

Psychological Health & Safety During Times of Change

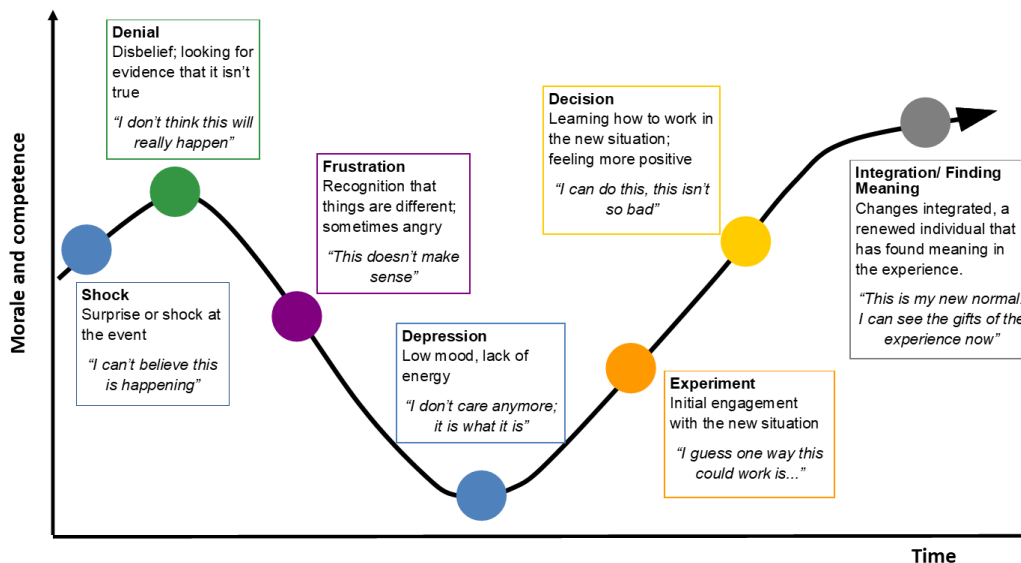
The COVID-19 pandemic has brought multiple changes to our working and personal lives, particularly for those who have been disproportionately impacted. As the City reopens and restrictions lift, we will continue to experience significant changes as individuals and teams. Supporting the psychological health and safety of City employees –all those who remained in essential front-line positions and those who pivoted quickly to work from home –is an important priority during this time of transition. While Management works to address the unique and specific needs of each team, here are some concepts you might consider as you continue to care for yourself and each other.

Change is hard enough, even without COVID-19 considerations

As many of us are focused on adjusting to the challenges caused by the pandemic, we may have overlooked the fact that the process of change *itself* can be hard. With every change or transition, we can expect to experience a variety of emotions.

It's important to remember that even “positive” change can be challenging. For example, on one hand, a lifting of restrictions signals a lessening of the pandemic and we may expect to feel relief or excitement. But, on the other hand, this change also presents a lot of unknowns and we might experience anxiety, sadness, anger, denial, or other emotions too.

The Change Curve: Understanding the impacts and experience of change



Change is a fluid and ongoing process; you might find yourself at any point along this change curve today and you might relate to a different point tomorrow. Try not to get caught up on *where* you identify yourself. Instead, think about what kind of support and resources might be most helpful for you right now, based on what you're currently experiencing. Considering change as a multi-stage process also helps us understand that other people may be at a different stage than we are. It is important that we respect the experience and needs of others as well, as they move through the process of change.

With every change or transition we will experience “losses” and “gains”. The process of naming those losses and gains can help us move through the change curve. Take a few minutes to make a simple chart to outline what you see as your losses and what you see as your gains with this transition.

Losses	Gains
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No commuting	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social interaction
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wearing comfy clothes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Easier boundary between worklife/homelife
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Quieter work environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fuller staffing teams on-site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

How does change impact our body and mind?

Short and long term changes can have a significant impact on our physical and mental health. We often don't realize that what we're experiencing *externally* is directly influencing what's happening *internally*. And vice versa. Be mindful as you move through the process of change. Watch out for signs and symptoms that the change is negatively impacting your physical and/or mental health:

Mental	Physical
• Fluctuations in energy and mood	• Restlessness and/or sleeplessness
• Emotional fatigue	• Over-sleeping
• Unexpected and/or erratic emotions	• Physical exhaustion
• Decreased self-esteem/self-confidence	• Headaches
• Irritability; unusually angry or frustrated	• Digestive problems and stomach-aches
• Rigid thinking and/or difficulty concentrating	• Muscle tension and backaches
• Difficulty managing work and/or personal life	• High blood pressure and heart problems
• Decreased productivity	• Eating too much or too little
• Depression or anxiety	• Increased substance use or reliance

Please be reminded that support is available for all staff and their eligible dependents through our Employee Family Assistance Program. Homewood Health has Counselors and Coaches professionally trained to support you in navigating the change process and the physical and mental impacts you might experience.

Tips for navigating a changing work environment

- ✓ Reflect on times in your life where you have successfully navigated a transition. Choose one or two healthy coping strategies you used and put them into practice again.
- ✓ Manage your expectations. Be gentle with yourself if you are not reacting as expected.
- ✓ Reach out for support as needed and offer your support to others, when appropriate.
- ✓ Continue to add to your "losses" and "gains" chart throughout the experience.
- ✓ Acknowledge that everyone will experience this change differently.
- ✓ Review the information available and connect with your Manager or Supervisor regularly.

Tips for transitioning back to the office

- ✓ Check in with yourself regularly when you are back in the office. "What do I need *now*?"
- ✓ Include some transition time in your calendar for your first return to the office. It's hard to know what or how you'll be feeling so try not to overschedule yourself.
- ✓ If possible, plan work that is less challenging and/or complex as you initially return to the office.
- ✓ Remember the habits that served you well in the past (ex: prepare your lunch ahead of time) and pick one to focus on first.
- ✓ Create space for everyone to share how they are doing with the transition.
- ✓ Review the information available and connect with your Manager or Supervisor regularly.

Additional Resources

On this [page](#) you will find short, self-guided lessons designed to help you develop skills to manage stress and navigate change. You can also visit the [Mental Health and Well-being Resources](#) page for an overview of supports available to employees, Managers/Supervisors, and eligible dependents.