



# Adjusting Your Sails

August typically ushers in a multitude of emotions: the happiness of embracing the dog days of summer, the comedown from vacations and music festivals, that strange tension we feel as September looms overhead with its promise of change, or returning to our regularly scheduled programming. It can be difficult to recognize and manage all the changes that we will experience over the next month, so it is important to act intentionally to prepare yourself in hopes that you will be able to manage your mental health. When you learn to adjust your sails rather than curse the wind, you will fare much better in times of change.

As we shift gears into a new season, you will likely start noticing small changes. The days are

getting shorter, and the sun is sitting a bit lower in the sky. These changes will likely be subtle at first, but a few weeks into September you may find yourself wondering where the light has gone as you are tidying up after dinner. September also signals the beginning of a new school year, a time fraught with some pretty big emotions for a certain population: kids. Children manage change in a lot of different ways, but they mostly look to us for cues, so modelling healthy coping mechanisms for them is important for their own growth and development. Children, like us, probably need some time to prepare for upcoming changes like returning to school, so sitting down with them in late August and going over new routines and expectations can decrease their anxiety. This is also a

good time to let them ask questions and feel acknowledged and validated. People always feel more amenable to change once they have more information ; it allows us to set our expectations and mentally prepare, no matter your age.

As motivational speaker Jim Rohn says, "life does not get better by chance, it gets better by change." This aphorism could not be any truer, and yet peoples' initial reactions to change are negative and resistant. We feel comfortable when our lives are humming along at a predictable pace. We have routines, expectations, and rhythms that bring us stability and contentment. When this status quo is threatened, we feel fearful and anxious. This is especially true when summer transitions to autumn; there is almost a grief response inherent in this shift. We might feel sad that the days are shorter, or that it is colder or rainier out, but it doesn't negate some of the positive aspects of this change. There are healthy ways that we can adapt to change while also acknowledging the difficult parts of it.

One of the most important things we can do when faced with change, no matter how big or small, is to be aware of our thoughts and emotions, as they point us in the direction of how we will behave. For example, if you find out that you are going to have to take on a new role at your company, you could be thinking I'm not prepared for this and I will likely fail. Why did they have to do this to me? I was so comfortable where I was, and now I have to learn new skills. These thoughts will likely stir up emotions such as fear, trepidation, and inadequacy. When we feel like this, our fight or flight reaction kicks in, and we feel stressed out and maybe even avoidant of tasks that need to be done at work. Instead of this

scenario, imagine thinking to yourself "this could be a new challenge for me, and I'm going to be learning a lot of new skills. I might not be perfect, but I'm willing to learn. This could really open some doors for me". Thoughts like these could lead to feelings of excitement and uncertainty, with some healthy anxiety as well, but point to more healthy behaviours like preparation and communication. Small changes like awareness of your thoughts and feelings can make change in your life much more manageable. When we learn to live with uncertainty, what we are really doing is increasing our flexibility . This doesn't necessarily need to happen in a big way; there are lots of manageable, everyday methods to introduce uncertainty into your life. For example, try reading a book completely outside of your preferred genres, or order a completely different kind of meal at a restaurant. These small changes can give you a boost in confidence and resilience, which in turn provide a healthier way to view change in your life.

As the season changes and new routines are introduced into your life, remind yourself that talking about these changes and the feelings and thoughts that go with them is a crucial step as well. It is universal to go through these experiences, so, opening up to trusted friends, family, or a mental health professional can offer perspective and empathy. The more you hold in your feelings and bottle them up, the greater the risk of heightened anxiety and distress. Navigating the winds of change isn't supposed to be easy, but it is necessary in order for all of us to evolve, grow, and learn so that our ship points us to where we want to go.



Being there matters.

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