Redundancy -the Emotional and Psychological Effects of Redundancy Factsheet

Depending on age, personality type, family and financial circumstances, individual reactions may range from mild, moderate to severe. The most common reaction to job loss is **physical shock** accompanied by some of the **classic symptoms associated with grief**: -

- disbelief
- denial
- anger
- feeling stunned
- becoming withdrawn
- loss of confidence
- a feeling of 'why me?'

This is particularly true when an individual had no warning or sense that they would lose their job.

Job loss, like any other form of major loss can have many of the emotions akin to those of bereavement.

Stress reactions to job loss vary. They may include: -

- crying openly
- becoming withdrawn
- breaking down completely
- pretending nothing has happened, even to the extent of concealing it from partner/spouse/key family members
- undergoing mood swings 'up one day and down the next'

When it comes to manifestations of distress, there are no gender differences. While men may initially display macho mannerisms, their physical and emotional reactions are the same as those of women – anger, despair, and a sense of loss, inadequacy, low self-esteem and, in extreme cases, suicide.

Around the time of job loss**, thinking patterns tend to follow a very specific sequence**: -

- denial
- followed by anger
- progressing to feeling low, sometimes slipping into clinical depression

The overall length of time a person remains in each of these states varies and depends on pre-existing factors as well as how soon new employment is secured. The most important aspect to remember is that **whatever the feelings, they are temporary and predictable**.

The second most important thing to bear in mind is that **emotional shock is a normal reaction**. Some people find the whole job loss experience so overwhelming that they exhibit classic grief and in severe cases trauma symptoms. Losing a job **may bring to the fore other unrelated areas of 'unfinished business',** going back over a period of several years, or even decades. This unfinished business might include delayed or unresolved grief over a bereavement, physical assault, divorce, relationship break up, or loss of a house. As with many other life events, an individual's response to crisis depends on: -

- the individual's philosophy of life and unique survival mechanism
- the way people have dealt with other crisis situations in their lives is also an important factor
- personal attitude to change, positive or negative
- state of physical health also plays a part

The **severity and duration of reactions vary enormously** and depend on variables such as whether a person has: -

- experienced job loss before
- experienced previous crises which they have survived
- peer group support, support of a partner, spouse, family, or friends
- someone to talk to

Relationships impact

The first thing you should expect from someone who has lost their job is that they are likely to behave differently. The following list provides helpful suggestions for families, friends, former colleagues, and others trying to support someone who is going through this transition process.

- accept the individual for how they are feeling
- listen, listen, and listen. An individual may repeat a story many, many times. It may even get boring, but keep listening nonetheless. This is the individual's way of processing what has happened
- be patient, be optimistic and remember this is a temporary situation
- make sure the individual has the contact telephone number of someone who will listen if they are distressed, cannot sleep, and need someone to talk to at 2 am, for example, 24-hour crisis centres such as the Samaritans
- do not be surprised if the individual is angry. This anger may not just be directed towards the job loss but could be about anything. Irritability is a common symptom
- recognise that the person may feel embarrassed about having lost his / her job. In many instances men particularly may feel they have let their families down
- do not use humour to try and avoid the emotions of the individual
- value the person and do what you can to boost his / her confidence, as confidence is likely to be at an all-time low
- do not pressurise the person
- never resort to platitudes such as 'it could be worse' … 'it happens to a lot of people'… 'This could be a turning point for you'… 'You never liked that job anyway'. All this may be true. However, the risk can be that the person is not in an emotional position to see this.

Not surprisingly, **relationships can be strained** due to a partner's job loss. People frequently find they are **unable to discuss the situation with each other and may stop communicating**. If the individual is the main bread winner then they may experience general uncertainty and concerns about money and financial security. They may blame themselves and feel quite rejected – even though those feelings are not necessarily either logical or justifiable. A **range of contradictory behaviours** is also possible. For example, it may include more arguments, more misunderstandings, and a need for more closeness. Equally, a search for independence and a reduction of commitment to the relationship may also take place. There are many variables and none of these states is necessarily permanent.

Follow a job loss parents may find that that their **children tend to act out their feelings through behaviour r**ather than in what they say. Some children may become quite aggressive in their play or in relationships with other children or may retreat into their own world. Children may be afraid of the changes they will have to face, such as a new home, a new school, or new friends.

Children may become deeply upset at the prospect of change and blame themselves for what is taking place. They may believe they are at fault for arguments or communications problems between their parents. Equally possible are scenarios where they openly blame the parent for the day-to-day changes that have been brought about in their own lives. They may become extra sensitive to criticism, especially if their parents are also quite anxious and worried. **Children need to be kept informed about what is happening in their family and they should not be sheltered from the practical impact of these changes.** They will experience and feel the impact anyway and their feelings about this need to be acknowledged by their parents. They will need more reassurance and understanding because they too will be feeling angry, frustrated, and uncertain about what is happening in their world.