

Coping with change

Change can be hard. Often change is for the good. Occasionally change brings about worse outcomes. The one predictable aspect of change is its inevitability. Coping with change is one of the biggest challenges in schools – the sheer volume, let alone the rate of change, can be overwhelming. Avoiding change fatigue can be critical to preventing change-related stress and burnout. Tips:

- Make small changes or break big changes into small increments. It's like running up a huge hill – don't look at the top, just keep your eyes a metre or so in front of you. Remember to turn around and look back at your progress every so often... that will help buoy you on and spur you up to the top.
- Use rituals and routines to make change easier and smoother. For example, if your school has requested you write a weekly class email and you keep running out of time, build it into your schedule by staying behind after your staff meeting (or a similar regular work task) to complete it. Add in a treat such as a special snack that you love to eat or play your favourite tunes whilst you work so you anticipate the task with pleasure, not dread.

Change makes us grow.

Unknown

- Use visualisation like riding waves or water off a duck's back to help you go with the flow. Know that everything will work out in the end.
- Journal about change. Venting your frustrations can help you release your attachment to them, without coming across as a whinger.
- Use the "ring theory" to talk to people who are not directly related to the change about any difficulties you're experiencing. This model is usually related to someone dealing with trauma but is useful in many other life contexts. By dumping your woes outside of the circle and not on the lap of your colleagues or line manager, you can clarify for yourself what might be a knee jerk-style reaction or fear and what is genuinely distressing you about the change.
- Use reflection to focus on the good when change feels stressful. Think about other situations where change felt difficult but the end result was worthwhile. If you've used the above strategy and still have doubts over the current change and whether it will benefit you or your students, talk constructively with your team and leaders about how you feel.
- Distract yourself. Go with change not feeling good for a while. See if your perspective changes when you've given yourself a bit of breathing space.
- Recognise that change is hard. Acknowledge that a proposed change is difficult for you. Own your feelings and own the responsibility of working through them as you also work through the process of adjusting your practice. Recognise your efforts after you've reached the summit and reward yourself for your perseverance. Celebrate with others!

Constantly resisting change will only set you up for dissatisfaction and distress. Even just employing one or two of the above strategies can totally change how you experience change in your school. Commit to trying one out right now!

Key points

The amount and rate of change in schools and workplaces is linked to stress.

Change is unavoidable – you need to develop resilience to change to survive and thrive.

Skills to cope with change can be learnt like any other – practice makes better!

Many mindfulness techniques (such as yoga and meditation) equip you for dealing with change.

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