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# SURVIVING THE GROWTH PROCESS

BY AMY PHILLIPS, MBA, LCSW, LAC



**E**ach spring, my German Shepherd Dog seemingly sheds enough fur to supply the neighborhood birds and bunnies with nesting supplies for a lifetime. I diligently brush her until the wiggles set in and she cannot sit still any longer, and then repeat again the next day. While the shedding process can be uncomfortable, restricting, and incredibly messy, without it she will be in for a miserable summer.

As my pup and I begin our shedding and grooming ritual each year, I am reminded that brushing her is a soothing, or meditative, agent for me in the midst of the unpredictability, uncertainty, and general stressors life presents. And, during the spring and early summer, a reminder that in nature, change is normal and expected. While she might get impatient while I brush her, my dog does not take the need for grooming personally. She does not take offense to the change, or fight against it as if it is a fault of hers that change is needed. We also need our seasonal processes of change and growth. Particularly in times like these, we need to shed old patterns or behaviors, and open ourselves up to feedback to put us on the right track to better handle the chaos, stressors, and plain old-fashioned change we have been experiencing, whether it is on an individual basis, an organizational or systemic one, or even in a family system.

I have come to appreciate this process and the comforting cyclic nature of changing and growing, complete with the growing pains that adaptation creates. Sometimes with trepidation or even dread due to the unknown, and the subsequent trial and error of adjusting to “new normals,” but also with a respect for the progress that occurs when we re-frame failure as an opportunity for growth.

If we do not give space for uncomfortable feedback, messy processing, and the shedding of outdated or redundant practices, we become stagnant and unable to adapt to our changing environment. We also risk perpetuating harmful and unjust systems through our inaction. Much like the changing of the seasons, now is an opportunity to metaphorically “brush-up the fallen branches” like our mindsets, habits, and ideals that are no longer serving us and may even be holding those beautiful new blooms at bay.

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With these challenges of growth in mind, remember to:

- **Acknowledge** that correction, feedback, and redirection can still sting even under the gentlest messenger. It is ok to lick your wounds (or a few pints of ice cream) before you move on to what you are going to do with it, but then make a plan and take productive steps forward towards your new goal.
- When we move forward toward change, it is not always our rational thought running the show, but rather our emotions. **Tune in** to how you feel and pay particular attention to your reactions to the feedback. Note where in your body you feel these emotions. Acknowledge any anger, frustration, unfulfillment, or ineptitudes which may show up, then remind yourself that they do not represent the full picture.



- **Contextualize** feedback. Process what you have heard, and determine what you can gain from the experience, what you (or your team) are going to incorporate into your future work, and what you simply need to let go of and move on from. Write this down and consider talking it through with a trusted coach, consultant, mentor, or friend - even if this means actively **seeking out** new support from individuals whose values and skills you admire and would like to emulate.

It is essential to continue moving forward during these times of transition, for the betterment of ourselves, our clients, families, and our communities. Do not ignore the hard situations and emotions, nor the grief and the loss that come along with it. Instead, commit to the work of transition, transformation, and new possibilities. And, if you need it, seek support from your Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program (COLAP) or re-engage with your therapist when help is needed to heal or process through your important work! •

Amy Phillips, MBA, LCSW, LAC, is the Assistant Director of the Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program (COLAP). COLAP is the free, confidential, and independent well-being program for the legal community of Colorado. For more information, go to [www.coloradolap.org](http://www.coloradolap.org). For a confidential consultation, discussion about your stressors, or to obtain helpful resources, contact COLAP at 303-986-3345 or [info@coloradolap.org](mailto:info@coloradolap.org).