

Job Tips for 50+ Workers

www.aarp.org/jobtips

Typical Reactions to Job Loss

How will I pay my bills? How will I face my family? Will I ever find another job? If you've lost your job, your mind is probably full of thoughts like these - and more. In moments of panic, you might even feel like you're losing part of your mind. Anger at what's happened can make you feel like doing things normally never would. When you lose your job, you can help yourself deal with the strong emotions you feel.

Here are three questions to ask yourself and actions you can take to get answers.

What feelings are normal?

How can I deal with the stress I feel?

How can I find trustworthy professional help if I need it?

Recognizing Your Feelings

Some people may feel relief if they lose their jobs. But most people who lose their jobs feel badly. Mental health professionals believe that, for most people, losing a job is one of life's biggest stressors.

Normal feelings range from mild distress to devastation. Your feelings about job loss, whatever they are, may change frequently. Or you may feel one way for a long time.

Some of these words may describe how you feel:

Overwhelmed	Disgusted	Resentful	Embarrassed
Tense	Demoralized	Vindictive	Humiliated
Sad	Irritable	Frustrated	Obsessed
Dull	Disbelieving	Depressed	Panicky
Tired	Anxious	Negative	Worried
Hurt	Confused	Shaky	Trapped
Guilty	Distracted	Powerless	Stupid
Moody	Angry	Immobilized	Pessimistic

Normal stages of grief

What you go through after job loss is similar to the stages of grief. You won't necessarily feel all these feelings. And most people don't go through stages in order. But understanding what is normal can help.

- Shock: I don't get it. I don't even know what's really happening here.
- Denial: I can't believe this. It can't be true.
- Anger: Why me? I don't deserve this. Why didn't it happen to someone else?

Whatever you feel is OK. Naming your feelings can help you understand what you're going through. When you understand what's happening, you can give yourself a break, de-stress, and get help if you need it. Then you'll be ready to start taking steps to get your next job.

Dealing with Stress

Your body reacts to stress in physical ways. From prehistoric times, we've inherited the fight-or-flight response. On the plains or in the jungle, fighting and running away were the right answers to danger. Our ancestors needed increased heart rates and high blood pressure to run from or do battle with charging animals.

Our bodies still have fight-or-flight reactions to stress. But for many of us, those reactions can result in pain, anxiety, and other less obvious conditions, such as heart disease and digestive problems. We can't help having those reactions to stress. But we can take actions to feel less stressed.

Many people who lose their jobs want to search for the next job right away. It's better to take a little time to relieve your stress first. Then your job search will be much more effective.

Relaxing is the best way to relieve stress. There are proven relaxation techniques that really work and are easy to learn. You probably know many of these techniques already, such as deep breathing or counting to ten. In progressive relaxation, you learn how to tense and then release each group of muscles in your body. You can learn how to stop stressful thoughts.

In the longer term, you can learn how to be more resilient. Resilience is the process of adapting well to stressful events. It is not a trait that people either have or don't have. It involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that anyone can learn.

What About Venting?

Some people get their emotional batteries recharged by being quiet and alone. Others like to be with other people. Some workers who lose their jobs can't talk about it right away with their families. Others depend on family talk from the start. Whatever you prefer, you may want to vent about your job loss at some point.

When you can, spread your venting around. Know that you'll also be needing family and friends to listen to you and help with your new job search. Try not to use up their time and patience all at once!

Think in advance about whom you might ask for job-search help, or work referrals. If you've vented your strongest, or most negative, feelings about job loss to them, it might be hard to go back and ask for other help later. Or they might be exhausted. Friends who've heard you at your lowest might find it hard to be positive when you're ready to move on. Save your strongest venting for other friends.

There are also online forums for unemployed workers. You can share feelings with others who understand. Some Web sites include ideas for taking action to push for better employment laws.

Be aware that many sites with ideas about recovering from job loss have something to sell. Sometimes the ideas listed are from a book that the Web site owner has published and is selling. Other times the Web site owner is looking for clients for a coaching or counseling business. Be cautious about sharing your personal contact information.

Check out the [Water Cooler](#) on AARP's Online Community where you can talk to other 50+ workers, join a group or start your own.

Finding Professional Help

How do you know when you need professional mental health help? The American Psychological Association (APA) says to ask for help when:

- You feel trapped, like there's nowhere to turn.
- You worry excessively and can't concentrate.
- The way you feel affects your sleep, your eating habits, your relationships—your everyday life.

The APA web site offers free resources including:

- [Brochures](#) such as "The Road to Resilience," a booklet dealing with difficult events, and "Stress Fact Sheet."
- [Psychologist Locator](#) where you can search by city and state or zip code. You can also obtain a referral to a psychologist in your area by calling 1-800-964-2000.