Coping With Feelings of Depression After Job Loss

Losing a job can have a profound effect on your psyche; it can shake your confidence and challenge your self-worth. In some circumstances, a sort of depression can set in, leading to feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness that can make it difficult to find a new job.

It’s common to feel shock, denial, fear, panic, and anger. You feel shocked that this has happened to you, panicked and fearful about your financial situation, and angry at your workplace and at yourself.

The financial aspects are generally a big concern. Particularly if you have a family, you might be very worried about whether you can continue to contribute to the household finances. But issues about money aren’t all that is at stake.

Job loss conveys that your sense of who you are has changed—yesterday you had a job title that helped define your place in the world, but today, that has gone. The loss of self-esteem can lead to feelings of despair and worthlessness, culminating in a depressive state that affects your personal life as well as your efforts to find a new job.

Recognizing the Signs of Depression After Job Loss

Often the first signs of a depressive state go unnoticed by the recently unemployed person. The signs tend to be fairly innocuous—a missed night’s sleep, tiredness, or loss of appetite could be chalked up to an illness or just a bad day. If these signs linger, however, it could be an indicator of some form of depression:

- Lethargy, lack of motivation, changes in appetite, and sleep patterns
- Loss of pleasure in activities previously enjoyed
- Irritability, anxiety
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or hopelessness
- Loss of concentration and focus: for example, finding it difficult to concentrate on a book or a television program
- Feeling that losing your job was your fault, and that you deserved it, even if that was not the case
- Loss of self-worth in other areas in addition to work. For example, you might feel that your worth as a parent or spouse has also diminished
Stay Motivated After Losing Your Job

Taking some positive steps can improve your situation and outlook. For example, losing a job leads to a sudden and dramatic change in routine. Now that you don’t have to get up early every day for work, you feel as though you have nowhere to go and nothing to do. The following strategies can help keep your motivation levels high:

Treat your job search like a job: Maintain your normal job routine and hours—make calls, send emails, go to meetings with prospective employers and professional contacts, learn new skills, and let your focus be on employment opportunities.

Consider creating a journal to record your job-seeking activities. The job hunt can get stressful and frustrating in part because it’s no longer common to get feedback from prospective employers after you send resumes or cold-call. When you don’t get results, this lack of feedback can make you feel as though you’re just not getting anywhere—but looking over the journal can remind you of all the proactive effort you’re making.

Get support and advice when you need it, from family and friends, and fellow job-seekers. Due to the current economic downturn, it’s easier to find support groups for people who have become unemployed, so consider joining one. Talking with other people in the same situation can help ease your stress and help you stay motivated.

Get regular exercise and eat healthy: Don’t neglect this simple, but important step. Consuming healthy food keeps you feeling fit and energetic for the job hunt; and regular exercise is a great endorphin booster to help ease stress and keep you firing on all cylinders.

In short, taking good care of your body and mind and gathering support will go a long way towards relieving mild feelings of depression from job loss. If you find that you need additional help getting out of a slump, don’t hesitate to talk to your doctor, who can evaluate and treat you for clinical depression. Remember, there is always hope, and tomorrow just may bring better things.