

A photograph of a middle-aged man with short, graying hair and glasses, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt. He is smiling slightly and looking down at a newspaper he is holding. The background is a blurred library or bookstore with bookshelves and a lamp.

Push forward

Coping with the emotional grief of job loss

You can expect a range of reactions to losing your job. Much of our sense of self is linked to our career and work role. You can feel like you've lost part of your identity and worth when you lose your job.

In many cases the loss of a job can trigger a grief response. The stages of grief are not set in stone. You may skip a stage or you may go back and forth between two or more stages.

The stages of grief

Stage 1: Disbelief, shock, numbness and denial.

As a way to cope, you may block out the reality of the situation. This helps you to avoid the painful feelings that happen with loss. It allows you time to take in this new reality.

Stage 2: Anger, bitterness or resentment.

You might blame yourself or others for the loss. You may direct this anger toward family and friends or those who are trying to help.

Stage 3: Sadness, depression and grief.

You may feel frozen, unable to act or move forward. You might feel helpless, hopeless or be racked by guilt or shame. You may doubt your own strengths and abilities in this stage.

Stage 4: Acceptance and moving on.

You find new energy and motivation to move forward and find a new job. You start to explore your options and take better care of yourself through exercise, eating healthy, finding time to relax and connect with others.

If you get stuck in stages 1 through 3, counseling may help. You process your emotions and move on. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. It shows good self-care!

Some other reactions to loss

- Feeling unable to focus and concentrate
- Being forgetful
- Confusion
- Lack of coordination
- Problems sleeping
- Not feeling hungry
- Feeling tired or run down
- Headaches
- Problems with digestion
- Difficulty making decisions
- Limited interest in usual activities

Things to try:

- Don't go it alone. Staying connected to others can really help you get through this transition.
- Talk, talk and talk more about what you feel and think. Some people think their reactions are strange and no one else has ever felt that way. When you reach out and share your story, you'll likely find that your responses are normal and others have felt the same.
- Try to delay major decisions until you reach stage 4. At that point, your thoughts should be clearer and your decisions more rational.
- Structure your time and keep busy, but with a balance. Too much frantic activity can keep you from being able to process your feelings. Being able to feel your feelings and accept this loss can help you to grieve and move on.
- Focus on the parts of your life over which you do have control.
- Do something fun and relaxing, even though you think you won't enjoy yourself. You might:

- Take a long walk
- Prepare a favorite meal
- Sit down with a good book
- Listen to your favorite music
- Avoid too much sugar and caffeine. Don't misuse alcohol, drugs or other substances.
- Find comfort in prayer and your spiritual practices.

Give yourself time to heal. Allow yourself to cry, feel blue, get frustrated or feel irritable.

Allow others to support you. Remember that reaching out for help is a sign of strength. It is a way to respect and take care of yourself.

Tell your family:

Telling others may be hard. However, it can help to talk with them about your thoughts and reactions. Each family member will have his/her own response and concerns. You don't need to protect others or "make it okay" for them. Everyone has a right to their thoughts and feelings. Work together to make life adjustments and plan for the future.

We're here to help. Confidential services are available 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

The EAP is administered by Resources For Living, LLC.

All EAP calls are confidential, except as required by law. Information is not a substitute for diagnosis or treatment by a professional. Contact a professional with any questions about specific needs.