

Making a change How easy is it for us to change our lives - and why?

In 1990, a young American named Christopher McCandless gave up his career plans, left behind everyone he knew, including his family, and went off on an adventure. He was 22 at the time. In an act of kindness, he donated all his savings to the famous charity, Oxfam International, and hitchhiked his way through America to Alaska. His decisions were so unusual for his age that Jon Krakauer wrote a book about them called *Into the Wild*, and Sean Penn directed a film that had the same title.

Of course, this is an unusual story. Most college graduates would not do quite the same thing. However, studies do show that in teenage years, people are more likely to try out new experiences. Instead of following the family career path, for example, and working his way up the same organisation like his grandfather did, a 15-year-old may dream about becoming a traveller - only to find in his early 20s that this fascination with new places is declining and change is less attractive. This age-related trend can be observed in all cultures.

The reason why people all over the world become less keen to change as they get older may be because people's lives generally follow similar patterns and involve similar demands. Most people, wherever they are, aim to find a job and a partner. As they get older, they may have young children to look after and possibly elderly family members. These responsibilities cannot be achieved without some degree of consistency, which means that new experiences and ideas may not have a place in the person's life. New experiences may bring excitement but also insecurity, and so most people prefer to stay with the familiar.

However, not every individual is the same. One toddler may want to play a different game every day and get fed up if nothing changes at the nursery. Another may seek out and play with the same children and toys on every visit. Young children who avoid new experiences will grow up to be more conventional than others. Psychologists argue that those who have more open personalities as children are more open than others might be when they are older. They also suggest that young men have a greater interest in novelty than women, although, as they age, this desire for new experiences fades more quickly than it does in women.

The truth is that, as we get older, we prefer the things we know. We tend to order the same meals in restaurants, sit on the same side of the train when we commute to work, go on holiday to the same places and construct our day in the same way. If you are older than 20, remember that your openness to new experiences is slowly declining.

So you are better off making a new start today than postponing it until later.

Questions 1-6

Do the following statements agree with the claims of the writer in the reading passage?

Write

YES *if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer*

NO *if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer*

NOT GIVEN *if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this*

- 1 Teenagers are more ready to have new experiences than young adults.
- 2 Grandparents usually encourage their grandchildren to get a well-paid job.
- 3 Life demands are different depending on which country you live in.
- 4 Some toddlers find repetitive activities boring.
- 5 Children who dislike new experiences become more adventurous than others as adults.
- 6 If you want to change something in your life, you should avoid delay.