



## Navigating Life's Transitions

May/June 2022

Life transitions include the many natural changes that will be encountered over the lifespan. From birth to older age, like the transition from childhood to adulthood, entering into an intimate relationship, starting a family, embarking on a career path, and entering into retirement, just to name a few.

As we go through transitions, there are times we feel ready for the change and there are times when we do not feel ready for the changes. When we do not feel ready for changes then we will feel stress. The ways in which we navigate the stress of change can make all the difference to our well-being. If we are excited about the change then we will feel something called eustress, this is a stress that has excitement, nervousness, and can sometimes give us “butterfly’s” in our stomachs. If the stress though feels like too much though, that we are not ready for it, then we may feel distress. The major source of our stress, feeling unprepared for a change, comes from not knowing what to expect. Or being given a situation or change so quickly unexpected, our nervous systems may even go into its primitive survival strategy of fight, flight, or freeze. When our circumstances change very quickly it can often feel dangerous, which alerts our brains to be ready to adapt quickly to the change in one of those 3 ways.

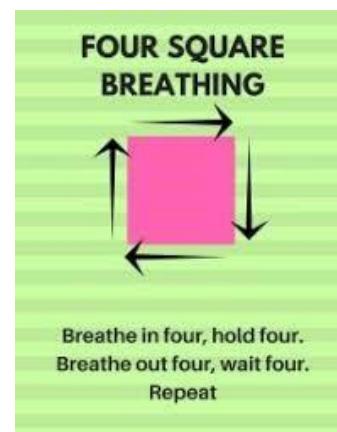
But how do we do this? Our nervous systems can have a hard time knowing what is actual danger, like a bear or cougar on a hiking trail, or what is perceived danger, like the boss asking to speak with us. In the first situation, our bodies will flood with adrenalin in preparation for fighting, fleeing, or freezing, as a survival reaction. In the second situation, our brain can jump to conclusions quickly and assume the worst so that we are prepared.

Depending on our experience in life previously, when we are asked by an authority figure like a teacher or supervisor, we may jump in our mind to the idea that we are in trouble and a negative change is about to happen (a danger). Our palms get sweaty, and depending on most practiced survival mechanism, we may find ourselves getting defensive (fight), becoming anxious and wanting to avoid the meeting (flight), or shutting down inside or ourselves, finding it hard to find words to say and staying exactly where we are (freeze).

If the perception of danger is flooding our brains, even though all that is going to happen is a conversation, our reactions may send a message of threat to our brain. When our nervous systems kick in with such an instinctual reaction, the blood flow to our brains decreases making it more difficult to think our way through and try to calm down with self-talk.

One of the most impactful ways to help ourselves cope with distress is to breathe deeply. When we consciously take a big breath, expanding our chests and getting breath down into our bellies, then we are changing our physiological response to the stress.

Our breathing if deepened sends a message that we are safe. Taking a several deep breaths, or even counting our breaths can facilitate a calmer response to any situation that has brought this stress. Four square breathing or box breathing is the practice of counting to 4 on an in breath, holding it for 4 counts, breathing out for 4 counts, and then holding again for 4 counts. Engaging in four square breathing can be very helpful to keep our nervous systems calm and allow our thinking to remain encouraging and reassuring, evidence that oxygen is getting to our brain.



Our thoughts can change with a more relaxed system to remind us that it is going to be okay, we will take one step at a time, and we will get through it. It is helpful to practice deep breathing or four square breathing in times that are not stressful so that it becomes a habit and we are doing it naturally. This strategy will help tremendously navigating the stress of change.

The one constant in life is change. Things will always change and if we accept that things will always change we can accept this truth and learn to breathe through even the most difficult of circumstances.



Organizations go through changes in their lifecycles of operations and Vancouver Island Counselling is no exception. In March, Bruce Youngren the executive director for Vancouver Island Counselling for the last 13 years, changed his position to become Senior Counsellor, we are so grateful to Bruce for his steady even approach in leadership and his ability to navigate the changes in the organization for over a decade. Diane Trapp that was the senior counsellor became the Executive Director. This change is called succession and was in the works for the last two years, so with that gradual expected change, the stress has been a natural progression and easily digested.

Along with that change comes the change of our Nanaimo counsellor Lynne Cameron transitioning to do private practice work away from Vancouver Island counselling. Lynne has been a valued, respected, and wonderful counsellor to be on the Vancouver Island Counselling team, we will miss her immensely and appreciate all of the service she has provided. We said good bye to Kelly Josling in March as she too changed from our organization to do private practice work and spend more time with her family as they go through important life changes in a natural child to teen transitions.

We have welcomed Heather Gooding, a recent graduate of the Masters in Child and Youth Care program from University of Victoria, this change has been value added to our team. Heather will be available in the Nanaimo office 1 day per week and 2 days in the Duncan office. Along with Heather, we have also welcomed Cindy Clark, a contract counsellor from Salt Spring Island. Cindy comes with a wealth of experience in individual, couples, and youth counselling. She will be available 2 days in Duncan and one day on line or via telephone. We are grateful to be able to flow with the changes in our office and provide service to anyone that feels that support would benefit as changes are made in day to day lives.

Covid has taught us much about navigating change. Our organization has changed because of it, we now offer counselling in person, via zoom, or on the telephone. These changes came about from a change none of us expected, however, have left us with more options. We never know where change will take us, and we are here to provide the tools to understand and support all kinds of life transitions. We will get through all of it together.

*Life* isn't about  
waiting for the  
storm to pass...  
*Dance* it's learning to  
*in the Rain*

*We're here to help!*

*If you are coming in person to counselling and have symptoms of any illness, please simply let our office know and we will shift the appointment to either a telephone or a zoom session.*



*Please call us at one of our numbers listed below if you have questions, need information or wish to book an appointment.*



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