

TOLERATING UNCERTAINTY
AND MANAGING ANXIETY
DURING ORGANIZATIONAL
RESTRUCTURING OR UPHEAVAL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- INTRODUCTION3**
- UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF UNCERTAINTY3**
- PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO MANAGE UNCERTAINTY AND ANXIETY3**
 - 1. Acknowledge the difficulty and your feelings 3
 - 2. Focus on what you can control..... 4
 - 3. Practice grounding techniques to manage strong anxiety 4
 - 4. Establish predictable routines 5
 - 5. Set information and conversation boundaries 5
 - 6. Practice self-care 5
 - 7. Stay connected and seek support 6
 - 8. Cultivate a growth mindset 6
- REFLECTION AND ACTION PLANNING7**
- ABOUT KONTERRA8**

INTRODUCTION

Organizational restructuring or sudden organizational upheaval due to funding or other changes can be a challenging and uncertain time. Changes in leadership, team composition, or job roles can lead to increased stress and anxiety. The uncertainty of not knowing what decisions may be made about positions and budgets can heighten feelings of instability and make it difficult to plan ahead. While uncertainty is uncomfortable, there are evidence-based strategies to help you navigate these sorts of transitions with greater resilience and clarity.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF UNCERTAINTY

Uncertainty triggers our brain's threat response, making us more prone to anxiety, overwhelm, and decision paralysis. During sudden changes or restructuring processes, you may experience:

- **Increased worry** about job security or role changes.
- **Emotional ups and downs** as new information unfolds.
- **Reduced focus and productivity** due to heightened stress.
- **Strained relationships** as everyone adapts to shifting dynamics.

Recognizing these responses as normal can help you take proactive steps to manage them effectively.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO MANAGE UNCERTAINTY AND ANXIETY

1. Acknowledge the difficulty and your feelings

It is natural to experience strong emotions when faced with uncertainty, especially when decisions about positions and budgets are unclear. Events that suggest a possible loss of stability or security can trigger fear, frustration, or anxiety. Acknowledging these feelings—rather than ignoring or denying them—can be an important step in coping effectively. Consider:

- Naming your emotions by finishing the phrase “I am feeling...” to better understand what is surfacing. If needed, refer to a “feelings wheel” to find the right words.
- Talking to trusted colleagues, friends, or mentors about your experiences.
- Journaling or writing out your concerns to help process emotions constructively.

2. Focus on what you can control

When events feel unpredictable and you feel anxious, it is helpful to identify what you can control or influence and separate those things from what is beyond your control. Focusing on things you can influence reduces feelings of overwhelm and powerlessness. While you cannot control external events like political outcomes or the actions of others, you can take small, actionable steps to care for yourself and others.

Try:

- Writing down a list of things that are currently causing you stress. Next, separate them into three categories: “Things I can control,” “Things I can influence,” and “Things I cannot control.” This helps clarify where to focus your energy and can help you let go of the things that are beyond your control.
- Listing the specific actions you can take in your role to support positive change, even if they seem small. Every positive action matters.
- Maintaining strong work performance and professional development.
- Strengthening relationships with colleagues.
- Managing your own stress response through self-care and boundaries.

3. Practice grounding techniques to manage strong anxiety

When anxiety builds, it can be difficult to concentrate or think clearly. Grounding techniques help calm the nervous system and bring your focus back to the present. Try:

- **5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Exercise:** Name 5 things you see, 4 things you touch, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, and 1 thing you taste. This technique helps anchor you in the moment.
- **Deep breathing:** Inhale for four counts, hold for four, and exhale for four. This activates your body’s relaxation response and reduces tension.
- **Distanced self-talk:** When caught in rumination, shift your perspective by referring to yourself in the third person. For example, “*Chris, you’ve handled challenges before, and you will again.*” This approach helps create emotional distance and reduces anxiety.

- **Zoom out:** When stress feels overwhelming, take a broader view. Consider past challenges you've overcome, historical resilience, or the bigger picture of your career and life.

4. Establish predictable routines

Routines create a sense of stability, which is especially important during times of uncertainty. A predictable structure provides a sense of control and helps regulate your stress response by reducing decision fatigue, increasing feelings of normalcy, and soothing anxiety. Even small, consistent routines can help create a greater sense of safety and wellbeing. Consider:

- Morning and evening rituals that ground your day, such as stretching, journaling, or preparing a favorite beverage.
- Consistent work habits, like structured breaks, dedicated focus time, or a defined end-of-day routine to transition from work to personal time.
- Regular check-ins with peers or mentors to maintain a sense of connection and stability.
- Engaging in familiar activities, such as exercise, reading, or hobbies, to reinforce a sense of normalcy and control.

5. Set information and conversation boundaries

Constant exposure to discussions or information about pending changes can increase stress and uncertainty. While staying informed is important, over-consuming information—whether through doom-scrolling, excessive speculation, or repeated discussions—can make anxiety worse. Protect your mental space by setting boundaries around when and how you engage with news and information. Try:

- Limiting exposure to workplace rumors or unverified updates.
- Checking official company communications at set times rather than constantly.
- Focusing discussions on problem-solving rather than speculation.
- Setting conversational boundaries: If you find yourself repeatedly drawn into discussions that feel unproductive or demoralizing, let people know that you need to step back from certain conversations for your own mental wellbeing.

