Hope Counseling Center Spring 2023

WE HAVE THIS HOPE AS AN ANCHOR FOR THE SOUL FIRM AND SECURE. HEBREWS 6:19

Navigating Change in the Stages of Life

Managing Change: Becoming a Parent

By Becca Cox, LMFT

Becoming a parent is life changing, to say the least. It is a complex emotional experience unlike any other I've ever had with extremely rewarding highs and completely overwhelming lows. I've been told "it's the best thing I've ever done" and "I'm still grieving the life I had before" all in one breath from so many parents, myself included.

Unsurprisingly, change is hard. What we often don't discuss is that even a positive change, like becoming a parent, can be just as hard as a negative change such as losing a job. Too often there is pressure to only focus on the positive aspects and "sugarcoat" the difficulties of positive changes. But with all change comes new challenges.

It is important for sustained mental wellbeing to acknowledge and lament the hardships as much as we acknowledge victories and sweet moments to find a healthy balance in the evolving emotional experience of parenting. It is not uncommon, especially with a dramatic decline in sleep, for emotions to be experienced even more intensely. Keep in mind growth occurs when encountering challenges, hitting personal limits, and seeking solutions.

One of the best ways to gain support during this season in life is to connect with other parents to have experiences validated, concerns addressed, and resources shared. It can be so easy to assume someone else "has it all together" from a brief snapshot of their life or social media account, but that's the exception (assuming there actually is someone out there who has it all together). Parental guilt is also common and frequently created by unrealistic expectations that can be dispelled when we connect with other parents and share our stories.

If you are a parent and you feel isolated, as many of us do, I encourage you to begin to connect. Start with less intimidating ways to share and hear the stories of others through online resources like podcasts and interacting with parent focused social media accounts and groups. Santa Barbara offers in-person Postpartum Education for Parents (PEP) and Moms of PreSchoolers (MOPS) groups led by experienced parents. This is one way for parents to connect with others going through similar stages in parenting and child development.

Another important part of maintaining mental health is adapting self care practices. Prior to being a parent you may have enjoyed an hour or two at the gym or quiet time by yourself, but that's likely no longer feasible with young children. It might only be possible to practice self-care in 15-20 minute increments throughout the day. Look for new ways to stay active that work with your child's schedule, like doing online workouts at home or going for a walk during nap time with baby asleep in the stroller or carrier. Socializing with a friend might now look like meeting at a kid friendly restaurant or park so you don't feel pressure to clean your house. Prioritize integrating things that help you stay mentally healthy even if it looks a little different these days.

Do your best to remain flexible. It is important to alter expectations so you don't anticipate the experience to be like what you did prior to having a kid otherwise you will quickly end up feeling frustrated. Life has changed and reasonable expectations may need to change as well.

(See related resources on page 4)

THERAPY OFFERING HOPE AND HEALING THROUGH PROFESSIONAL AND CLINICAL COMPETENCE, FAITH-BASED WISDOM, WARMTH, AND COMPASSION.

Managing Change: Caretaking for Aging Parents

An interview of HCC Board Chair, Eliot Bertha

My dad is 90 and had been living independently. Last December, the day after Christmas, he suddenly needed to be taken by ambulance to the emergency room and was diagnosed with pneumonia and sepsis. The doctors admitted him and said it would take months, not days for healing. He spent one week in the hospital and from there, while still sick and confused, we moved him to a skilled nursing facility. It was clear that without family involvement he most likely would not have survived.

He had so much confusion having been so sick and moving locations twice. He'd lost his ability to get up from bed, walk to the bathroom, and care for himself. It required patience and loving care from family, consistent communication with nurses and doctors and being a strong advocate for his needs. Decisions had to be made for daily issues as well as for the long term. Our family made the decision to move my dad to an assisted living situation once he was well enough.

What has been the most challenging aspect of switching roles and becoming the caretaker for your aging parent?
Communication between siblings and with the parent has been the most challenging for me. Everyone has their family role and personality. It requires humility and a willingness to listen and hear the expression of many needs and emotions, and to come to an agreement for what is best for the aging parent. And then there is the communication with those overseeing care if it's not you.

Being willing to work things out with family members, but realizing not all family members are as willing has been challenging. So it's important to define what is really important and to work toward getting everyone on the same page. This requires a lot of communication, understanding, and letting go.

Another difficulty is that there is always something that is needed. This is where healthy boundaries come in. Deciding what you are able to help with and what can be done realistically with regards to physical, emotional, and financial needs.

