

## Handling The Stress Of Losing Your Job

from the American Counseling Association

Once upon a time most people expected that when they went to work for a company it would be a lifetime experience. But in today's economic climate, businesses no longer offer guaranteed employment, and lay-offs, firings and businesses closing have become much more common.

While losing a job may bring financial problems for most people, it's also important to understand it usually also brings significant mental and emotional stress.

Mental health professionals tell us losing a job brings reactions similar to the pattern experienced in the death of a loved one or the end of a serious relationship. There is usually first shock and denial, of being unable to believe this has really happened.

That's often followed by anger. The cause of that anger may be those who took away your job, but most times the anger is instead taken out on those close to you. You may find yourself tense, more easily upset and quicker to react to family and friends.

You may also go through a stage of "bargaining," a preoccupation with trying to get that old job back, no matter how unrealistic or even undesirable that might be. You may experience sadness and depression as you question your worth and abilities.

Understanding that these are all normal reactions can help you get through those stages quicker, accept the loss and start creating a new work life.

An important step is to avoid adding extra stress to your life. Tell family and friends what's happened and what you're feeling, so they can help. Eat healthy, exercise, get plenty of rest and keep socially involved, rather than withdrawing from those close to you. Avoid sudden, rash, major life decisions and changes.

Instead, carefully evaluate and set future goals. Do you need more education, to look to a new career field or to sharpen up your job skills? Evaluate what will make you feel rewarded and fulfilled in a new job. Are you using your network of family, friends and other contacts to help in your job search? Rather than dwelling on the lost job, view it as an opportunity and focus on a positive future.

If you find you're being overwhelmed by the job loss experience, seek professional help. A professional counselor can provide stress management, career guidance and other services to help you handle this loss and move on to a more positive future.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org*

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