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Wellbeing Insights
People, Culture & Wellbeing



Stress Management Society
from distress to de-stress

BEYOND COMFORT: EMBRACING CHANGE IN A CHALLENGING WORLD

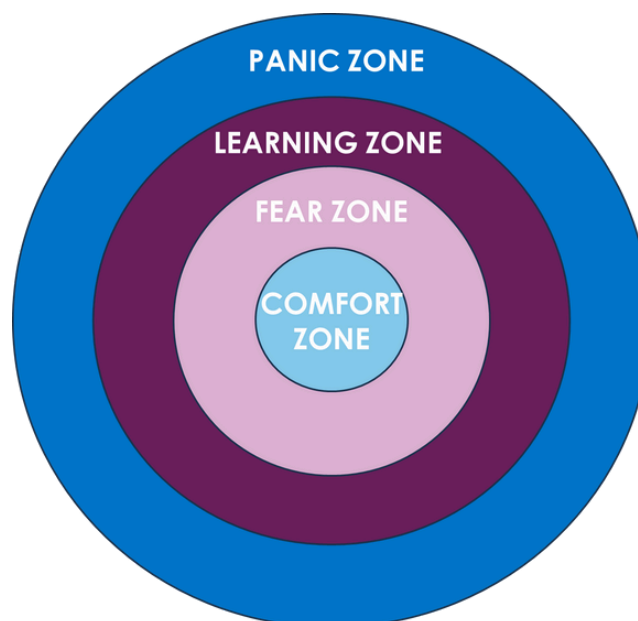
With Neil Shah Chief De-stress Officer of the
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What happens when change can cause anxiety

When change exceeds our capacity to manage it effectively, anxiety often follows. This anxiety frequently arises in unfamiliar situations, such as life transitions, and manifests as a sense of internal discomfort. As a result, we may experience nervousness and even panic, often feeling overwhelmed and incapable of coping. The symptoms of anxiety can be multifaceted. Physically, it may present as an elevated heart rate, shortness of breath, or excessive sweating. Emotionally, one may experience fear, dread, or significant distress. Cognitively, anxiety can impair thinking, reduce decision-making capabilities, and hinder overall cognitive performance. This response to change can be conceptualised through the comfort zone model. Within our comfort zone, we feel secure and in control. Stepping into the stretch zone, we encounter new challenges that promote growth. However, if the demands of change become too overwhelming, we risk entering the panic zone—where anxiety peaks and hinders our ability to function effectively.



The Comfort Zone Model

The comfort zone model is a psychological model describing individuals states of stress when engaging in activities and how at a certain point of the journey, just the right amount of stress is beneficial in your performance. This right amount can also be known as the anxiety sweet spot. We start at the comfort zone where our body is at rest at this stage, we feel comfortable and calm. However, the downside is that we don't have much opportunity to grow at this stage and for that reason we need to step out of the comfort zone. The Fear Zone is where we encounter challenges and the unknown. Despite the discomfort, it promotes personal growth, resilience, and self-confidence as we overcome obstacles and embrace new experiences. The Learning Zone is where we face challenges, novelty, or positive stress like exercise, promoting adaptation and growth. This is the sweet spot and is the best place to adopt and embrace change, we should aim to arrive at this destination. The Panic Zone is when we reach and pass our limits and our sympathetic nervous system kicks us into fight, flight or freeze.



COPING WITH CHANGE

Coping with change can be challenging for many individuals, making it crucial to adopt a straightforward approach. To navigate change effectively, it is helpful to keep three key principles in mind:

- **Nothing is Permanent:** Change is inevitable, and no situation lasts forever. Recognising this can alleviate unnecessary worry and help maintain perspective.
- **Keep It Simple:** Avoid over complicating the process. For example, if you want to start running, focus on the act itself rather than getting caught up in purchasing gear or equipment. The simpler the approach, the easier it is to take action.
- **Focus on What's Important:** When faced with change, concentrate on one aspect at a time. Narrowing your focus makes the overall process of change less overwhelming and more manageable.



Exercises to facilitate embracing change:

To make the process of change smoother and more beneficial, incorporating certain exercises can help individuals embrace change and maximise their growth in the learning zone. Consider the following techniques:

- **Breathing Exercises:** Deep breathing can be highly effective in promoting relaxation. Encourage individuals to practice slow, controlled breathing by inhaling deeply through the nose, holding the breath briefly, and then exhaling slowly through the mouth. This activates the parasympathetic nervous system, helping to reduce stress and calm the mind.
- **Visualisation:** Positive imagery is another useful tool. Encourage individuals to visualise successful outcomes. For example, when facing a job transition, they can imagine themselves thriving in their new role, which fosters a positive mindset and reduces anxiety.
- **Reframing Negative Thoughts:** Help individuals challenge and reframe negative thoughts by questioning their accuracy. Are these thoughts based on facts or assumptions? By addressing irrational fears and replacing them with more balanced perspectives, they can better manage their response to change.