What prominent or unexpected emotion(s) have you experienced after assuming the role of caretaker for your aging parent?
Feeling responsible; a desire to make sure my parent's needs are met. Gratitude for being able to help them for all they have done for me. Guilt for not doing something correctly. Grief in watching a parent decline in health.

What has been helpful for you as you have processed and coped with this role change?
Encouragement and prayer from dear friends; and as a Christian- prayer, bible reading and a dependence on God for His leading and comfort. Talking to others who are in similar situations to glean wisdom.

How have you intentionally cared for yourself during this time of change?
Yes, and 'intentional' is the key word! It won't happen without planning and discipline. Prayer, exercise, healthy diet, and some fun moments with family and good friends. Making sure I'm healthy and strong, physically, spiritually and emotionally so I can give to my parent.

What advice would you share with someone who is about to become the caretaker of an aging parent?
Seek advice from those who have gone through it and know that your own story is unique. Everyone will have opinions and you need to feel confident in your decisions. Think about change to your daily, weekly, monthly life before entering into any commitments. Put healthy boundaries in place such as limits around time given. Are you able to help financially? Is a daily phone call needed? Can you say no and will you be able to if needed? You'll never regret helping your parent in their time of need.

Additional Questions to Ask For Those Transitioning to Caretaker of An Aging Parent

By Catherine House, LMFT

- How would you describe the communication between you and your aging parent? How would you like it improved?
- How do you plan to bring up the topic of taking on the role of caregiver?
- How do you intend to bring up the topics of finances and how care will be paid for?
- What are your concerns? What is your biggest fear?
- What are some healthy boundaries you have or would like to establish around your new role as caregiver?
- What are some goals for your parent(s) and yourself?
- Are you prepared for a crisis where you will have to make all of the decisions without your parent's active input? How have you prepared for a potential crisis?
- Keep in mind there is no "normal" plan for this transition. It will look different for each family and each relationship. The sooner finances and a plan are discussed the easier it is to emotionally transition when the plan needs to be enacted.

Understanding and Managing Graduation Anxiety

By Steve Rogers, PhD

Graduating from college should be a time of celebration and joy, right? This is true for some students; in fact, a few of my graduating college students have a countdown and never pass up the opportunity to remind their peers of the days remaining until their freedom from the shackles of academia. But, for over 40% of graduates, this excitement is colored by anxiety, making graduation anxiety a genuine psychological phenomenon.

So, what do most graduates worry about?

- Getting a job and performing well at a job – unless they already have a position secured, most graduates are anxious about their occupational status. Even hearing a well-meaning question like, "What are your plans for after graduation?" can feel like expectation. And even if graduating students have a job, they often experience self-doubt about their competencies. They feel inadequate, maybe even imposterish, realizing they are starting at the bottom of the learning and success ladder.

- Their ability to fulfill "adult" responsibilities – it's not uncommon for graduating students to worry about their success in finding a place to live, to wonder if they'll make enough money to pay their bills and the debts they've been able to defer. Even the thought of navigating medical and car insurance can seem intimidating.

- Losing friendships and creating a new community – many friends will move away, the frequency of contact with each other can lessen, and there is a growing awareness that new connections will take work. This can make some graduating students afraid of loss, loneliness, and relational unrootedness.

- Experiencing dissonance between their hopes and the reality of life after graduation. Many graduating students worry that the future to which they have been driving themselves won't be what they hoped for, that the outcome of all their time and effort won't match their expectations. They may secretly harbor the question, "Will life be as fulfilling as I hoped?" "Will all of this be worth it?"

- And if all of this isn't stressful enough, beneath these are deeper existential concerns. Graduation itself is an existential experience – it's a transition between phases, and with it comes worry about security, a loss of identity, and a redefinition of purpose. The cocoon provided by academia's schedule, rules for social behavior, and fixed expectations gets displaced by the unknown and feelings of insecurity. No longer can graduates organize their identity and self-schema around being a student. And prior to graduation, their meaning and direction seem clear – they take classes, read, write papers, strive for good grades. But when someone is no longer striving for graduation, what becomes the new thrust of their life? New sources of meaning, purpose, and direction need to constructed.

So, what are some ways of managing this graduation-induced anxiety?

1. Accept and allow yourself to experience these feelings. Intentionally naming and accepting our anxiety calms the amygdala, one part of the brain involved in emotional arousal.

2. Remember that excitement can mask itself as stress. Excitement and stress both look physiologically similar – both involve fast heartbeat, tense muscles, rapid breathing, and perspiration. One of the differences, however, is in the label the mind gives it. This means (a) sometimes we mistake the excitement about graduation for stress, and (b) you can alter your experience of stress by reminding yourself it's only stressful because you are labeling it as stressful.

