

The 5 Lies People Tell Themselves in Transition

| What you're telling yourself about how you're handling this — and what's actually true instead.

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There's a particular kind of pain that comes not from the change itself — but from what you tell yourself about how you're handling it.

You compare your insides to other people's outsides. You measure your grief against some imaginary timeline. You decide that because you haven't "moved on" yet, something must be wrong with you.

Nothing is wrong with you.

But the stories you're telling yourself — some of them are making this harder than it has to be. That's what this guide is about. Five of the most common lies people tell themselves when their life is in flux, where each one comes from, and what's actually true instead.

Read it slowly. One section at a time, if you want.

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This is the one that does the most damage.

Someone you love died eight months ago and you're still not sleeping. You left a job two years back and you still think about it every day. Your marriage ended and a year later you're still not "back to normal." And because of that gap, you've added a second layer of suffering on top of the first: shame.

The timeline lie is everywhere. Culture gives us rough estimates — a year for grief, a few months for a breakup — and we treat them like medical facts. They're not. They were never based on anything real.

Psychologist George Bonanno found that resilience after loss doesn't look like a steady upward climb. It looks chaotic. Good weeks and terrible weeks. That oscillation is the normal pattern. Not a sign of weakness. The pattern itself.

WHAT'S ACTUALLY TRUE

There is no "by now." The question worth asking isn't why am I still not over this? It's what does this feeling need from me today?

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They don't. You just can't see their 3am.

This lie runs on comparison — and comparison in the middle of a crisis is a particularly cruel sport, because you're always comparing your raw, unedited experience to someone else's highlight reel. You see a colleague who went through a divorce and seems completely fine. You measure yourself against those visible surfaces and find yourself lacking.

What you're not seeing: the therapy appointments, the wine, the nights staring at the ceiling. The performance of coping is not the same as coping.

There's also something worth knowing about people who appear to bounce back fastest. Researchers call them "repressive copers." Studies show lower cortisol responses in these individuals during stress — but the same research links repressive coping to worse long-term physical health outcomes. The feelings don't disappear. They relocate.

WHAT'S ACTUALLY TRUE

The person who "handles it better" might be handling it differently. Or delaying it. Or not handling it at all in ways that will cost them later.

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This one keeps people performing okay when they're not.

It's the fear underneath the fear. If you actually let yourself feel how hard things are — if you stop holding it together for one moment — you will collapse in a way you can't come back from. So you stay busy. You keep moving. Stillness feels like the edge of something dangerous.

The irony is that avoidance of emotional pain doesn't reduce it. It stores it. The body keeps a detailed and patient account. Gabor Maté spent decades documenting how suppressed emotional experience shows up in physical illness — chronic pain, autoimmune conditions, gut disorders. The grief you don't feel doesn't go away. It waits.

Your track record for getting through hard days is, at this moment, one hundred percent.

WHAT'S ACTUALLY TRUE

Falling apart is not the opposite of resilience. It's often the beginning of it. You can fall apart. You will put yourself back together. That's not optimism — that's what humans do.

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Transition has a particular torture: the gap.

The old thing is gone and the new thing isn't visible yet. The brain, which runs on predictability, finds that gap almost physically painful. So it demands a plan. A destination. Anything to close the uncertainty.

This is where people make decisions they later regret. They rush into a new relationship to fill the silence. They take the first job offered because ambiguity is unbearable. They start new things before finishing grieving old ones.

William Bridges drew a sharp line between *change* (the external event) and *transition* (the internal process). Change can happen in a day. The most important part of transition — what Bridges called the "neutral zone" — is the in-between. Things are being integrated there that cannot be rushed.

WHAT'S ACTUALLY TRUE

You don't need to know what comes next. You need to be where you are.

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This one has a particular grip on people who've always been the capable one.

If you're the person others come to — the reliable one, the strong one — there's a specific shame that comes with needing help yourself. As if having a limit makes you a fraud. As if the things you've managed before should make this manageable too.

They don't. Asking for help isn't evidence of failure. It's evidence of accuracy — an accurate read on what this situation actually requires.

The research on social support during high-stress periods is unambiguous. People with strong support networks recover faster from illness, loss, and major life disruption. Not because talking changes the facts, but because isolation amplifies the brain's threat response. Connection literally regulates the nervous system.

WHAT'S ACTUALLY TRUE

The people who come through hard things best are almost never the ones who did it alone. They're the ones who let someone sit with them in it.

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You are not behind.

You are not broken.

You are **human**.

Transition is not a problem to be solved on a schedule. It's a process that has its own pace, and fighting that pace is one of the most exhausting things you can do.

What you are is in the middle of something genuinely difficult — and that is enough of a reason to be exactly where you are.

The Transition Letter — Every Sunday

One science-backed insight for navigating change. Same honesty as this guide. No filler. No toxic positivity. Just practical wisdom for people in flux.

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