



# SURVIVING TOUGH TIMES

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## CONTROLLING STRESS

### Unemployment is Stressful

Losing your job is one of the most stressful events a person can experience. Unemployment can be personally devastating and can trigger the same reactions you might feel during other serious crises, such as divorce or the death of someone you love.

Losing a job forces you, against your wishes, to make rapid changes. No one likes to be rushed, but without security of a job there will be instant physical and emotional changes that are sure to cause stress. The obvious problem of job loss is lack of income, but that is not the only stressor. Your job is an important part of your identity, and when that is taken away, you are put in a position to reevaluate who you are. Suddenly you have to completely redefine your role in the family and society.

You may have mood swings and find yourself lashing out at others. You may experience feelings of frustration that lead to family arguments. Or you may feel depressed and discouraged. What you need to know, is these feelings are **NORMAL** and common. Other family members usually share some or all of the same emotions.



So, what can you do about all of these feelings and stressors? It won't be as simple as just "snapping out of it." You and your family will need to process and accept what has happened and find your own ways of

working through these changes. People deal with stress and changes differently. Allow yourself and other family members to express their feelings. Be sensitive to the individual needs of family members as they work through these changes. Some people find it helpful to keep busy and fill their day with lots of activity. Others need quiet time to absorb the shock and rethink what to do.

Every member of the family feels the stress of unemployment, and it will take every member of the family to get through this stressful time. Some roles and responsibilities may need to be changed until a new job is found. Everyone needs to be flexible and willing to trade off tasks with other family members. Those families that do this are most likely to successfully cope with unemployment.

Normal routines are going to be upset for everyone. Try to maintain daily routines and familiar habits as much as you can. If you find yourself with too much free time, find satisfying and rewarding ways to spend the day. This can be a good time to work on household projects that you haven't had time to do or learn something new you always wanted to do. A south Georgia woman was able to help her family with an ill father during his last days during her job loss. She and her father benefitted from the quality time they had together before he died. When a physician's license was temporarily suspended he spent his time doing all

the things he never had time to do with his children. He actually enjoyed small pleasures most people take for granted like transporting his children back and forth to school and helping out with their clubs and school projects. Everyone benefitted and made the most of a stressful time.

Change can be difficult, but all family members need to pull together during a crisis such as unemployment. Everyone needs to pitch in and do what needs to be done regardless of previous roles. All family members, especially children, fare better when parents support each other.

### **Take Care of Yourself**

Excessive stress is not only damaging to your mental and emotional health; it can also be damaging to your physical health. Some evidence shows that stress can increase your chances of heart attacks. One of your main goals after job loss is to secure new employment. Staying healthy is important for keeping yourself employable. Eat balanced meals, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly.

One approach to coping with stress overload is to take a break from the stressful situation. Here are some suggestions:

- Take a walk. For some people, exercise helps them to relax and thus lessen the pressures of daily life.
- Watch a movie
- Spend time on yourself-take a long bubble bath or shower.
- Listen to music.
- Work in the yard or garden.
- Work on your favorite hobby, or start one.
- Jog, dance, or participate in some other physical activity.

Another approach is to take action to reduce excess muscle tension by using relaxation exercises. Although relaxation



exercises do not get at causes of stress overload, they provide a physical release from tension.

Learning to achieve the relaxation response is a skill that takes practice. Practice the technique at least twice a day. Follow these guidelines:

- Find a quiet place.
- Get into a comfortable position - lie down on the floor or sit with uncrossed legs.
- Breathe easily and naturally.
- Keep muscles loose and relaxed.

### **Easy Relaxation Techniques**

#### **Belly Breathing**

Sit or lie comfortably in a relaxed position. As you slowly breathe in, let your belly expand. Think of it as a balloon filling with air. As you exhale, let the air out of your “balloon” slowly. Place your hands on your stomach. You should feel it rise and lower as your breathe.

#### **Slower Respiration Rate**

Slow down your breathing rate by seeing how few times you can breath each 60 seconds. When you begin to get tense, take a few minutes and simply slow your breathing down to about three or six breaths per minute.

#### **Shoulder Exercise**

Try to touch your ears with your shoulders. Hold it for a count of four. Then let your shoulders drop. Now rotate each shoulder separately toward the rear. Do each shoulder 5 to 10 times. Then do both shoulders together.

#### **Massage**

Massage the back of your neck, concentrating on the part that feels tense. Cup your thumbs at the front of your neck and massage on both sides of your spinal column, letting your head fall limply back against your rotating fingers. Use your fingers to massage around your hairline, under your jaws, and your cheekbones.

## Mental Vacation

Enjoy the pleasure of a vacation through your imagination. First, close your eyes and think of some place where you would like to be. Then go there in your mind's eye. Perhaps you will go there alone. Or you might imagine being with someone. You may be quietly watching the sunset, mountains, woods, or an ocean. Or you may be active in hiking, hunting shells or rocks, playing some sport or game, climbing a mountain, or cycling. Enjoy the experience.

## When To Get Help

Sometimes things may get so difficult and out of control that you may need to get professional help. In every community, resources such as the family doctor, mental health professionals, support groups and clergy exist. They can help you deal with extreme levels of stress and the physical and emotional trauma that often accompany them.

The following symptoms may indicate a need for outside help:

- You are depressed. (Some signs are difficulty falling asleep, waking a lot in the night and too early in the morning or sleeping constantly, constant crying for no reason; skipping baths and shampoos; feeling numb as if you don't want to do anything; fatigue; unreasonable fears; inability to concentrate; change in appetite, and/or anything that is considered a change in a person's usual behavior.)
- You hit, shove, kick your partner (or vice versa)
- You think of suicide.
- You over-react to little things.
- You discipline your child too harshly.
- You hear voices or see things.
- You consider separating from your partner because of problems.
- You feel overwhelmed by bills.
- You can think of nothing good to say about one of your children, or find yourself constantly down on a family member.
- You drink in the morning. You hide liquor so no

one knows how much you're drinking. You have more than two or three drinks or beers almost every night. You get "mean" while drinking.

- You feel guilty, as though you aren't being a good parent to your kids.
- You feel you can't cope. You are "down" on yourself.
- You notice your child is starting to act out a lot, getting in trouble with the law, or acting "crazy."
- You find you're starting to lie to people about what happened to you, or what you're doing. You start lying to yourself.
- You have attacks where you feel extremely panicky, have a high pulse rate and have difficulty breathing.

Before your problems become too big to handle, find a trained, skilled counselor to help you and your family cope with this crisis. A family counselor can help you handle your fears, adjust to your present situation, and plan adequately for the future. Insurance can help pay for counseling costs. Some counselors charge on a sliding scale fee depending on your ability to pay.

Check the "Yellow Pages" of your local telephone company for a listing of "Mental Health Services." Most communities have a 24-hour, toll free, "Help Line" and/or "Crisis Line," and these are usually listed in the front of the telephone book. In Georgia you can call "Helpline Georgia" at **1-800-338-6745** for help and information on where to get help locally. Helpline Georgia is funded by the Department of Human Resources and the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council. All calls are confidential and anonymous.

# SURVIVING TOUGH TIMES

*Surviving Tough Times* is a 19-part series for individuals and families experiencing under-employment and unemployment. Originally developed by Linda Boelter, University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Service.

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