

Facing job loss is a major life event under any circumstance. You may never have thought you would be facing this day, yet now the loss of your job is touching your life.

Accepting Job Loss and Unplanned Change

Losing a job, especially when it is unplanned, is a major and significant loss. It is considered one of the most stressful of life's events and can cause a myriad of feelings to surface, not unlike those experienced from the loss of a loved one. How can you accept this event and move on with your life? Often, part of our sense of self is connected to our work role and career. Our self-worth and identity can feel diminished when our job has been terminated. What once seemed constant, certain, and helped define us has now suddenly changed.

Unfortunately, change, rather than stability, may be the only constant in today's world.

Work provides satisfaction, security and meaning in life. Leaving and facing the unknown can create feelings of anger, sadness, anxiety and loss for the entire family. Creating a positive path forward after such a loss is not easy. However, it is possible, and it can open doors for opportunity and growth. Knowing what to expect emotionally when loss and change occur and finding positive ways to manage associated stress are important keys to successfully moving forward.

Experiencing Stages of Loss and Change

Initial Stage/Learning the News

Feelings of panic, confusion, insecurity, sadness and sense of loss may prevail. Remember, these are normal reactions to a major life event. Seeking support and knowing you're not alone can make a tremendous difference.

Middle Stage/Limbo

Feelings of uncertainty, anger, bitterness, resentment and mourning can surface. The "old" is gone; the "new" has yet to start. Stay focused on your strengths and weaknesses and your values and goals.

Final Stage/Firmer Ground

Acceptance of the situation comes through grieving and working through your loss. Confidence and trust that you can adapt, grow, make positive life changes and move ahead emerge.

Coping – Change Management Skills

A number of skills can help you manage the stresses arising from job loss:

- Limit other changes in your personal and family life.
- Have realistic expectations of yourself and others.
- Judge yourself by your own standards, beliefs, values and expectations, not those of others.
- Be flexible, understanding and accepting of yourself and family.
- Set realistic goals.
- Learn to accept things you cannot change.
- Take things one at a time, one day at a time.
- Obtain information about severance and job-search benefits.
- Develop a financial plan.
- Eat nutritiously and get adequate rest.
- Work off stress through physical activities.
- Set aside time for activity and relaxation that is pleasurable.
- Maintain your sense of humor.
- Develop a support network of family and friends.
- Talk about your fears, disappointments and other feelings with someone you trust.

Believing – Moving Ahead

As you begin your job hunt, you may question your ability to move ahead or to do new and different things. This is normal. Work to keep a positive attitude about yourself. Remind yourself of all your skills and abilities. Remember past achievements if frustrations set in or temporary failure occurs. Use all resources available to you, including your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), outplacement support and networking with contacts and friends. Above all, believe in yourself.