



Coping with Job Loss

Losing your job can be devastating. The Canadian Mental Health Association considers job loss to be a major life crisis, comparable to serious injury, divorce, even to the death of a family member. Shock, anger, frustration, grief, worry: all of these reactions are normal stages in coming to terms with losing your job. Taking control and being active in your job search can help you to cope successfully with this transitional period in your life.

Job loss can lead to

- Feelings of shame: You may blame yourself for losing your job, even if it was in no way your fault.
- Loss of sense of identity and self worth that may have been tied up in your job.
- Loss of social ties, friendships and social gatherings associated with your job.
- Reduced income, sometimes severely reduced.
- Family stresses as a result of your loss of job and income

For many people, work provides a sense of identity, belonging, status and self-confidence. Losing your work can lead to a loss of your self worth. Losing your source of income may also leave you short of money, or even seriously financially compromised. Over time, being unemployed can lead to feelings of helplessness and burnout; some people may become seriously depressed, anxious, may develop stress related disorders, may drink too much or take drugs. Developing strategies to cope with job loss can help prevent the most debilitating aspects of being unemployed.

Take Control of your Life after Job Loss

Successful coping with job loss requires effort, planning and thought. Coping strategies put in place during the first weeks after being laid off are crucial to achieving a sense of mastery over your situation. Losing your job can lead to a sense of

powerlessness, but there are steps you can take in the early stages to regain a sense of control over your life.

Crucial steps in the weeks to a month after job loss:

Financial steps:

- Be practical. You need an income. If you are worked in a job where you paid into Canada's Employment Insurance (EI) plan and are eligible for benefits apply immediately. *Delay in filing may result in loss of benefits.*

Government of Canada. Employment Insurance Plan: How to Apply for Benefits:

http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=en/ei/application/applying_for_benefits.shtml&hs=aed

- Take advantage of any support services your former company has on offer. These might include severance packages, continuation of benefits such as medical and dental, career counseling.
- Consider your financial situation carefully and plan accordingly. Draw up a budget for your reduced financial outlook. If your circumstances are complex you may require help from a professional such as your banker or financial consultant.

For more information on financial steps see Alberta Human Resources and Employment: "Attending to the Basics" in Creating a New Future: The **job-loss** workbook
www.alis.gov.ab.ca/pdf/cshop/CreatingNewFuture.pdf

- If you are not eligible for EI, have few assets and face serious financial difficulties, welfare benefits are another option to be considered. Do not hesitate to claim the benefits you are entitled to.

Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services. Ontario Works

<http://www.cfcs.gov.on.ca/CFCS/en/programs/IES/OntarioWorks/default.htm>

Steps to keep Active:

Have you always wished you had time and energy to be a volunteer in your church or for a local charity? Have you always wanted to take up drawing or photography or to join a choir but have never had time?

Use your enforced leisure to take up activities that have always been at the back of your mind. Do volunteer work, join a political movement or party, start a hobby, help out a

neighbor. Start being active early – enjoyable, useful activity will help to sustain you, give you a sense of confidence and usefulness and help to prevent feelings of helplessness and depression. You may also make useful contacts through volunteering.

Steps to stay Positive

Be optimistic. You will find a new job, maybe even a new career. Modern North Americans change jobs six times during their lives and many people go through several whole career changes. You may not have chosen this particular time for a life change, but it has happened and you might as well take advantage. Be prepared and flexible. Losing your job can become an opportunity to discover new skills and strengths you never knew you had.

Job Hunting Tips:

- Tell everybody you know and everybody you meet that you are looking for a new job. Be clear about exactly what type of work you are looking for. Many jobs are found by word of mouth.
- Develop an overall job search strategy and daily job search schedule. Carry out your job search as though it were your job. Carry the same enthusiasm and energy to your job search as you did to your job.
- Learn what career and job search resources are available to you. For example, federal government resources such as Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, provincial resources, municipal services, community centers and agencies and public libraries.
- Learn to use the Internet. Many job opportunities are posted on the Internet. There are good job sites online below to get you started.
- Take time and thought to consider career planning: Were you satisfied with your job? Perhaps its time to make a change. Upgrade your skills? Go back to school? Take some extra courses? Consider retraining or upgrading your skills. For example, learn to use computers to be more flexible.
- Learn how to prepare a winning resume. Polish your interviewing skills. First impressions are very important: Pay careful attention to your clothing and grooming; look confident and energetic. There are websites below to help you get started.

Tips to coping with being unemployed:

Being unemployed is stressful for yourself and your family. It is not something anybody wishes for. But it is a reality of the modern world that most of us will be unemployed at some time during our working lives. For some it may take many months before landing a

new job. Strategies for coping with the ongoing stresses of unemployment have been developed by counselors, mental health agencies and employment centres.

