Navigating a Life Transition

A plain-language guide to a change that is large, slow, and hard to name.

For general education only. Not a substitute for therapy, diagnosis, or medical care.

What a life transition is

A life transition is a change in role, place, or routine: a move, a new job, a separation, a birth, an empty nest, a diagnosis, a retirement, a move to a new city or country, or recovery that rearranges an ordinary week.

Even a chosen change carries loss. The familiar commute, the friends nearby, the version of yourself that knew what to expect. Ambivalence is normal: you can be glad and grieving in the same week.

Why it often feels heavier than expected

- In identity: Who am I now that the role has changed, questions about what you want for yourself, a sense of being between two lives and fully in neither.
- In daily structure: The routines that carried you are gone, decisions pile up all at once, sleep and appetite shift, and ordinary tasks take more effort than they should.
- In relationships and other people: People expect you to be thrilled, advice arrives unasked, some friendships thin out, and the people who could help do not know what to offer.

What tends to help

- Name the loss and the gain in one sentence each. Both are true at once.
- Make one small decision a day rather than the whole future in a weekend.
- Keep one familiar ritual from the old life, so continuity is not entirely severed.
- Tell people what kind of help you actually need, since they will guess if you do not say it.
- Give the change a real date and a first step, rather than a vague intention to begin later.
- Track sleep, drinking, and appetite. Those three show the strain before anything else does.

What tends not to help

- Waiting until you feel ready. Readiness usually arrives after you start.
- Comparing this chapter to someone else's posted version of it.
- Hiding the ambivalence from the people closest to you.

When to reach out for support

- The decision has been circling for weeks without moving.
- Sleep, drinking, or appetite have changed and stayed changed.
- You cannot hold work, school, or caregiving together.
- You feel alone inside a change that other people call exciting.
- Low mood or panic has lasted more than two weeks.

If you are in crisis, call or text 988. If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

A few prompts

1. What is actually changing, in plain words?

2. What am I losing, and what am I hoping for?

3. What is one decision small enough to make this week?

4. Who could I tell this week, even in a sentence?

Questions worth asking a therapist

- How do you work with life transitions, and what would we focus on first?
- What would you expect to change in the first month?
- How do you help someone who is unsure whether the decision was right?
- What are your fees, and do you provide superbills for out-of-network claims?

For general education only, not a substitute for therapy, diagnosis, or medical care. These prompts are optional. Stop if completing them increases distress and seek appropriate support. This sheet is not monitored; keep completed notes private. If you are in crisis, call or text 988. If you are in immediate danger, call 911.