HOPE COUNSELING CENTER

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Eliot Bertha
Chair

Jennifer Parsons
Treasurer

Lisa Winebrenner
Secretary

STAFF

Becca Cox
Director, Marriage & Family Therapist

Natalie Feller
Marriage & Family Therapist

Catherine House
Marriage & Family Therapist

Karis Sykes
Associate Marriage & Family Therapist

Steven Rogers
Clinical Psychologist

Carolee Peterson
Administrator

DOWNLOAD BROCHURE!

HOPE COUNSELING CENTER
5266 Hollister Ave
Suite 211
Santa Barbara, CA
93111
805-681-7384
www.hopecounseling.org

3. Pay attention to the immediate. Anxiety is inherently future-oriented. It focuses on what "what will be," on the "what ifs," in part because it is trying to prepare us to deal with future threats. This means, by definition, if you are anxious, there is no immediate threat. It's about the possibility of a threat. So, focus on the immediate and rest in comfort knowing there is no threat in that given moment.

4. Restrict your options – we are most anxious when we perceive too many possibilities. You've experienced this if you've ever gone to a cereal aisle or tried to select a cold medication in a drug store. But if you restrict your options to a few choices, that stress and anxiety dissipates. Therefore, when you feel stressed and anxious, restrict your choices and possibilities.

   And try not to make your choices moralistic. Thinking of your options and possibilities in terms of "right or wrong" will only lead you to weigh your decisions too heavily, which will result in paralysis.

5. Hijack the autonomic nervous system (ANS). Do something that provides a bit of a shock or jolt to the ANS, like splashing cold water on your face, which disrupts patterned stress responses. Cover yourself in something heavy, like a weighted blanket, to calm the ANS. Lower the temperature and smile because cold temperature elicits positive emotions and smiling cools the brain, all of which creates a happier and more relaxed mood.

6. Ask yourself, "Am I failing enough?" "Am I doing what it takes so that failure is an option?" It's interesting because some of those who are most anxious have failed the least, almost like they believe anxiety is its own antidote to failure. But the reverse is more accurate- failure is the antidote to anxiety.

7. Remember conscientiousness is key. Of all the personality traits that employers tend to value most, conscientiousness consistently rises to the top. And when companies are asked to lay some people off, those with high conscientiousness are least likely to lose their jobs. So, when in doubt about your skills, just try to be reliable, organized, responsible, punctual, and efficient.

8. Consider connecting with a therapist now, rather than waiting until after commencement. Not only will this help with graduation anxiety, but it can also aid the transition to full-time employment, relocating to a new city or residence, and developing new social networks.

9. Find at least one person who fully believes in your professional abilities. It could be a teacher, a supervisor, or someone who knows your professional skills well. It's critical that you have at least one person who fully believes in your professional competence.

Allow yourself to feel accomplishment, pride, and achievement because they are well-earned.

Parenting Resources

Local Resource: Dr. Katrina Mitchell www.phsycianguidetobresatfeeding.org. Postpartum health, breastfeeding support, infant concerns and a wealth of other resources for new parents.
Instagram: @themompsychologist (Dr. Jazmine, Psychologist) Positive parenting and discipline techniques and support.
Podcast: Therapy 4-Dads (Travis Goodman, LMFT) Integrates mental health, evidence-based education, and parenthood with the mission of "reclaiming the narrative of fatherhood, one story at a time."

Give A Gift Today

Please consider Hope Counseling Center as a mission deserving of your financial support. Your gifts provide healing and support in our community. Our Fund for Therapy offers scholarships for clients who could not otherwise afford therapy. Our Supervision Scholarship Fund supports new therapists through the mentorship process. Every dollar makes a direct impact. To give, visit our website or mail a gift using the coupon below. We truly appreciate your support!

Fund for Therapy: ☐ $50 (1 session for 1 client) ☐ $150 (3 sessions for 1 client) ☐ $500 (10 sessions for 1 client) ☐ Other: $_____

Supervision Scholarship: ☐ $50 ☐ $100 ☐ $250 ☐ Other: $_____

Wherever Most Needed: $ _____

CLICK TO GIVE!

Tax deductible donations can be mailed to 5266 Hollister Ave., Suite 211, Santa Barbara, CA 93111 or given online at www.hopecounseling.org. If you'd like to sponsor an individual, please contact Becca Cox, Director, for details at (805) 681-7384 x1. Thank you for your generosity!