

Managing Job Loss Stress

Guidelines for Coping

When you lose your job, it's natural that your reactions include a wide range of feelings and emotions. These feelings are normal because you are experiencing a sense of loss (your job) that is very important to you. The following are some guidelines to help you cope.

Immediate

Don't panic.

It is likely that your initial reaction to the announcement was shock, even though you may have suspected that the announcement would be made. You may have problems concentrating or may feel anxious. You may be angry or sad.

Give yourself time to think about your situation.

Sometimes we react emotionally and say or do things that we may regret later. Take a "time-out." It works for the professionals on the ball field and it can work for you. Give yourself time to plan your strategy.

Don't lose control.

Chances are you may be experiencing all sorts of feelings such as shock, anger to relief. Try to label your feelings. Chances are you'll handle this, because you've managed major changes in the past. But again, if you feel you might lose control and do something that may be harmful to you or others, immediately talk to someone and ask for help.

Prepare to talk to your spouse or partner.

Be ready to answer these questions:

- > Why are you losing your job?
- > How will retirement or pension benefit be distributed?
- > How long will your medical coverage continue?
- > What about life insurance?
- > What kind of support will you get to help you find a new job?
- > What other resources will be provided to assist you?

Ongoing

Take care of yourself.

Drive carefully; resist the temptation to take out your feelings in traffic. If you need to pull over and take a "time-out," do it!

Talk to your family.

As difficult as the situation may be, let your spouse or partner know what is going on. Recall your first reaction; remember how you felt. Your partner probably feels the same way. He or she may also feel anger or shock. Ask for their support.

Take a break.

Get something accomplished around the house. Get a small project out of the way. Accomplish short-term goals. This will bring a sense of control of your life.

Be aware of your stress level.

If you feel particularly stressed, take a walk or perform an activity to relieve your tension. Moderate exercise can help you manage stress. Try to cut down on caffeine and alcohol as they can add to your stress level.

Don't rush out and tell everyone you need a job.

Wait until you are prepared and have clear objectives regarding your job search. Otherwise, you may waste a very important contact.

Be cautious about thinking of the past.

Prepare to move forward. You need to prepare yourself to find a new job and new opportunities.

Stay socially involved.

Continue to socialize. Don't put everything off until "life settles down." It's okay to have fun while in transition. Go to the party! Enjoy a good movie! Have fun with your children. Taking a job search seriously doesn't mean being serious all the time.

Realize there will be ups and downs.

Rainy days, flat tires and late mail deliveries may take on undue significance.

Don't overreact.

Do not make major life decisions until you have a plan of action regarding a job search.

Practice moving forward.

While this may not be helpful at this moment, people do get new (often better) positions, no matter what the industry, stock market or local news sources say about employment outlook. Use your energy to keep moving forward not looking back.

Don't blame every problem on the job loss.

Avoid blaming everything that goes wrong on the job loss. Blame does not fix the problem. Remember, children whose parents have not lost their jobs are also having problems at school; faucets leak in "normal" households; and couples disagree in the best of times.

Share your thoughts with your spouse, your partner and your family.

"Protecting" your family members from what you consider "bad" news is not the answer. Inform them of your situation; let them know that you are moving forward and that you need their support. Include your children in this discussion. It will ease their fears and they can learn from your example.

Recharge yourself.

Make the most of this time to recharge yourself before starting something new. Listen to music; visit friends; teach a class or even sign up for a class yourself.

Finally

Work diligently on your new job search strategy!

The right approach will help you to reposition yourself in your job search!

Additional Information

This information is brought to you by State of Idaho EAP. This company-sponsored benefit offers confidential help and support 24 hours a day, 7 days per week, at no cost to you or your immediate family. The Guidance Consultants can assist you with your concerns at: **833-955-3400**

Practical Guide to Coping With Job Loss

Give yourself permission to feel. Express your feelings. Take time to cry, if needed. Don't repress any recurring thoughts or emotions. Talk with others about how you feel. Write your thoughts down. These thoughts and emotions will diminish over time.

Find someone you trust. Talk with a family member or close friend about your experience. Have someone stay with you, if you live alone. Do not carry the burden of this experience alone; share it with those who care about you. Talking about the situation will help you clarify your plan to find new employment or opportunities.

