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How to create meaningful change

Change can be challenging, even when we long for it. We might sense a restlessness within, our current circumstances like a dress that no longer suits us, yet can still be unsure what does.

According to Dr Julie Hannan, a psychologist and author of *The Midlife Crisis Handbook: Finding Direction In The Second Half Of Life* (Morency, £10.99), it's common for midlife women to find themselves in a liminal space, caught between identities. For example, their children might have left home, or they might have outgrown the job they've had for two decades.

Hannan explains we lay down our values from the age of ten. 'These are influenced by our parents, also by important figures in our lives, such as teachers, and by society. Our values guide our choices, be it what career we pursue, or who we date. But by midlife, they've often changed. Yet we don't update our life to align with them. This can leave us feeling lost and stuck.'

Hannan suggests four ways to help you discover and implement change:

TAKE AN OVERVIEW

Write a list of these 14 areas of your life: Work, Finances, Play, Social, Parenting, Spirituality, Family, Health, Relationships, Sex and intimacy, Joy, Self-esteem, Comfort in life, and Relaxation. Rate, on a scale of one to ten, how satisfied you feel in each (with

one being very low satisfaction and ten being extremely satisfied). Then reflect on your lower scores. Where are you not satisfied? How and when do you think you steered off course?

Focus on recalibrating one area at a time, so you don't overwhelm yourself. And accept that the journey to change is often not linear. For example, you decide you want to improve your health and start working out. Then, a month in, you sprain your ankle. Give yourself time to heal, but don't use your injury as a reason to give up.

REASSESS YOUR VALUES

Write down your ten most important values. Be instinctive, and don't overthink it. Reduce this list to the six that are most representative of you and what you stand for. Use the information gleaned from the previous exercise to see how present these values are in the areas you had low scores. If you were acting in accordance with them, how would you behave differently?

To create a life that's in synch with your values often means first letting go of certain things, or people. For example, 'Adventure' may be a key value, but you have a big home with a huge mortgage. Exchanging it for a smaller one might free up more opportunities for travel. Or perhaps you chose 'Authenticity', but have friendships where you don't feel respected for being your true self.



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SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES

Once you know your values, use these to create clear boundaries, where you say yes to what's in accordance with them, and no to what's not. For example, if you're dating and 'Intimacy' is one of your values, don't get involved with people who are just looking for a fling.

Midlife is an opportunity to learn to take up more space in the world and find our voice. As women, we've been taught to fit in. But learn to be grounded in the truth of who you are, and to care less about what others think. Being clear on your values and having strong boundaries in place creates confidence. And confidence radiates out, and is likely to bring more opportunities your way, in all areas of life.

FIND YOUR CHEERLEADERS

Surround yourself with people who believe in you, want the best for you, and are supportive of you making changes. And, remember, not all friendships are meant to last a lifetime. When our values shift, we might outgrow some of them. For example, you and a friend were both unhappily married, and bonded over complaining about your partners. If you decide to leave and your friend doesn't, you may have little left in common, and find seeing each other challenging.

The right friends can offer us a huge amount of support. Equally, they're not meant to be our therapists. If you feel like you spend your entire time talking to them about your problems, consider also getting some therapeutic support.

“Midlife is an opportunity to learn to take up more space in the world”

Learn to find support from within, too. Notice how your cheerleaders speak to you, and try to develop that same compassionate voice towards yourself. Not least as the liminal space of midlife is often accompanied by some form of loss, be it a person, a job, children leaving, or the changes in our bodies, which is when self-compassion becomes more valuable than ever.

