



Personal Growth In Challenging Times

Richard Tedeschi, Ph.D. and Lawrence Calhoun, Ph.D. created the theory of post-traumatic growth* to describe the positive ways people change as a result of struggling through times of adversity. During significant stress or trauma, "people develop new understandings of themselves, the world they live in, how to relate to other people, the kind of future they might have and a better understanding of how to live life." says Tedeschi.

What is post-traumatic growth? Research shows us there is some common ways people may grow during times of crisis.

- Improved relationships: more fulfilling relationships, deepened connections with others
- New possibilities for one's life: new directions and pursuing meaningful life possibilities
- A greater appreciation for life: deepened gratitude
- A greater sense of personal strength: increased confidence, new personal skills learned
- Spiritual/existential development: changes in philosophy of life and belief systems

What is not part of post-traumatic growth? Post-traumatic growth is not the absence of difficulty, painful feelings, suffering, or loss. When growth occurs, it occurs along with, not instead of, the painful parts of living through trauma or loss. Post-traumatic growth does not mean you have to be thankful that something terrible happened to you. It is also not just resilience or bouncing back to a previous level. It is actually new growth or growth beyond a previous level.

Reflect on your own growth. We are currently living through a time of collective trauma and adversity, with differential impacts. Take a few moments to reflect upon how this time has shaped and changed you. With self-compassion, consider both positive and negative changes.

- Do you notice any changes in your relationships?
- Are there new life possibilities you are considering?
- Do you have feelings of gratitude for aspects of your life?
- Do you feel stronger, more confident, or know you have developed new personal skills?
- Have there been shifts in your belief systems?

Along with our past and continuing struggle in these difficult times, it is important to validate our growth.

*For references, on research in this handout, contact Mary Bade at mbade@austin.utexas.edu

