

## Job Loss and Unemployment Stress

### Coping with the Stress of Losing a Job



Losing a job is one of life's most stressful experiences. It's normal to feel angry, hurt, or depressed, grieve at all that you've lost, or feel anxious about what the future holds. Job loss and unemployment involves a lot of change all at once, which can rock your sense of purpose and self-esteem. While the stress can seem overwhelming, there are many things you can do to take control of the situation, maintain your spirits, and come out of this difficult period stronger, more resilient, and with a renewed sense of purpose.

### Why is job loss so stressful?

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Our jobs are much more than just the way we make a living. They influence how we see ourselves, as well as the way others see us. They give us structure, purpose, and meaning. That's why job loss and unemployment can be so stressful.

Beyond the loss of income, losing a job also comes with other major losses, some of which may be even more difficult to face:

- ▶ Loss of your professional identity
- ▶ Loss of self-esteem and self-confidence
- ▶ Loss of your daily routine
- ▶ Loss of purposeful activity
- ▶ Loss of your work-based social network

- ▶ Loss of your sense of security

No matter how devastating your losses seem right now, there is hope. In time and with the right coping techniques, you can come to terms with these setbacks, ease your stress and anxiety, and move on with your career or occupation.

## Grief after job loss

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[Grief is a natural response to loss \(/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm\)](/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm), and that includes the loss of a job. Losing your job forces you to make rapid changes, which can leave you feeling upset, angry, depressed, or out of balance.

**Give yourself time to adjust.** Grieving the loss of your job and adjusting to unemployment can take time. Try to accept your feelings and go easy on yourself.

**Think of your job loss as a temporary setback.** Most successful people have experienced major setbacks in their careers but have turned things around by picking themselves up, learning from the experience, and trying again. You can do the same.



(/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm)

[Coping with Grief and Loss: \(/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm\)](/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm) Dealing with the Grieving Process

**Express your feelings in a creative way.** Writing about your loss in a journal, for example, can help you to look realistically at your new situation and put things into perspective.

While everyone grieves differently, the following coping tips can help you deal with both the grieving process and the stress of your job loss in a healthy way.

## Reach out to stay strong

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Your natural reaction at this difficult time may be to withdraw from friends and family out of shame or embarrassment. But don't underestimate the importance of other people when you're faced with the stress of job loss and unemployment. Social contact is nature's antidote to stress. Nothing works better at calming your nervous system than talking face to face with a good listener.

- ▶ The person you talk to doesn't have to be able to offer solutions; they just have to be a good listener, someone who'll listen attentively without being distracted or judging you.
- ▶ As well as making a huge difference to how you feel, reaching out to others can help you feel more in control of your situation—and you never know what opportunities will arise.
- ▶ You may want to resist asking for support out of pride but opening up won't make you a burden to others. In fact, most people will be flattered that you trust them enough to confide in them, and it will only strengthen your relationship.

### Developing new relationships after your job loss

It's never too late to [expand your social network](/articles/relationships-communication/making-good-friends.htm) (/articles/relationships-communication/making-good-friends.htm). It can be crucial in both helping you cope with the stress of job loss and unemployment—and in finding new work.

**Build new friendships.** Meet new people with common interests by taking a class or joining a club such as a book group, dinner club, or sports team.

**Join a job club.** Other job seekers can be invaluable sources of encouragement, support, and job leads. Being around others facing similar challenges can help energize and motivate you during your job search.



(/articles/relationships-communication/job-networking-tips.htm)

[Job Networking Tips: \(/articles/relationships-communication/job-networking-tips.htm\)](/articles/relationships-communication/job-networking-tips.htm) Building Relationships

**Network for new employment.** The vast majority of job openings are never advertised; they're filled by [networking \(/articles/relationships-communication/job-networking-tips.htm\)](/articles/relationships-communication/job-networking-tips.htm). Networking may sound intimidating or difficult—especially when it comes to finding a job—but it doesn't have to be, even if you're an introvert or you feel like you don't know many people.

**Volunteer.** While unemployment can wear on your self-esteem, volunteering helps you maintain a sense of value and purpose. And helping others is an instantaneous mood booster. [Volunteering \(/articles/healthy-living/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm\)](/articles/healthy-living/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm) can also provide career experience, social support, and networking opportunities.

## Involve your family for support

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Unemployment affects the whole family, so don't try to shoulder your problems alone. Keeping your job loss a secret will only make the situation worse. Your family's support can help you survive and thrive, even in this difficult time.

