

Embracing a New Normal

I once saw a cartoon which read “normal is just a setting on the clothes dryer.” Wow! I bet we can all relate. I spend many counseling hours helping clients to embrace “a new normal”.

We may experience new normals during: a job change, relocation, birth of a child, loss of a relationship, financial challenges, or even children leaving the nest. It could mean finding a new normal after retirement, death of a loved one, or when dealing with a medical condition. New normals must be found anytime that there is a major shift in life as we know it.

New normals are a part of life for all of us to some degree. Those who master the art of embracing extremely new normals are known as heroes. These may include: all of our military personnel-especially our wounded warriors, Corrie ten Boom, Joni Eareckson Tada, Nick Vujicic, and maybe others in your own family who have had courageous battles with cancer, went through the Great Depression, or triumphed in spite of the great challenges they faced.

Everyone deals with changes and loss differently. It is natural to go through a grieving process when dealing with any loss, but we must make sure we are going through and not getting stuck. Medical intervention including a support group may be needed if we become stuck in our grief or it manifests as depression.

Embracing the “new normal” is often very difficult. Nevertheless, it is a necessary part of healing. Most of us have spent many wasted hours rehashing the “I wishes or the woulda, shoulda, couldas” in life, but it often accomplishes very little. It actually steals our “todays.”

In some instances the change may be simply new and different, not necessarily awful. We must accept the changes in our lives and adapt or we will not heal. Acceptance is the key element of the Serenity Prayer which is used in many recovery programs today. Maybe we should recite it daily:

Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity

to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

It is important to model the acceptance of “new normals” to our children too. They pick up on our coping styles. This is a great time for them to see us practicing our faith and praying. It is also ok if they see us crying or very concerned from time to time, but we are their rocks. It is not ok for them to see bouts of rage and violence or substance abuse as a way of coping.

To begin embracing a change we must allow ourselves to move past denial. Just as forgiveness is a choice so is acceptance. Acceptance does not mean that we are necessarily gleeful about the situation. It merely means that we realize the reality we face and we choose to make the most of it. Thoughts which tell us that we cannot go on since “such and such” has occurred must be cast down. We must remind ourselves that as long as we have breath our lives are not yet over. Often we must give ourselves permission to go on.

Embracing a new normal allows us to move thru the losses and changes. This doesn't mean that we don't carry precious memories from the past. It does mean that we should not feel guilty about embracing the future.