

When you lose your job, not only is your usual source of income gone, but also your personal work relationships, daily structures, and an important sense of self-purpose. Unemployment can be, and often is, a shock to your whole system. You can experience some of the same feelings and stresses that you would if you were seriously injured, going through a divorce, or mourning the loss of a loved one. You can go through some or all of the stages of grieving just as you would with any other major loss.

You will probably feel as if you are on an emotional roller-coaster. You may be shocked, angry, or deny that anything bad has happened to you. You will probably worry or feel anxious about how you are going to pay the bills. This can also make you feel frustrated and depressed. Feelings of frustration, anger, hope and excitement will all come and go while you are looking for a new job. The roller-coaster ride can often keep going until you find a new job.

If you have recently lost your job, we hope this pamphlet will help you to understand that you are not alone in your feelings and to help you cope with the difficulties of unemployment.

Why You?

Your job is a very important part of your self-esteem. When you lose your job, your self-esteem may be diminished. You may even begin to feel worthless; it is a common response.

Try to be realistic about why you lost your job. Was it something beyond your control, such as financial problems or political decisions within the company? Or were you somehow responsible?

If you decide you really were responsible for losing your job, do something to improve your job skills. There may be programs available through your local Canada Employment Centre or other community organizations. You can also check out the local library and bookstores for books on improving job skills.

WHAT ABOUT MONEY?

You have a right to claim unemployment or welfare benefits that you are entitled to, and you should do it as soon as you possibly can. There is nothing wrong about doing so.

At the same time, start thinking about how to reduce your regular living expenses. Find out about sources of low-cost entertainment, recreation, food and clothing in your community. If you have a family, everyone will need to be involved in making plans to cope with a reduced income.

CREATE A NEW DAILY ROUTINE

A job forms a large part of your daily schedule. When you lose your job, it is important for you to build and maintain a new routine. Your search for a new job will, no doubt, take a large part of your new schedule, but it will likely not take up all your time. Remember to maintain recreation and leisure time for yourself. Try to live as normally as you can while you are unemployed.

REACH OUT FOR SUPPORT

We all need to share our burdens. When we do, problems can be put into a better perspective and can seem less difficult.

Talk to your family and friends about the problems you are facing while you are unemployed. Their caring and support can help you cope during this period. You will, no doubt, find they care about you and that you are important to them whether or not you have a job. Remember, family and friends can also be a valuable source for suggestions and may even help you find a new job.

In addition to family and friends, check out local organizations for programs designed to assist unemployed people with building their self-confidence and improving job search skills. Self-help groups may also be available in your area to help you cope with the changes in your life.

If you feel your problems are too overwhelming, talk to your family doctor about seeing a mental health professional.

COPING STRATEGIES

To help you keep your stress level down, your confidence up, and your health and relationships strong, you should develop some special strategies while you are unemployed, such as:

- Establish a daily schedule including a regular time for job search activities.
- Set daily goals that you know you can accomplish. Go for a walk, go to the library, call a friend.
- Contact the local Canada Employment Centre or other employment counselling service for information on programs in your community.
- Use your networks. Tell everyone you know what kind of work you are looking for, and ask if they know of any jobs or any companies

that employ people with your skills. Your friends, relatives and acquaintances may not think of mentioning contacts to you because they don't have a clear idea of what kind of work you are looking for. Remember, many people get their jobs through "word of mouth."

- Read some books or take a workshop on stress management techniques. Everyone is under extra stress when unemployed, and you could save yourself and your family from additional emotional strain if you learn some effective stress management skills.

- Volunteer to help someone else. Both of you will feel better.

- Keep busy and stay active outside your home. Isolating yourself at home will not get you a new job and can lead to additional mental and emotional stress.

- Reward yourself on a regular basis for your efforts.

- Before you go to bed, prepare a written plan for the next day. It will give you a reason to get up in the morning.

- Pursue the hobby you always wanted but never seemed to have time for.

- Check into new career opportunities or the possibility of continuing your education.

- Keep regular hours, and get regular exercise. Limit your intake of caffeine, cigarettes and alcohol. When you do get a job, you want to be in good shape for it.

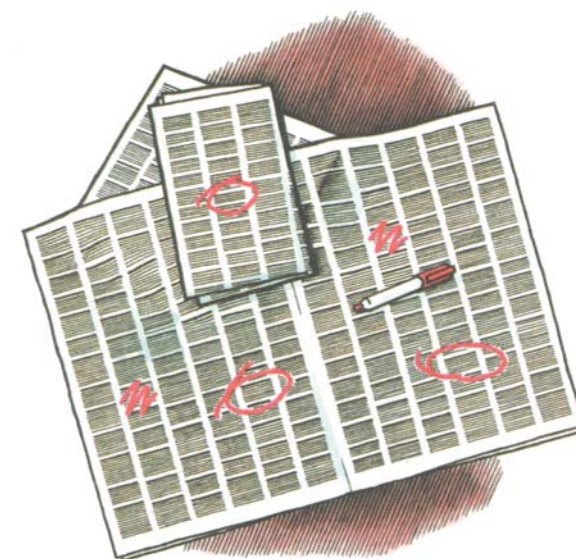
Do You Need More Help?

If you are unemployed and need further information on the community resources and programs for job search skills, career counselling and support, contact a community organization such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, which can help you find additional support.

The Canadian Mental Health Association is a nation-wide, voluntary organization that promotes the mental health of all and supports the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness. CMHA accomplishes this mission through advocacy, education, research and service.

Visit the CMHA website at www.cmha.ca today.

COPING WITH UNEMPLOYMENT



MENTALLY HEALTHY PEOPLE IN A HEALTHY SOCIETY