**Open up to your family.** Whether it's to ease the stress or cope with the grief of job loss, now is the time to lean on the people who care about you, even if you take pride in being strong and self-sufficient. Keep them in the loop about your job search and tell them how they can support you.

**Listen to their concerns.** Your family members are worried about you, as well as their own stability and future. Give them a chance to talk about their concerns and offer suggestions regarding your employment search.

**Make time for family fun.** Set aside regular family fun time where you can enjoy each other's company, let off steam, and forget about your unemployment troubles. This will help the whole family stay positive.

### Helping children cope with a parent's job loss

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Children can be deeply affected by a parent's unemployment. It is important for them to know what has happened and how it will affect the family. However, try not to overburden them with too many emotional or financial details.

**Keep an open dialogue with your children.** Children have a way of imagining the worst when they write their own "scripts," so the truth can actually be far less devastating than what they envision.

**Make sure your children know it's not anybody's fault.** Children may not understand about job loss and immediately think that *you* did something wrong to cause it. Or, they may feel that somehow *they* are responsible or financially burdensome. They need reassurance in these matters, regardless of their age.

**Children need to feel they are helping.** They want to help and having them do something like taking a cut in allowance, deferring expensive purchases, or getting an after-school job can make them feel as if they are part of the team.

## Face your feelings

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Anger, depression, and anxiety will make it harder to get back on the job market, so it's important to actively deal with your feelings and find healthy ways to grieve. It can be easy to turn to unhealthy habits such as drinking too much or bingeing on junk food for comfort. But these will only provide fleeting relief and in the long-term make you feel even worse. Acknowledging your feelings and challenging your negative thoughts, on the other hand, will help you deal with the loss and move on.

As well as talking to friends and family, try to:

**Write about your feelings.** Express everything you feel about being laid off or unemployed, including things you wish you had said (or hadn't said) to your former boss. This is especially cathartic if your layoff or termination was handled in an insensitive way.

**Accept reality.** While it's important to acknowledge how difficult job loss and unemployment can be, it's equally important to avoid wallowing. Rather than dwelling on your job loss—how unfair it is; how poorly it was handled; things you could have done to prevent it; how much better life would be if it hadn't happened—try to accept the situation. The sooner you do, the sooner you can get on with the next phase in your life.

**Avoid beating yourself up.** It's easy to start criticizing or blaming yourself when you've lost your job and are unemployed. But it's important to avoid putting yourself down. You'll need your self-confidence intact as you're looking for a new job. Challenge every negative thought that goes through your head. If you start to think, "I'm a loser," write down evidence to the contrary: "I lost my job because of a company takeover, not because I was bad at my job."

**Look for any silver lining.** Losing a job is easier to accept if you can find the lesson in your loss. What can you learn from the experience? Maybe your job loss and unemployment has given you a chance to reflect on what you want out of life and rethink your career priorities. Maybe it's made you stronger. If you look, you may be able to find something of value.

## Get moving to relieve stress

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If work commitments meant that you didn't have the time to exercise regularly before, it's important to make the time now. [Exercise is a powerful antidote to stress](/articles/healthy-living/the-mental-health-benefits-of-exercise.htm) (/articles/healthy-living/the-mental-health-benefits-of-exercise.htm). As well as relaxing tense muscles and relieving tension in the body, exercise releases powerful endorphins to improve your mood. Trimming your waistline and improving your physique may also give your self-confidence a boost.

Aim to exercise for 30 minutes or more per day—or break that up into short, 10-minute bursts of activity. A 10-minute walk can raise your spirits for two hours.

Rhythmic exercise—where you move both your arms and legs—is a hugely effective way to lift your mood, increase energy, sharpen focus, and relax both the mind and body. Try walking, running, weight training, swimming, martial arts, or even dancing.

To maximize stress relief, instead of continuing to focus on your thoughts, focus on your body and how it feels as you move—the sensation of your feet hitting the ground, for example, or the wind on your skin.

## Eat well to keep your focus

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Your diet may seem like the last thing you should concern yourself about when you're facing the stress of job loss and unemployment. But what you put in your body can have a huge effect on how much energy you have and how positive you feel.

