to change on your part. An important aspect of this process involves grieving for what was. Grieving usually occurs even if the loss or change is all for the better.

This process of adapting to change and grieving for what has been lost usually often elicits several different emotions, which you will experience to varying degrees depending on the influence the change has made in your life. In order to work through this process it is helpful to understand its stages and look at the steps involved in moving through them.

Often the first part of this emotional process is what is called shock or denial. During this time you tell yourself that whatever has happened is "no big deal." Self-talk phrases such as "I can handle this," "Let's just get on with it," etc., are common during this period, and your feelings are fairly numb. Sometimes even though your feelings are numb, your body is still reacting. You may have sweaty palms, tense muscles, headaches, and a variety of other physical symptoms.

Eventually the reality of the transition will dawn on you, and at this point you may become either **angry** or **depressed**, or alternate between the two. The anger may be frightening because it is often irrational and unpredictable. It may be directed at people who are not even involved in your situation or God or whatever your Higher Power is. It may also appear when you least expect it, and it feels overpowering.

Depression is also frightening because during this time emotions are overwhelming and you may find yourself crying "for no reason," have difficulty concentrating, experience memory loss, be unable to carry on conversations or even motivate yourself to get out of bed. During this time your body also experiences a great sense of fatigue and you feel physically exhausted most of the time. In this stage, sitting and staring at the wall may be all you can manage, and THIS IS OK! Although this experience may be frightening for a normally active, intelligent person, the best thing you can do for yourself during this time is to do whatever feels right. If that means you mentally shut down for a while and allow your emotions time to heal, then that is what is most therapeutic for you and what you should allow yourself to do.

Another feeling that may be associated with grief is **guilt**. If you are dealing with a negative transition there may be a sense of self-blame, or over-responsibility. At this point you might relive the experience or situation and spend a lot of time trying to redo it in your mind. This is also part of the **bargaining** phase, where you may mentally try to make a deal with your Higher Power to change or alter the situation. A typical example of this is when a parent who has a seriously ill child will vow to live a better life or help others more if the child recovers.

There is no predictable amount of time the grief process takes. It depends on what the transition is and how great the influence on your life. However, it usually takes longer than people expect, and it's most important to trust your feelings during such a time.

Eventually you will reach a state of **acceptance**, where you have managed to let go of the old, fit the new into your life, and come to terms with the change. The old way of living has become a permanent part of the whole incredible you, and has contributed to the new person you are continuously becoming.

Transitional experiences are what foster personal growth. They consist of life's triumphs and tragedies, and are a necessary part of a complete, full life. Although understanding the process won't alleviate experiencing it, the knowledge of how it works and what to expect may take the fear and confusion out of it.

Exercise: Lifeline

Take a few minutes to think of some transitions you have walked through, and remember how you felt during the experience. Draw a line that represents your life (straight, curved, whatever feels right). Think for a minute about the significant events in your life. These may elicit positive or negative feelings. Write these events down along your lifeline, marking them with an "X" and identifying the event and any people who were an important part of it. Begin with your earliest memory of childhood and continue to the present.

These significant life events represent your personal path of growth and change. It is important for you to know that the destination is not what is important here. Rather, it is the process and how you deal with it. What you have learned from each event adds to your ability to take on and deal effectively with whatever the next situation will be.

Through the lifelong process of transition, loss and change, you gain an appreciation for your flexibility, strength and ability to cope and adapt. Your self-esteem and image of yourself as a capable, competent person will continue to grow as you deal with difficult life situations. The more difficult and painful the change, the greater the personal growth.

My Lifeline

Exercise: My Transitions

Now, refer back to your lifeline and take a few minutes to think about some of the significant changes you have experienced and transitions you have walked through, and answer the questions below:

Change/Transition/Situation: What changed?

How did it feel? (What was lost? What was gained? What were your fears about this loss and gain?)

How I dealt with these feelings:

What I learned about myself in the process:

How this experience changed me:

Reflections on Transitions, Grief and Loss

- Change is an important and inescapable part of life.
- There are several emotions often felt when experiencing a transition or loss.
- There are six stages in the process of grieving.
- Changes can feel either positive or negative, or sometimes both at the same time.
- Transitions require emotional growth.
- When you experience change you grieve for what you have lost or what is ending.
- It's important for you to do whatever feels right to take care of yourself emotionally and physically when going through a transition.

My Reflections on Chapter Five

