

Life happens

Successfully managing transitions

Insights and tips from life transition expert Dr. Amy D'Aprix.



Vesna and Marshall were getting ready for their youngest child to leave home when their oldest child asked if he could move back home while finishing his graduate degree and finding a job. Then, Marshall's father had a heart attack and Marshall started helping with the maintenance of his parent's house. Vesna and Marshall thought their pre-retirement years would be quieter. They expected all their children to be self-sufficient and hadn't anticipated the level of support their parents would need. Just as they thought life was settling down, it seemed to drastically change.

Transitions are a part of life. Some are anticipated and welcome, like finishing school, starting a new job or getting married. Others can come as a surprise and be more difficult to manage, like caring for an aging parent or losing a job. No matter the circumstances, all transitions have emotional, practical, familial and financial implications.

Vesna and Marshall were like many people – they assumed life would eventually calm down and that they wouldn't have to deal with so much turmoil. The truth is that middle age and

beyond can involve many life transitions, from helping young adult children get established to dealing with your retirement. Some people can also face more difficult challenges, including health issues, job losses, divorce or widowhood. With all of this change – both positive and negative – how can we thrive?

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Prepare when possible

Not all transitions take us by surprise and we can actually be ready for many of them. Think of how thoroughly you may have planned for the birth of a child or your marriage. Retirement is a transition for which people tend to be more prepared for the financial aspects but may not give as much thought to how they're going to spend their time and maintain a sense of purpose and meaning. Taking a holistic view helps you to expect the unexpected and ensure you've addressed all angles of the transition.

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Don't go it alone

Having access to a support team is one of the best ways to make it through a big life change. This team should consist of people who can offer you both emotional support and practical support, and may include friends, family and qualified professionals. Reaching out for whatever support you need can make all the difference. For example, many people don't think to contact their financial advisor when they experience a change, yet they may be key in helping you through it. After all, having a financial plan adjusted to your evolving life may significantly reduce your stress levels.

Crucial questions

Asking yourself the following questions can be helpful in better managing each of the four facets of transitions.

Practical considerations:

1. Are there concrete, tangible steps I can take to prepare for, or respond to, this transition? For example: getting more organized by creating a to-do list.
2. What information, resources or services do I need to explore to prepare for this transition? For example, if you anticipate caregiving may be in your future, it would be useful to know ahead of time what support is available.

Emotional considerations:

3. Who are the people I can turn to for emotional support when things get difficult? Keep their contact information handy for easy access if and when times get tough.

4. If I don't feel that I have enough emotional support in my life, how can I build that network? This might include reaching out to old friends you've lost touch with or forging new connections through community groups, volunteering or online meetups.

Family considerations:

5. Have I considered how this transition might impact other people in my family? For example, children can be greatly impacted by divorce or the loss of a parent.
6. Have I spoken to my family about how a transition might affect each of us, what we're each willing to do and how we can best prepare together? It's not uncommon for families to operate with many assumptions they never check out with each other. Talking openly and honestly can help prevent and resolve these issues.

Financial considerations:

7. Have I consulted with my financial advisor to create a plan that empowers me to better cope with future life transitions?
8. If I'm experiencing an unexpected transition, have I contacted my financial advisor to discuss its financial implications and the best ways for me to respond?



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Dr. Amy D'Aprix is an internationally renowned expert on lifestyle issues relating to retirement, aging, caregiving, and family dynamics. As a Life Transition Expert she helps clients, and their advisors, navigate these matters to help ensure the success of their overall life goals and financial plans.