

Experiencing a Job Loss

You have just learned that you have or will soon lose your job. Since our careers and work lives satisfy many of our needs such as self-esteem, a sense of life meaning and financial security, receiving news about a job loss is never easy to face.

As with any loss, losing a job is most often an experience that is accompanied by uncertainty, anxiety, and perhaps some questions as to how you will manage and cope. Even though it does not make it easier, it is helpful to understand normal reactions during the early stages after learning this news, and to consider some steps that can help strengthen your ability to cope during this time.

Early Reactions

When you are first informed about a job loss, it is normal to react with feelings of shock, disbelief, and sometimes anger, especially if this was unanticipated. These reactions of shock and disbelief can evoke a sense of detachment and a feeling of numbness. Even if you anticipated that you might be facing a job loss, you may still react with anger, irritability, and general distress in the moments following your being informed.

As the realization sets in that you have lost your job and nothing can change this reality, it is normal to experience a range of reactions triggered by general concerns and anxiety for your future. These reactions can vary in intensity as you come to terms with your job loss circumstances. As you work through the impact of this loss, you may experience waves of sadness, anger, and anxiety as you reflect on how you are going to cope with this major life change.

This can be a time that triggers questions and thoughts about what factors contributed towards the job loss. Some individuals will ask themselves “Why me?” or “What did I do wrong?” or “What could have I done differently to prevent this from happening?” This self-reflection is natural, but may be too soon in the early part of this experience to be helpful; it may in fact lead to fostering discouragement and self-devaluing behaviours.

While many individuals will be generally upset, some individuals may feel a sense of relief after hearing the news, particularly if they have experienced a recent period of uncertainty about their job security. Some may even react with a more positive, hopeful outlook if this change allows them to move forward and explore new career or life opportunities.

Surviving and thriving – How long will the adjustment period last?

This varies with each person, given everyone’s unique circumstances. Some people adjust within a short period of time, while others will require a longer period of adjustment. On certain days you may feel worried, while on other days, you will feel more confident and ready to move forward with new career and life directions.

Remind yourself that you are experiencing normal reactions in dealing with a major life transition. It may require a certain period of time before you feel fully re-adjusted and comfortable with your changed life.

Moving Forward

It is normal to experience significant difficulty accepting a major life change and most individuals will require varying periods of time before they are ready to move forward after a job loss.

Need more assistance or support?

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Your natural resilience to cope with resulting life changes will strengthen with time as you work through the adjustment and recovery phases. As you move forward, it will be helpful to mobilize your energy and focus on constructive activities, creative new ideas and projects that will support your future direction. During this period of readjustment, you may notice that new ways of resuming a productive life are helping you move forward. This phase will further strengthen your resilience and healthy adaptation to a job loss. A resurgence of self-confidence can be experienced during this time of change and personal growth.

What steps can you take to support your adjustment?

- **Do not devalue yourself.** You will need all your energy to maintain your motivation and to get organized, so you can begin the task of transitioning to new opportunities. Negative and self-deprecating thoughts can disrupt the energy needed to be successful.
- **Reflect positively on your work experience.** Losing your job does not mean that you have lost your skills, expertise, and accomplishments. Reminding yourself about this will help restore your self-confidence. This reflection should also help you understand what aspects of your work you are good at and value the most. Identify the various skills you have and consider areas where you may require further development.
- **Develop a plan which will help you organize job search activities.** Explore work opportunities that are best suited to your aptitudes, interests, and experience. Determine your job search strategy, including whether you may consider other areas of work. Consult resources that will assist you with your search. Establish an action plan which will help you assess your progress and maintain your motivation.
- **Be open to exploring different opportunities and other ways to utilize your skills.** This may involve considering a somewhat or significantly different kind of job, even a possible career change. Some people who have lost a job explore the idea of creating their own business.
- **Consider seeking the support and guidance of a career or vocational counsellor.** Whether through your EFAP or other community resources, seasoned professionals can help you get started in the right direction and assist with the realization of your personal action plan.
- **Take time to talk about your reactions and feelings with family, relatives or close friends.** It can be very beneficial and helpful to ask them for their support and advice.
- **Take care of yourself.** During this transition period, it is very important that you continue to enjoy life activities, connect with family or friends, exercise, and engage in hobbies or cultural and social events. This should help you stay motivated and provide a different perspective on your situation.
- **Reflect on any lessons learned from the experience.** Whatever the reason might be for your job loss, take time to reflect on and identify possible lessons learned that can be helpful with your next job. What you have learned can contribute to making this experience an opportunity for personal growth and development.

Need more assistance or support?

For more information, to book a counselling session or to access Homewood Health for any additional assistance or support, contact our Client Services Centre available to you 24/7 in English and French. All calls are completely confidential.

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