Why We Don’t Like Transition
And How To Deal With Transition When We’d Rather Not

By, Janie Feldman, PsyD

With the end of summer rapidly approaching, we begin to anticipate the transition from summer to fall as for many of us, our feelings about pending change begin to swirl. Our realization of the passing of summer may occur as the daytime heat begins to subside, the evening temperatures become more cool, a crisp breeze sweeps through us, or perhaps when those back to school advertisements become prominent. Surely, these triggers will come and for some people, the transition from summer to fall triggers greater anxiety. Whether it is specifically the return to school that troubles us, or the anticipation of some other change up ahead, the prospect of transition can be distressing and anxiety-provoking. If we associate bad events or negative outcomes with change, we are more likely to experience fear and anxiety in anticipation of change. Now that school has begun for most students, what we anticipate about future experiences may be as alarming as prior experiences – if not more so.

What is it about transition that beckons distress and worry? Why is it that for many of us, upcoming change creates undue apprehension, anxiety, even avoidance? There are several reasons for this. First to arrive are the thoughts. Once we recognize there exists a possibility of something happening to us (if not a likelihood something will happen), we begin to evaluate the situation. We may quickly recall what has happened at this season in the past. We might also imagine what might possibly happen, regardless of valid evidence or prior experience. What we anticipate can be as alarming as our past experience, or even more so. Thoughts can be quite powerful whether they are logical, emotional, or completely irrational. Once we entertain a thought, our emotions will activate.

Emotional activation is often beyond our awareness. As we process our world – our sensations, thoughts and experiences – feelings are born and become influential. The developing association of thoughts and emotions can be intensely powerful. If we recall being distressed from an experience, when a pending similar event is about to recur, that recollection could ignite renewed distress and anxiety. We may worry about how we will manage the repeat of a troubling experience. If we do not have confidence in our ability to navigate successfully, our worries may increase. This uncertainty in ourselves flows effortlessly into a chasm of doubt, and may result in new or intensified fears. This is how we connect our thoughts and experiences from our past and bring them to our current lives.

What may remain elusive to some of us is the ability to transcend successfully from a bad experience with confidence and diminished anxiety. The association or pairing of an emotion to an event can be difficult to alter. It may seem apparent that we do not need to process our emotions when we navigate successfully through life’s challenges. Yet there can be great insight available in so doing. For how else can we develop confidence besides reflecting on our
successes? **Cultivating confidence can be enormously empowering.** With renewed or increased confidence we can embrace the unknown more powerfully equipped. We can enter the unknown when we feel confidence in our ability to handle what may lie ahead.

When change is looming in front of us, consider these tips to make transition occur as smoothly as possible:

- **Prepare in advance**
  - Identify what will likely happen
  - Recognize what skills, materials and support you desire
  - Familiarize yourself with the places, people and situations you will encounter
  - Establish reasonable goals that will define what it takes to succeed
  - Develop relaxation techniques well in advance to help manage anxiety

- **Collect your resources**
  - Organize your materials to minimize last minute distress
  - Contact individuals or groups who can provide support in advance of needing them
  - Recognize that support can lead to greater success and less distress
  - Learn how to contact your resources if and when you need them

- **Cultivate confidence**
  - Actively recall times in your life when you have overcome obstacles to meet with success
  - Identify what you have already done to foster success and own it as your success
  - Recognize what skills, talents, and assets you possess to hasten success

- **Move one step at a time**
  - Keep your focus on what is immediately important and away from looking too far in advance
  - Recognize success at each step along your journey

- **Practice relaxation**
  - Regular practices of relaxation diminish overall anxiety and keep stress levels down
  - Utilize relaxation techniques when stress builds
  - Give yourself breaks to allow yourself time to rest, refresh and regroup so your energy level remains strong enough to enable you to work hard toward success
  - Make certain to eat healthfully, get some physical exercise even if that means taking the stairs or going for a brief walk outdoors, and get enough rest
  - Drink plenty of water to keep hydrated

- **Reflect regularly on your progress**
  - Think about how you are managing at regular intervals to insure your progress will lead to success
  - Focus more thought and energy on success rather than failure or challenges that could impede your success
  - Modify your strategies as you monitor your progress, realizing the benefits of reflection and self-examination
  - Seek the support of your resources when uncertainty builds
  - Remember that seeking or accepting help from others brings strength and is not a sign of failure or of weakness

- **Reward yourself upon transition completion**
  - Celebrate your successes
  - Recognize what efforts on your part led to your success
  - Assess what might need to be different in the future for even greater success and plan accordingly
Embrace future challenges with more confidence by continuing to focus on success rather than struggle.

The change of seasons from summer to fall can be exciting for some but distressing for others. Cultivating confidence in ourselves, planning well in advance, utilizing resources and focusing more on positives rather than negatives can minimize anxiety and potentially lead to a new and more positive association with transition. We can begin to alter the association of change with anxiety, as we strive to build success in new or challenging situations. We can work to embrace changes we encounter as exercises in growth, rather than obstacles of fear. Building self-confidence is the key to successfully managing transition, and with heightened confidence, the challenges we experience of transition may changeover to experiencing the rewards of the challenge.

Janie Feldman, PsyD is a licensed, practicing psychologist who has over 20 years’ experience providing psychotherapy, consultation, and assessment services to adults, teens, children, couples, and families. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is available, as well as Friendship Group Therapy that facilitates positive social relationships for children and teenagers. Beyond promoting healthy relationships, other areas of specialization include anxiety, depression, parenting, and more. In addition to her private practice, Dr. Feldman enjoys writing, speaking in public and on television, and consulting with schools and businesses. Outside interests include skiing, taking photographs, and enjoying time with family and friends.