

How to Thrive While Life Happens

Sometime life happens quickly, bringing a continuous mix of opportunities, uncertainty and even potential peril.

There's no law that says devastating events must happen one at a time. For example, it's not a stretch to picture facing a personal event—retirement, illness, divorce or death—at the same time a weather event upsets your ability to do the most routine tasks like returning home at the end of a work day. You can look back on the past six months and readily find a number of previously unthinkable local disasters—floods, earthquakes, mudslides, tornadoes, and blizzards—and some of them in places they're not supposed to happen. When these disaster strike, people are living their lives, they may be getting ill, in the process of divorce, or grieving.

How we handle ourselves at these pivotal moments can potentially set the stage for how the rest of our lives look. At these times competent decision-making is more important than ever, yet less likely than ever as trauma compounds trauma. Without help, people might emerge from the other side of crisis at a grave disadvantage instead of being in a position to thrive.

Keep Calm

When you are overwhelmed, your behavior is affected. Your sleep patterns are off and your brain activity might be disconnected during periods of the day. Your interactions with others are often compromised. You might be out of touch with your competencies and sometimes even your values, but you may not even be aware of these changes.

Your brain and body aren't meant to be in a state of prolonged stress, and your goal is to lower your stress level. You need to find coping mechanisms that don't involve major decisions that might be regrettable. You should strive to structure

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your life so that you can optimize the quality of your sleep and make sure you are eating well. Meditation is a powerful tool to calm the mind and body and can be a good tool as part of your daily routine.

Carry Very Little

One way to cope during change is to carry very little. This involves designing a life that is as streamlined as possible. Wherever possible decisions or actions should be simplified, and goals that are set should be attainable financially and not emotionally or physically taxing.

Let's look at how this looks in real life . . .

Janelle is a widow whose husband passed away ten months ago. She has a great support network and was doing okay with her grieving process. She was just starting to recover enough to begin organizing, which felt soothing. She started with the house, room by room, and though she went to sleep exhausted each night, she preferred that to crying herself to sleep.

Just when this routine became comfortable and she was feeling like she was emerging from the fog, her home suffered property damage from an unexpected flood. She didn't live in an area that had ever flooded in the past, and she suddenly needed to move out of her home and find a way to repair it. Janelle had to accomplish all this while continuing to pay the bills for the house and additionally paying rent for an apartment.

She was feeling very alone, even though she had family members helping her. They noticed she was showing signs of stress: her hair was falling out, she had bags under eyes, and she was always "too tired" to come over for a meal. And then she started talking about selling the house without fixing it and just staying in the apartment. She said she liked the simplicity of that idea because it meant she didn't have to do

