



The Stress of Unemployment

When someone loses a job, whether it was involuntary or not, it's normal to feel a sense of loss. For a period of time, you may miss the personal work relationships, a daily schedule and routine, financial security and for some, a sense of self-worth. Even though losing your job may have been a result of a layoff due to budget cuts or a merger, you may feel as though it is your fault or in some way you have failed. And if you were responsible for losing your job, your self-esteem could be quite wounded. Regardless of how you lost your job, unemployment can be a shock to your whole system. You can experience similar feelings such as losing a close friend or relative or going through a difficult divorce. Loss triggers a grieving process that involves a number of different stages. Be aware that these stages don't necessarily occur in sequence. You can feel anxious one moment and hopeful or sad the next. Remember - feelings are never right or wrong. They just are.

The four primary stages of grief are:

- 1. Denial/Shock.** Numbness can occur when we feel that the news we have received is somehow a mistake. Our first response is very often "No, there must be a mix up." Denial often gets negative publicity, but it does have an important function. Denial protects us until we have a chance to process information. It can be seen as a safe place to be for awhile. Denial only becomes problematic if it is present too long and in the face of overwhelming realities.
- 2. Anger/Frustration.** During this phase, we often become angry with the company, ourselves, the job search environment, and sometimes even our family members or friends. No matter how confusing anger is, it becomes a necessary and healthy adjustment and demonstrates that we are moving through the grief process.
- 3. Despair/depression** This feeling can follow the wave of anger we experience. We become sad and feel despondent. Small tasks and concentrating can seem insurmountable. Despair and depression signal to us that the loss is real and is a healthy sign we are not in denial.
- 4. Acceptance/adjustment** When we have enough time to heal, we begin to accept what has transpired and we can make sense of it. When we accept the situation, it does not mean we do not feel the loss, and become saddened by it, it simply means we are able to balance the loss and move forward.

Ways to manage the stress of job loss:

- 1. Control what you can:** While you can't change events, you can control how you react to them. The simple act of consciously choosing what you will think and do in response to losing your job can help you begin to take control of the situation. See this as a challenge, not a failure or an insurmountable setback. Try not to compare yourself to others who have lost a job. Each individual is unique and reacts with a wide range

of emotions and behaviors. You can handle this one step at a time.

Page 2

- 2. Choose the positive actions you will take:** Your new job is looking for a job. Plan your day with job search activities such as writing your resume, networking or practicing interviewing skills. Try to spend time with people who are confident in you and think optimistically about your future. Talk to those who have constructive ideas and suggestions that will help you move forward.
- 3. Change your negative thinking:** Catching and stopping your negative thinking is essential to managing stress and overall emotional health. Once you've caught yourself thinking negatively, take a deep breath and say, "STOP!" Then, replace that thought with a more positive and realistic thought. Find the positive side of unemployment, such as having more time with family and friends, finishing projects, enjoying hobbies and not dealing with a commute each day.
- 4. Take care of your health:** Being under stress for any length of time can have adverse effects on your health. Make sure you get appropriate amount of sleep, nutrition and exercise to counter the stress of unemployment. This may be a good time to start an exercise program and begin eating more healthy foods. You can check out the link below to access numerous resources on exercise.
<http://search.atomz.com/search/?sp-a=sp1000a00e&sp-q=exercise>
. Avoid alcohol or drug use to manage stress. Also, take scheduled breaks in your job search and do some fun things that you enjoy.
- 5. Get professional help when you need it:** If you feel the stress of unemployment has become too great or intense and uncomfortable feelings have lasted too long or you have turned to alcohol or drugs to cope, you may wish to seek professional help. Aurora EAP can help you with information or a referral to a professional counselor in your area. We are available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. Call **800-236-3231** for confidential assistance. Also, you can check out our website: aurora.org/eap and click on "Toolkits" for more information on stress management.

