

When Does Change Happen?

People only change when the **pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of changing**. Change can be difficult, even when we know that our current situation is causing problems. At the same time, staying the same can feel familiar, predictable, and safe.

This does not mean that people must suffer before they can change. Instead, it means that meaningful change often occurs when a person becomes aware of both the **costs of remaining where they are** and the **costs and benefits of moving in a new direction**.

Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) provides a way to explore this process without judgment. By slowing down, becoming aware of thoughts and feelings, and connecting with nature, we can observe our choices more clearly and discover what truly matters to us.

1. Reasons to Stay the Same

There are usually good reasons why people continue doing what they are doing. Even unhealthy patterns may provide something that feels useful in the short term. Staying the same may provide familiarity, comfort, security, predictability, or relief from the uncertainty associated with change.

For example, someone may continue avoiding difficult situations because avoidance temporarily reduces anxiety. Someone may remain in an unhealthy relationship because it feels safer than facing the unknown. Someone may continue using an unhealthy coping strategy because it provides immediate relief.

Mindfulness helps us notice these reasons without judging them. In nature, we can slow down and ask:

- What am I getting from staying the same?
- What does this behavior help me avoid?
- What feels safer about not changing?
- What am I afraid might happen if I change?

The goal is not to criticize these reasons. It is to become aware of them.

2. Reasons Not to Stay the Same

The second area involves recognizing the **cost of maintaining the status quo**. Sometimes the familiar becomes increasingly painful. A behavior that once provided relief may eventually create additional problems.

Ask yourself:

- What is staying the same costing me?
- How does this pattern affect my relationships, work, or well-being?
- What opportunities am I missing?
- If nothing changes, where might I be a year from now?
- Is the short-term relief worth the long-term cost?

MBE encourages us to observe these consequences mindfully rather than becoming overwhelmed by them. Nature can provide perspective. A walk through a changing landscape can remind us that change is a natural part of life. Trees lose leaves, streams change course, and ecosystems continually adapt. The question becomes: **Is staying the same still serving me?**

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3. Reasons to Change

Change becomes more compelling when we recognize what we might gain by moving in a new direction. These reasons are often connected to our **values**. These are the qualities and principles we want to express through our lives by living in our True Self.

Ask yourself:

- What could improve if I changed?
- What kind of person do I want to be?
- What relationships or experiences could become possible?
- What would I be able to do that I cannot do now?
- What matters enough to me that I am willing to experience some discomfort?

MBE emphasizes **Living in True Self** by identifying and acting from what is genuinely meaningful rather than simply responding to fear, expectations, or old patterns.

Nature can help us explore this process. Consider a tree growing toward sunlight despite obstacles around it. The tree does not need to eliminate every obstacle before growing. In the same way, we do not have to eliminate fear, doubt, or discomfort before taking a meaningful step forward.

4. Reasons Not to Change

Change also has costs. Recognizing these costs is important because pretending that change will be easy can create unrealistic expectations.

Changing may involve discomfort, uncertainty, grief, effort, vulnerability, or the possibility of failure. We may have to give up familiar behaviors, relationships, beliefs, or routines.

Ask yourself:

- What will be difficult about changing?
- What might I have to give up?
- What am I afraid of?
- What uncomfortable feelings might arise?
- What support will I need?

Mindfulness teaches us that discomfort does not necessarily mean that we are making the wrong choice. We can acknowledge difficult thoughts and feelings without allowing them to automatically determine our behavior.

Finding Your Balance

These four areas can help us understand ambivalence about change:

Reasons to Stay the Same:

“What do I get from remaining where I am?”

Reasons Not to Stay the Same:

“What is staying the same costing me?”

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Reasons to Change:

“What could I gain by moving forward?”

Reasons Not to Change:

“What will be difficult or uncomfortable about changing?”

Mindfulness allows us to hold all four perspectives at the same time. Instead of immediately choosing one side, we can observe our thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and surroundings with curiosity.

The goal is not to pressure ourselves into change. The goal is to become sufficiently aware that we can make a **conscious, values-based choice**.

A Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Reflection

Find a quiet natural place and spend several minutes simply observing your surroundings. Notice the sounds, sights, smells, textures, and sensations around you. Then consider each of the four questions.

As you reflect, notice what happens in your body. Do you feel tension, resistance, excitement, sadness, relief, or fear? Rather than trying to change these sensations, simply notice them.

Then ask:

“If I continue doing what I am doing, what is the likely cost?”

and

“If I make this change, what might become possible?”

Finally, ask:

“What is one small step I can take toward the life I want, even if discomfort comes along with it?”

Change does not have to happen all at once. Often, it begins with awareness, followed by one small action that is consistent with what matters most.

The goal is not to wait until life becomes unbearable. The goal is to become mindful enough to recognize when the costs of staying the same are greater than the costs of moving toward something better.

You may find the chart on the next page helpful in clarifying your reasoning.

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<i>Reasons to stay the same:</i>	<i>Reasons not to stay the same:</i>
<i>Reasons to change:</i>	<i>Reasons not to change:</i>