

# Coping with the Loss of a Job

## Objective

To increase your well-being and maintain a positive outlook following a job loss.

## What to Know

Under ordinary circumstances losing your job impacts so many areas of your life, but finding yourself unemployed in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic brings even more upheaval. The typical stressors of unemployment, like financial hardship and loss of purpose, are very real. But facing job loss in the middle of a pandemic adds stress you could not have previously imagined – including being isolated from family, friends, and colleagues and feelings of uncertainty, fear, anxiety, panic, and helplessness. Work provided you with time structure, identity, purpose, and social interaction. You may be experiencing many emotions and troubling thoughts. Check off any of the following that apply to you:

- I feel like I have lost my sense of purpose.
- I feel sad and depressed most of the time.
- I feel fearful.
- I miss having structure and a routine.
- I feel unimportant and unappreciated.
- I feel anger and jealousy at people who are still working.
- I feel lost and do not know what to do next.
- I feel disconnected from the people I used to work with.
- People close to me do not understand what I am going through.
- I am worried about how I will take care of myself and my family.

*\*If you have checked even one of these statements, consider seeking a mental health professional or support group for help. If you have thoughts of hurting yourself, immediately call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255. You can call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.*

Not everyone will experience these thoughts and feelings, but even if you think you are coping well with unemployment you might experience some of them at times. Accept that what you

are feeling is normal. Remember to give yourself credit for doing the best you can under the circumstances.

As you face this challenging time, it is essential you take care of yourself. Your situation may be stressful and unstable, but there are things you can do to increase your well-being and maintain a positive outlook. Here are six strategies for increasing your well-being if you have recently lost your job:

**1. Be kind to yourself.** The reason you lost your job probably has nothing to do with your performance. Remember, losing your job does not mean you have failed. Keep the following points in mind:

- **You are much more than your job.** Work is important, but it is not what makes you who you are because you have characteristics, skills, values, and attributes unrelated to your job.
- **Avoid thinking errors.** Your mind might draw incorrect conclusions when you are upset and stressed. You might incorrectly blame yourself.
- **Remember unemployment is not permanent.** The COVID-19 situation will eventually improve. Yes, it has been very difficult, but this situation will end. Try not to lose perspective.

**2. Keep socially connected.** Communicating with others is an important way to keep your mind occupied, because isolation leaves space for ruminating or worrying – potentially leading to depression or anxiety. Talk to someone you trust about your situation, whether that is a family member, friend, colleague, counselor, or mentor. Try to catch up regularly with family and friends by phone or virtually. Set up a group chat with your colleagues on Zoom. Connect with others online - check out Reddit or search Facebook for groups that match your interests.

**3. Stick to a routine.** Make a calendar for the week and divide the days into morning, afternoon, and evening, and wake up and go to bed at the same time each day. Keep a schedule that includes regular activities like set mealtimes, exercise, or hobbies.

**Do the following every day:**

- One pleasurable activity that makes you feel good, such as watching a favorite TV program or eating a piece of chocolate.
- One achievement activity that makes you feel like you are productive and functioning, such as enrolling in an online course, posting on LinkedIn, or revising your resume.

**4. Exercise regularly.** Regular exercise has been shown to decrease stress and help with depression and anxiety.

**5. Clear your mind.** Turn off the news and avoid “doom scrolling” on social media. Take a “coronavirus time-out” for at least one hour every day, when you avoid talking about or thinking about the pandemic. During your time-out you might practice mindfulness using an app such as [HeadSpace](#) to quiet your anxious or racing thoughts. Slow down and focus on the “here and now.”

**6. Seek out resources.** If you are having trouble providing basic needs for yourself or your family, you can turn to community resources for assistance. Getting help with basic needs, such as food and shelter, can reduce the stress of unemployment. Local, state, or government resources (such as food banks) are available to help. In the United States you can get affordable health insurance through [HealthCare.gov](#) if you no longer have health insurance coverage. Unemployment help may be available, and you might be eligible to receive [pandemic unemployment assistance](#).

This worksheet will help you increase your well-being and maintain a positive outlook following the loss of your job.

### **What to Do**

First, connect with your sense of self-worth. Answer the following questions.

What are you good at?

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What do you care about?

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What do you know?

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What characteristics can you count on within yourself?

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Write down three of your strengths.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Who can you connect with? Write down three people you can contact.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Each day for the next two weeks, choose at least two activities from the previous list of six suggestions. For example, on the first day you might make a calendar and schedule daily activities. There are many types of activities you can do to be kind to yourself, including journaling, relaxing with a good book, or baking a cake with your children. You might schedule time to connect with colleagues, or search for jobs online.

Use the chart on the following page to schedule these activities. Write down the date, the activity, and how you feel after completing the activity. Write down any notes or follow-up required.



What activity helped you the most? Describe.

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What was most challenging about this exercise?

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Did this exercise increase your well-being and help you maintain a positive outlook?

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What else can you do to increase your well-being?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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