Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Age Expectations: Accepting Life's Journey at Every Age

In the journey of life, you hit many important milestones along the way. Some we look forward to and others make us cringe. When you turned 13, you became a teenager and left your childhood behind. Getting your drivers license in your teens gave you more freedom and helped you feel more responsible. By your 20s, you're officially considered an adult and you may have finally felt free to create your own path.



As you continue to reach milestones throughout your adult years, however, where you are and how you should feel becomes a little less cut and dry. You probably have a whole slew of expectations that come with every age you reach. For many, 30 is when you envision themselves as married and starting a family. Perhaps 40 is that threshold where you thought you'd make your mark within your career. Your 60s? Maybe you see a small army of grandchildren, a comfortable relationship and the financial freedom to retire. Setting expectations at different ages is something most of us do at some time or another. It's a way of planning for the future and of setting goals to reach for. But when life looks a little different than planned when you hit one of these milestones, it can cause some serious stress and disappointment and leave you wondering; "How did I get here?"

Are You There Yet?

Thought you would be more successful, happier, focused and far more confident at your age? If it feels like your life plan has somehow gotten away from you, you're not alone. Many people reach life markers—usually at the start of a new decade—not entirely where they thought they'd be. Learn to appreciate your life now, your accomplishments while continuing to strive towards your goals—regardless of your age—by:

Counting your blessings. There are always things to be thankful for that you didn't have 10, 15 or 20 years ago. So you've turned 40. But, how have you changed? What have you learned and what are you proud of? Maybe you're not where you thought you would be professionally but you have a beautiful family and a supportive group of friends. Instead of pining for lost years, appreciate your wisdom, growth and all the challenges you've overcome. Be proud of who you are and move forward.

Believing it's never too late. There will always be some reason to not push yourself and make the things you want to happen, happen. People leave jobs that aren't right for them, go back to school or meet the love of their life at all ages. In many cases, it is possible to do and be whatever you want but you will have to be willing to step out of your comfort zone and out of your own way. If you tell yourself it's too late then it will be.

Setting new goals. If you feel like you didn't do everything you wanted to in your 20s, look to the future instead of dwelling on unaccomplished goals of the past. Take some time to set new goals that you hope to reach in your 30s—not based on where you saw yourself when you were 15. Once you have your list, prioritize and decide what you want to work on in order of importance. Taking on too much at

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once is a recipe for failure. Remember to stop and celebrate when you reach a goal, no matter how small.

Making lemonade when life gives you lemons. Maybe you never expected to be divorced or widowed at 60. And while the idea of being alone may make you want to crawl under the covers, why not embrace it as a chance to meet new people and make new friends? Join a support group of people in similar situations and, if you feel ready, even venture out into the world of dating. Didn't see yourself as jobless at 45? Perhaps it's time to turn that hobby of yours into a real business. While it may seem cliché, the truth is many "happy endings" and "success stories" begin after a darker chapter has ended. Challenge setbacks and look for ways to transform them into opportunities.

Enjoying yourself. The single most effective way to learn to accept you and where you are, regardless of the milestone you're celebrating, is to continue to have fun. Develop your hobbies, maintain strong relationships, try something new and stay active. Taking care of yourself—physically and emotionally—will make getting older way less daunting and that much easier!

As you age and reach new stages in life, you may have to adjust your pursuit of happiness. Every age has its wisdom, joy and pain and is a part of your unique and exciting journey. Being happy has very little to do with how old you are and who you're supposed to be. Instead, it has everything to do with appreciating and celebrating life's little victories in the here and now.