Take care of yourself. Get enough rest and eat regular meals. If you are irritable from lack of sleep or if you are not eating regularly, you will have less energy to cope with the situation.

Make daily decisions. This will give you a feeling of control over your life. Know your limits. If the problem is beyond your control and cannot be changed, accept it.

Maintain your daily routine. This will also give you a feeling of control over your life.

Practice relaxation and meditation. Create a quiet scene. You can't always get away from a situation, but you can visualize a quiet scene or a walk along the beach. Such visualization will temporarily remove you from the turmoil of the present situation.

Take one thing at a time. At this time, any ordinary workload may seem overwhelming. Do not overwhelm yourself by multi tasking. Perform one task at a time.

Allow extra time. This will help reduce the time pressure. If you usually plan half an hour to complete a task, schedule forty-five minutes to complete it. Do the best you can. Do not be too critical of yourself.

Create a pleasant and comfortable environment. Surround yourself with things you like and enjoy. Listen to music.

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Dealing With Loss

When dealing with a major loss, such as losing one's job, there are several similarities that everyone experiences. It is called a grief process—grieving over losing one's income, stability of a job, loss of friends, social connections or work identity. The grief process has several stages with an expected resolution of accepting the loss and finding new opportunities.

Denial and Isolation. The initial state of denial is common when confronted with a major loss. This inability to comprehend fully what happened is short lived. Disbelief and shock is a common reaction. There is also a tendency to withdraw from social and daily activities.

Anger. Once the shock of the loss has subsided, it is common to react with anger, rage or resentment. These feelings may be directed at the employer, the person making the announcement, family members, friends or co-workers. You may find yourself more irritable and impatient.

Bargaining. This is an attempt to postpone the grieving process by bargaining with the employer.

Depression. Anger may be replaced by a sense of loss or physical and emotional distress over the future. Physical expressions of grief may include decreased appetite, sleep disturbances, weight loss or difficulties concentrating. Emotional expressions of distress may include crying, panic and helplessness in relation to losing one's job and looking for new opportunities.

Acceptance. This is the final stage of grief when the loss of job is fully accepted. You are now ready to face new challenges and opportunities.

There can be great variations of how people will experience loss of employment and the above stages may not be followed in the specified order. In fact, people may go back and forth between the stages as they may experience a wide range of emotions at different times. Some people may be relieved and may not experience the loss. Regardless, you will be able to cope with your situation. You will be able to develop strategies on how to find new employment opportunities. You will find a new job or new opportunities to lead a productive life! However, if the signs of grief persist, it would be beneficial for you to seek professional assistance to help you resolve the grief process and return to a state of productivity and wellbeing.

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Common Reactions Following Job Loss

I. Physical Reactions

- > Shock
- > Fatigue
- > Insomnia
- > Headaches
- > Low energy
- > Loss of appetite

II. Emotional Reactions

- > Fear
- > Grief
- > Anger
- > Denial
- > Anxiety
- > Sadness
- > Irritability
- > Depression
- > Apprehension

III. Cognitive Reactions

- > Confusion
- > Forgetfulness
- > Poor coping skills
- > Lack of concentration
- > Poor decision-making
- > Poor problem solving

IV. Behavioral Reactions

- > Emotional outbursts
- > Avoidance of others
- > Increased need to keep busy
- > Impaired level of functioning
- > Increased or decreased appetite
- > Increased alcohol consumption
- > Increased interpersonal conflicts
- > Decreased interests in usual activities
- > Trouble sleeping or excessive sleeping

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Job Loss Do's and Don'ts

People who have experienced job loss may experience changes in their behavior. These suggestions will help you reduce the probability of long term reactions.

Do's

- > Get enough rest.
- > Maintain a good diet.
- > Maintain an exercise routine.
- > Follow regular daily activities.
- > Talk to friends and family.
- > Take one thing at a time.
- > Maintain your sense of humor.
- > Expect the experience to upset you.
- > Ask for help if your reactions persist.
- > Remind yourself that things will improve.
- > Attend meetings regarding this situation.

Don'ts

- > Drink alcohol excessively.
- > Use drugs or alcohol to numb feelings.
- > Reduce leisure activities.
- > Withdraw from others.
- > Take on new major projects.
- > Look for easy answers.
- > Have unrealistic expectations.
- > Pretend that everything is fine.
- > Blame everything on the job loss.
- > Dwell on the job loss.

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