

Life Transitions Pathway

Research Context and Evidence Base



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Purpose: Research context document

Note: This document does not describe a clinical intervention and does not claim therapeutic outcomes.

Executive Summary

This document outlines the research context informing the Life Transitions Pathway.

Major life transitions — including menopause, relocation, and relationship change — are consistently associated with increased stress, identity disruption, and uncertainty. While there is no single evidence base addressing life transitions as a unified category, this pathway draws on adjacent research examining stress regulation, identity change, and responses to natural environments.

Key points from the evidence include:

- Major life events are associated with cumulative psychological and physiological stress.
- The menopausal transition is linked with increased stress sensitivity, sleep disruption, and changes in mood and cognition.
- Exposure to natural environments is associated with reduced stress markers and improved autonomic regulation.
- Environmental psychology research highlights the role of place attachment and non-directive settings during periods of change.

Evidence is broad, indirect, and variable in quality. For these reasons, the Life Transitions Pathway is offered as a supportive, non-therapeutic experience rather than a treatment or intervention.

Purpose of This Document

This document provides research context for the Life Transitions Pathway.

It explains how the pathway is informed by existing research into life events, stress physiology, menopause, identity change, and environmental psychology. It does not claim treatment effects and does not replace medical, psychological, or social care.

The Life Transitions Pathway: Experiential Focus

The Life Transitions Pathway supports people navigating periods of significant change, including menopause, relocation, and changes in relationship or marital status.

The emphasis is on:

- Regulation rather than resolution
- Sensory experience rather than discussion
- Reduced demand and flexible engagement

Participants are not asked to define their transition, explain their experience, or move towards a particular outcome.

Research Context

Scope of the Evidence

There is no single body of research addressing life transitions as an intervention category.

Instead, this pathway draws on research from adjacent fields that explore how people respond to stress, uncertainty, and identity disruption during periods of change.

The studies included provide context rather than prescription.

Life Transitions and Cumulative Stress

Research on life events consistently shows that major transitions — even when positive or chosen — increase overall stress load.

Findings across studies associate life transitions with:

- Increased psychological stress
- Disruption to routines and social roles
- Heightened vulnerability to anxiety, low mood, and fatigue

Cumulative or overlapping transitions may amplify these effects.

Menopause and Stress Sensitivity

The menopausal transition is increasingly recognised as a whole-body process rather than a solely reproductive one.

Research associates menopause with:

- Neuroendocrine and hormonal fluctuation
- Increased stress reactivity

- Sleep disruption and fatigue
- Changes in mood, attention, and cognitive load

This pathway does not treat menopausal symptoms. It is informed by research suggesting that stress regulation and supportive environments may be relevant alongside medical care.

Nature Exposure and Stress Regulation

A substantial body of research links exposure to natural environments with:

- Reduced physiological stress markers (e.g. cortisol)
- Improved autonomic regulation
- Reduced perceived stress

These findings are relevant across life transitions where stress systems may be under sustained load.

Identity, Meaning, and Liminal Experience

Life transitions often involve a liminal period — a sense of being between identities, roles, or life stages.

Qualitative research highlights that:

- Transitions may involve grief for what has ended
- There is often pressure to “move on” quickly
- Non-directive environments can support reflection without forcing narrative or resolution

Nature-based experiences are frequently described as supportive during these in-between periods.

Relocation, Belonging, and Place Attachment

Research in environmental psychology suggests that relocation is associated with:

- Loss of familiar cultural and social cues
- Disruption to identity and belonging
- Increased stress and loneliness

Connection to place, including access to natural environments, has been linked with grounding and emotional stability during adjustment periods.

Relationship Change and Emotional Load

Changes in relationship or marital status are consistently ranked among the most stressful life events.

These transitions may involve:

- Grief and ambiguity
- Social role change
- Increased emotional and cognitive load

Low-pressure, non-verbal experiences may feel more accessible during these periods than talk-based approaches.

Summary of Key Studies (Indicative)

Study	Population / Setting	Focus	Key Findings	Limitations
Holmes & Rahe, 1967	General population	Life events	Transitions linked to stress load	Descriptive
Avis et al., 2015	Midlife women	Menopause	Increased mood and stress symptoms	Variable findings
Park et al., 2010	Healthy adults	Stress physiology	Reduced cortisol in forests	Short-term
Antonelli et al., 2019	Systematic review	Cortisol	Stress marker reductions	Heterogeneous
Scopelliti & Giuliani, 2004	Adults	Place attachment	Link to wellbeing	Context-specific

Limitations of the Evidence

- Evidence is stronger for stress reduction than for specific transition outcomes
- Menopause research is growing but uneven
- Findings are largely associational
- Individual experiences of transition vary widely

Because of these limitations, this pathway does not claim therapeutic outcomes.

How This Research Informs the Life Transitions Pathway

The research context above informs:

- Slow pacing and flexible engagement
- Emphasis on sensory experience rather than discussion
- Respect for ambiguity and not-knowing
- Absence of outcome-driven expectations

Participants are invited to engage without pressure to define or resolve their experience.

Closing Note

Life transitions are complex, overlapping, and often non-linear.

The Life Transitions Pathway offers a supportive setting during change, without expectation or prescription.

References

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