

Quarter-life Crisis and Midlife Crisis: Everything You Need To Know About Midlife Crisis and How to Deal with It

A crisis is a period of time defined by struggle and uncertainty. Oftentimes, it is a turning point in life. There are two typical “life crises” that invoke reflection and change: a quarter-life crisis and a midlife crisis.

The term quarter-life crisis is relatively new. This applies to those around 25 years old who experience a sense of misguidedness early on. At 25, young adults stop and reflect on the path they’ve taken and where they are in life at this point.

In modern society, common milestones of a 25-year-old include a steady job, financial independence, moving out of their parent’s house, and a committed romantic relationship. A quarter-life crisis typically occurs when one measures their life experiences against expected milestones and feels they are falling short.

A midlife crisis is incited in a similar way. Middle-aged people begin to measure their life experience against certain milestones that may include owning a home, having children or grandchildren, being on track to retire, etc.

However, a midlife crisis tends to be more intense than a quarter-life crisis. This is because those ages 40-60 may feel that time is no longer on their side.

Midlife Crisis Signs

How do you know if you’re experiencing a midlife crisis? There are emotional and behavioral signs that you can look out for as you approach your middle years of life.

According to Harvard Business Review, a midlife crisis is frequently caused by perceived professional shortcomings (Setiya 2020). From ages 40-60, professionals begin to enter the final phase of their careers. This can either be a relief or a major stressor.

Signs of a career-incited midlife crisis include: feeling as though we did not reach our career goals, that we spent too much or too little time working, or that we did not reach our highest earning potential. This can create feelings of regret, inadequacy, and a lost sense of identity.

However, a midlife crisis can begin to affect our ability to function. These signs of a midlife crisis may include anxiety, depression, lack of motivation, fatigue, trouble sleeping, social withdrawal, and lack of self-care.

Coping with a midlife crisis

There are many ways to cope with a midlife crisis. Depending on the length and severity to which you are experiencing negative effects, you may need to consult with your healthcare providers for professional assistance.

If your signs and symptoms are on the milder, more manageable side, consider some self-care rituals to help you cope. As midlife crises present themselves emotionally, behaviorally, and physically, begin by noting which signs and symptoms you are experiencing.

Reflection journaling

If you are struggling emotionally, take time to reflect. Writing in a journal about your feelings, goals, and life experiences will help you organize your thoughts. You can use this information to identify patterns that require attention.

In your journal, you can track triggering thoughts or experiences and your mood. From there, you can begin therapeutic techniques. Many who experience a midlife crisis feel inadequate or do not have anything to be proud of or excited about.

Set up your journal to incorporate sections in which you can write down affirmations that directly respond to your perceived shortcomings. For example, if your shortcoming is “I spent too much time working and not enough time living” rephrase this to: “My work ethic and motivation led me to my career success so that I can now live the life I want to.”

This can also be done with gratitude lists. Using the same shortcoming example, this statement can be turned into: “I am grateful for all of the professional opportunities I had. I am grateful for dedicating more time to life outside of work now.”

Enhancing relationships

During a career-induced midlife crisis, we feel that we have sacrificed our relationships for professional goals. This can manifest in feelings of regret and loneliness.

To combat these feelings, schedule time to spend with people who matter to us. It is easy to reclude into our jobs or allow the stress/fatigue of our work to consume our time. However, maintaining relationships will relieve feelings of isolation during a midlife crisis.

Pursuing self-care activities, hobbies, and exercise

During times of emotional distress, we must take care of our mental and physical well-being. Creating self-care routines during a midlife crisis can alleviate feelings of dissatisfaction and general unwellness.

Some common signs of a midlife crisis that are significantly impacting one's life include neglecting hygiene, sleep, health, and beloved hobbies. As you engage in the reflection process, you can also write down your daily self-care goals in your journal.

By making time for your hobbies, you can mitigate feelings of discontent with your professional milestones by focusing on things that bring you joy. This will place value on your interests rather than solely on your career.

Preventing a midlife crisis

Midlife crises tend to be reactive to a regretful past with fear of limited time in the future. As we approach our middle-aged years, we want to feel as if we worked to live rather than lived to work.

The key to avoiding a career-triggered midlife crisis is to find purpose in personal reflection, relationships, self-care, and hobbies. To prevent a midlife crisis, it is important to begin these “coping” processes early—before the crisis hits.

By consistently reflecting throughout each stage of life, we are more likely to come to terms with the aging process. This builds a sense of self-awareness which is an understanding of the function of each stage of life. With this understanding, we can evaluate what is best for us earlier on: preventing feelings of regret and disappointment.

Similarly, by keeping relationships with family and friends strong and maintaining our health and interests outside of work, we are more likely to feel fulfilled by our lives outside of work and less likely to feel consumed by our jobs.

References

Setiya, K. (2020, December 2). *Cope or quit? facing a mid-career crisis*. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved December 19, 2022, from <https://hbr.org/2019/03/facing-your-mid-career-crisis>