6. Practice self-care

Experiencing extended change processes can be emotionally draining. The prolonged uncertainty, shifting expectations, and evolving work environments can take a toll on

mental and physical health. Prioritizing self-care is essential for maintaining resilience and long-term wellbeing. It is easy to neglect self-care when feeling stressed and anxious, but maintaining regular habits will improve your ability to cope. Try:

- **Evaluate your basic self-care habits:** Assess your current sleep, eating, and exercise patterns. Identify small, realistic changes you can make this week to support your wellbeing.
- **Defuse stress reactions:** Uncertainty triggers physical stress responses. Find ways to release and process this energy through movement or creative activities:
 - Move your body—walk, run, dance, stretch.
 - Engage in a creative activity—cook, paint, write, garden, knit, or do a puzzle.
 - Organize something—clean a cupboard, sort a drawer, or organize your workspace.

7. Stay connected and seek support

Isolation tends to amplify anxiety, while strong support networks can provide reassurance and stability. Talking with trusted colleagues, friends, or family members about your experiences can normalize your feelings and provide reassurance that you are not facing challenges alone. Maintain:

- Open conversations with colleagues about shared experiences.
- Regular check-ins with mentors, managers, or trusted peers.
- Professional support (e.g., Employee Assistance Programs or counseling) if anxiety feels overwhelming.

8. Cultivate a growth mindset

Uncertainty often brings unexpected challenges but also opportunities for growth. By shifting your mindset, you can turn uncertainty into a catalyst for resilience and personal development. Reframe this period as a time you may be able to:

- Innovate in response to need
- Develop new skills or explore different roles within the organization.
- Strengthen adaptability and problem-solving abilities.
- Expand professional networks and collaborations.

REFLECTION AND ACTION PLANNING

Charting a course through upheaval and adapting to change takes time. By focusing on what you can control, maintaining stabilizing routines, and seeking connection and support, you can navigate uncertainty with more confidence and less anxiety.

Taking small, intentional steps can make a significant difference in navigating uncertainty with resilience and clarity. To help apply these strategies, consider these reflection questions:

- What aspects of uncertainty are causing me the most stress?
- Which coping strategies have helped me manage change effectively in the past?
- What support networks or resources can I lean on during this transition?
- What is one area where I can set better boundaries to protect my mental space?
- How can I incorporate small, consistent self-care practices into my routine?

Action Planning:

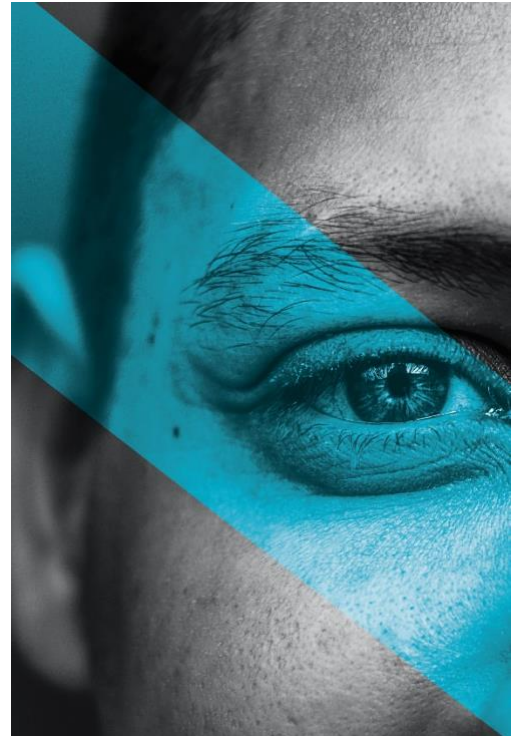
1. Review your responses to the reflection questions.
2. Identify up to three specific actions you want to prioritize.
3. Write them down and set a plan to integrate them into your daily or weekly routine.
4. Check in with yourself regularly to assess progress and adjust as needed.

ABOUT KONTERRA

At KonTerra, we specialize in supporting clients that operate in complex and high-stress environments where organizations and their staff face difficult challenges.

When staff work in high-pressure roles or locations with elevated exposure to threat, suffering, graphic content, or conflict, they are at risk of experiencing overload, attrition, and stress reactions such as burnout. The KonTerra Group works directly with individuals, leaders, and teams to equip them with tools to better understand and manage the challenges they face.

Providing support in a meaningful way is only possible with the right people. The experience and sensitivity of our counselors, trainers, and coaches allows us to work with clients in a way that is unique. Our specialists all share two attributes which equip them to deliver excellent support: all are veteran mental health clinicians (master's or doctoral-level); and experienced supporting staff in high-stress and high-stakes environments and roles.



Services delivered by our uniquely positioned professionals include:

- Individual Counseling and Coaching
- Virtual and Onsite Training and Educational Events
- Staff Wellbeing Assessments
- Manager Support and Consultations for Organizations and Leaders
- Critical Incident Response Services

If you are interested in learning more about any of the above services, please contact your KonTerra Account Manager or email: info@konterragroup.net.