Schedule your day. Getting up every morning, getting dressed and going out the door to work provided necessary structure to your life before you lost your job. Don't disrupt your daily schedule just because you are temporarily unemployed. Instead, make your job search your job. Design a schedule giving yourself five hours a day to pursue activities related to finding a job. Get up at the same time as you did when you were working, shower, dress, have your breakfast as usual and then go to work job hunting. Make sure you get out of the house every day: go to the library, network, meet a friend for tea, join job search support groups or clubs.

It is also important to schedule time for friends and family, for entertainment and exercise. If you organize your schedule into work and play you will then be able to do constructive job hunting during working hours and enjoy your leisure time when the day is over.

Learn to economize. Money worries are a source of extreme stress. Try not to worry about money more than strictly necessary. Budget wisely. Investigate ways to economize on clothing, food and entertainment. Help your family to understand the need for economy and to participate in economizing.

Stay active and stay in shape. Exercise – go to the gym, take up jogging, go for regular daily walks. Eat regular nutritious meals and limit your use of caffeine, alcohol and tobacco. You will look better and feel better.

Socialize: Do maintain a normal social life. Your family and friends provide an important support network. Continue to be interested in things around you: read, visit the museum, go to movies. Support groups and job clubs are also available to provide support.

Hold your head high. When at a party someone asks you “So, what do you do?” – a very rude question that is often asked -- say you are an engineer or a secretary and that you are looking for a job. Don't be sheepish.

Reward yourself: Reward yourself for your efforts instead of blaming yourself.

Help is available if you need it

For some people, unemployment leads to mental health problems, depression, anxiety, substance abuse. If you feel you require help from a professional do not hesitate to get help. Your family doctor can give you advice. The Canadian Mental Health Association in your community can also be a source of support and help if you are having problems adjusting to unemployment.

Depression Checklist

- Do you feel sad or irritable?
- Have you lost interest or pleasure in activities you once enjoyed ?
- Increase or decrease in weight?
- Sleeping problems?
- Do you have feelings of guilt, hopelessness or worthlessness
- Inability to concentrate
- Do you experience fatigue or loss of energy
- Have you increased restlessness or decreased activity
- Do you have thoughts of death or suicide
- Complaints of aches or pains for which no medical explanation can be found

If you or someone you know has been experiencing several of these signs for two weeks or more see your doctor. Depression is a serious condition and can be treated.

Here are some websites to help you with your job search: Good Luck!

- **Job search manuals provide overall practical advice on job hunting:**

Alberta Human Resources and Employment: Creating a New Future: The **job-loss** workbook (www.alis.gov.ab.ca/pdf/cshop/CreatingNewFuture.pdf)

SunRaye enterprises. Job Search Manual:
(http://www.sunraye.com/job_net/index.html)

- **Tips on how to write resumes, interviews.**

Government of Ontario. Ministry of Education. Job Search Skills.
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/career/jsearch.html>

Canadian Mental Health Association: Job Search Skills and Strategies. Guide to coping with unemployment.
<http://cmhanl.ca/education/publications/gcwu/10-jobsearchskills.php>

Government of Canada: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada webpage:
<http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/home.shtml>

Government of Alberta. ALIS. Advanced Techniques for Work Search:
<http://www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop/showproduct.asp?DisplayCode=PRODUCT&EntityKey=2155>

- **Help to Find and Apply for Jobs :**

Many good links at: Employment and the Workplace:

<http://www.markhamdistrict.hs.yrdsb.edu.on.ca/guidance/Employment%20and%20the%20Workplace.htm>

- **Advice on job hunting for people over age 45:**

Government of Alberta: ALIS.

Over 45? Don't make it easy to screen you out.

<http://text.alis.gov.ab.ca/tips/archive.asp?EK=3302>

- **Volunteering in Canada site:**

Volunteer.Ca: www.volunteer.ca

- **Job sites:**

Workopolis: <http://www.workopolis.com/index.html>

WorkInfoNet. Career planning with links to useful sites: <http://www.workinfonet.ca>

Canada Career Consortium: www.careerccc.org

- **Upbeat career advice articles:**

http://www.sideroad.com/Career_Advice/index.html

- **Coping with unemployment stress**

CMHA Newfoundland and Labrador Guide to coping with unemployment:

<http://www.cmhanl.ca/education/publications/gcwu/index.php>

Canadian Mental Health Association. Guide to Coping with unemployment. Personal coping

<http://cmhanl.ca/education/publications/gcwu/08-personalcoping.php>

Government of Ontario. General Stress management links:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/career/stress.html>

Unemployment stress management:

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/components/7269-6.html>

Canadian Mental Health Association: Coping with unemployment:
http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/content/about_mental_illness/workplace_mental_health.asp?cID=3227

- **Resources for people with depression:**

Links to information on depression: HealthyPlace.com. Depression Center:
<http://www.healthyplace.com/communities/depression/toc.asp#related>

Mood Disorders Association of Ontario. <http://www.mooddorders.on.ca/>

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health: Finding mental health services in Ontario:
http://www.camh.net/care_treatment/challenges_choices_index.html