**Minimize sugar and refined carbs.** You may crave sugary snacks or comfort foods such as pasta, white bread, potatoes, or French fries, but these [high-carbohydrate foods](/articles/healthy-eating/choosing-healthy-carbs.htm) (/articles/healthy-eating/choosing-healthy-carbs.htm) quickly lead to a crash in mood and energy.

**Reduce your intake of foods that can adversely affect your mood,** such as caffeine, trans fats, and foods with high levels of [chemical preservatives or hormones](/articles/healthy-eating/organic-foods.htm) (/articles/healthy-eating/organic-foods.htm).

**Eat more Omega-3 fatty acids to give your mood a boost.** [The best sources](/articles/healthy-eating/choosing-healthy-fats.htm) (/articles/healthy-eating/choosing-healthy-fats.htm) are fatty fish (salmon, herring, mackerel, anchovies, sardines), seaweed, flaxseed, and walnuts.

**Avoid nicotine.** Smoking when you're feeling stressed may seem calming, but [nicotine is a powerful stimulant](/articles/addictions/how-to-quit-smoking.htm) (/articles/addictions/how-to-quit-smoking.htm), leading to higher, not lower, levels of stress and anxiety.

**Drink alcohol in moderation.** Alcohol may temporarily reduce worry, but too much can cause even greater anxiety as it wears off.

## Take care of yourself

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The stress of job loss and unemployment can take a toll on your health. Now more than ever, it's important to take care of yourself.

**Maintain balance in your life.** Don't let your job search consume you. Make time for fun, rest, and relaxation—whatever revitalizes you. Your job search will be more effective if you are mentally, emotionally, and physically at your best.



(/articles/stress/stress-management.htm)

[Stress Management](/articles/stress/stress-management.htm): (/articles/stress/stress-management.htm) Self-Help Techniques

**Get plenty of sleep.** [Sleep](/articles/sleep/getting-better-sleep.htm) (/articles/sleep/getting-better-sleep.htm) has a huge influence on your mood and productivity. Make sure you're getting between 7 to 8 hours of sleep every night. It will help you keep your stress levels under control and maintain your focus throughout your job search.

**Practice relaxation techniques.** [Relaxation techniques](/articles/stress/relaxation-techniques-for-stress-relief.htm) (/articles/stress/relaxation-techniques-for-stress-relief.htm) such as deep breathing, meditation, and yoga are a powerful antidote to stress. They also boost your feelings of serenity and joy and teach you how to stay calm and collected in challenging situations—including job interviews.



## Stay positive to keep up your energy

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If it's taking you longer than anticipated to find work, the following tips can help you stay focused and upbeat.

**Keep a regular daily routine.** When you no longer have a job to report to every day, you can easily lose motivation. Treat your job search like a job, with a daily “start” and “end” time, with regular times for exercise and networking. Following a set schedule will help you be more efficient and productive.

**Create a job search plan.** Avoid getting overwhelmed by breaking big goals into small, manageable steps. Instead of trying to do everything at once, set priorities. If you're not having luck in your job search, take some time to rethink your goals.



(/articles/healthy-living/finding-the-right-career.htm)

[Finding the Right Career:](/articles/healthy-living/finding-the-right-career.htm) (/articles/healthy-living/finding-the-right-career.htm)

Choose or Change Career Paths

**List your positives.** Make a list of all the things you like about yourself, including skills, personality traits, accomplishments, and successes. Write down projects you're proud of, situations where you excelled, and things you're good at. Revisit this list often to remind yourself of your strengths.

**Find activities that give your life “meaning.”** For many of us, our work gives our lives meaning and purpose. Following job loss, it's important to find other ways to nourish your spirit. Pick up a long-neglected hobby, try a new hobby, get involved in your community by volunteering or attending local events, take a class, or join a club or sports team.

**Focus on the things you can control.** You can't control how quickly a potential employer calls you back or whether or not they decide to hire you. Rather than wasting your precious energy on things that are out of your hands, turn your attention to things you can control during your unemployment, such as learning new skills, writing a great cover letter and resume, and setting up meetings with your networking contacts.



**Help yourself to stay on task.** If you're having trouble following through with these self-help tips to cope with job loss and unemployment stress, HelpGuide's free [Emotional Intelligence Toolkit](/articles/mental-health/emotional-intelligence-toolkit.htm) (/articles/mental-health/emotional-intelligence-toolkit.htm) can help. By learning to manage troublesome thoughts, stress, and difficult emotions you'll find it easier to follow through on positive intentions and regain control of your job search.

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