

DESCRIBE THE SIGNIFICANCE TO OTHERS. You may find it helpful to share with others how you feel about them and what their absence in your life will mean to you (Lamb, 1985; Ward, 1984). This process can be bittersweet – it hurts but at the same time can leave you (and those around you) with a special feeling about your relationships, activities and, more generally, the phase of your life that is ending.

DEFINE AREAS OF CONTINUITY IN LIFE. While it is important to realize what will be changing in your life, you can also benefit from reminding yourself of ways in which your life will remain the same (Rando, 1984). Although you may be leaving certain cherished friends and loved ones, you may be able to find ways to experience some of these relationships as continuing despite the distance (Weddington and Cavenar, 1979). A sense of continuity can be gained through making plans for future contacts, reunions, and return trips to college and so forth. A sense of continuity can also be derived from reminding yourself that in some ways the person you have become has incorporated aspects of your past relationships and activities (Rando, 1984).

FIVE “Ds” FOR UNSUCCESSFULLY DEALING WITH DEPARTURE AND LOSS:

DENY THE LOSS. (See Jackson, 1977; Worden, 1982).
By focusing only on the phase of your life that you are about to enter and failing to think about the phase that is ending, you may be setting yourself up for pain and distress when you realize what you have lost AFTER you have lost it (at which point you no longer have the opportunity to prepare yourself for the parting).

DISTORT YOUR EXPERIENCE BY OVER GLORIFYING IT.
Over idealizing your past experiences on a continual basis can lead to your not letting go of the past. It also makes the past an INCREDIBLY tough act to follow; the future is likely to pale by comparison.

DENIGRATE YOUR ACTIVITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS. The reverse of over glorifying our past is to mentally destroy it – to tell yourself that you are losing nothing of value (DeWald, 1967; Worden, 1982). Although this strategy may help you to avoid pain, it may also prevent you from growing and benefiting through your past experiences. Using this strategy can result in your passing repeatedly from one phase of your life to another without ever feeling good about what you have done, where you have been or whom you have known.

DISTRACT YOURSELF FROM THINKING ABOUT DEPARTURE. Like denying the loss, excessively distracting yourself by keeping busy with other matters prevents reflection on the significance of what is occurring and preparing for the transition.

DETACH YOURSELF ABRUPTLY FROM YOUR ACTIVITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS. (See Jackson, 1977; Yalom, 1975.) This strategy, like denigrating our experiences, can be viewed as an attempt to avoid pain. It can also leave you with the illusion of being empowered and in control. However, it prevents you from gaining a feeling of closure or a sense of resolution to the phase of your life that you are leaving and can cause others to feel abandoned and hurt.

You are welcome to stop by or call to make an appointment:
131 Van Housen Hall
267-2330
8:30-4:30 pm



THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Potsdam

**EFFECTIVELY
DEALING WITH
TRANSITION AND
LOSS**

College Counseling Center
State University of New York at Potsdam
131 Van Housen Hall
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Dear SUNY Potsdam Student:

Change is inevitable, especially in the life of a college student. Change is also multifaceted: it can be exciting, confusing or emotionally challenging. It can be a time to look back, as well as to look forward. This brochure was prepared to discuss how change can affect you and to give you some ideas on how you might want to deal with change and use this as a guide. We are all unique and different and we deal with things in our own special way. Some of this may fit and some may not even come close.

If you would like to further explore ways in which change may be affecting you, counselors are available at the College Counseling Center, to meet and talk with you.

CHANGE = SAYING GOODBYE

What Does it Mean to Say Goodbye?

Generally, we think of saying goodbye as referring to expressing best wishes at a time of parting. More broadly speaking, however, “saying goodbye” can mean acknowledging, reflecting on and preparing for upcoming life changes and the losses that accompany them.

The Losses Which Accompany Change

It has been said that one of the few constants in life is change (Senour, 1981). While we often look favorably upon change and focus upon what we will be gaining, we also must contend with the fact that with change comes loss (Heikkinen, 1979; Senour, 1981).

For instance, while graduations may be perceived as accomplishments and as making the beginning of a new exciting phase of life, they can also involve numerous losses; including loss of a support network, a routine, a sense of youth and a familiar environment. To some degree they can even include a loss of one’s sense of identity (Hayes, 1981). Graduations, relocations, career changes and all other major transitions offer us the opportunity to say “hello” to a new phase of life and, just as importantly, give us the chance to bid farewell to the old. There are times in which it is appropriate not only to look ahead but also to look back, acknowledging to ourselves and to others that what we are leaving will be missed.

Why Say Goodbye?

Just as viewing a good ending to a movie can greatly enhance our feelings about the movie as a whole, so can appropriately saying goodbye heighten positive feelings about the phases of our lives that are coming to an end. When we take the time to “say goodbye,” to reflect on and prepare for upcoming transitions in our lives, we often gain a sense of closure or finality and feel better prepared to continue on in life. Saying goodbye can reduce later feelings of disorientation and disappointment and can increase feelings of power, control and predictability.

Saying goodbye allows for a period of review and assessment. It gives us the chance to step back, take stock of our lives and get a broader perspective of what different activities and relationships have meant to us. By so doing we can move on to the next phase of our lives feeling better about where we have been and where we are going.

How Should You Say Goodbye?

Coping with loss is a very personal experience and what works best for one person may be far less beneficial for another (Cheikin, 1981; Worden, 1982). Nevertheless, certain general guidelines can be offered regarding how to deal with major transitions in life.

FIVE D’S FOR SUCCESSFULLY DEALING WITH TRANSITION AND LOSS:

DETERMINE WAYS TO MAKE YOUR TRANSITION A GRADUAL PROCESS. Weeks or even months ahead of time, begin to think about what it will mean to leave the current phase of your life so that you can adequately prepare yourself and relish your remaining time.

DISCOVER THE SIGNIFICANCE THAT DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES HAVE HAD IN YOUR LIFE. Step back and spend some time reflecting, reviewing and reminiscing on your life; strive for a broad perspective on your life and the current transition that you face (see Corazzini, 1980; Lamb, 1985, Rando, 1984).