

# SURVIVING A LAYOFF

Keeping It Together When You Lose a Job



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## Keeping It Together When You Lose a Job

Losing a job is one of life's most stressful events. There are both practical and emotional sides to losing a job. On the practical side, you're faced with how you will pay your bills and find a new job. On the emotional side, you may feel ashamed, betrayed, or angry that you've lost your job. It's easy to become overwhelmed and take actions that may affect you for years to come.



On the other hand, in the long run, losing your job may open the opportunity for you and your family to pull together, do some financial planning you've been putting off, and perhaps even find better-paying or more satisfying work.

## Coping Strategies

Losing a job ranks near the top of the list in terms of stressful life events. It's easy to say that you should stay positive while you're looking for a new job, but following through is another matter. Work is a major part of our identities, and not having a job can be frightening.

1. **Take it easy on yourself.** Losing a job is traumatic. In many ways, it can be more exhausting and stressful than when you were working. Understand it's normal to feel a wide range of emotions including a sense of helplessness, fear about the future, and resentment toward friends and family who "don't understand."

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2. **Get help.** Talk to your doctor or mental health professional if you're experiencing panic attacks, anxiety, or depression. Don't assume you should just "snap out of it." You may need outside help. If you are withdrawing from family members or loved ones, or find yourself frequently fighting or arguing with them, get help.
  3. **Help your children.** If you have children, they may pick up on a lot more than you realize. Talk openly with them about what happened, answer their questions, and let them know it's your job to take care of the family. There are a few books that can be helpful in talking to your children, including *My Mommy Lost Her Job Today* by Judy Delton or *When a Parent Loses a Job: A Workbook About My Parent's Job Loss* by Denise McNaught.
  4. **Develop a routine.** Give yourself a reason to get up in the morning. Set a schedule for researching jobs and making phone calls. Get out to network with others.
  5. **Exercise.** Do something (inexpensive) that you enjoy but perhaps have been putting off because you were too busy. Walking, biking, or gardening can all be good for relieving stress and keeping you healthy.
  6. **Don't dump it on your spouse.** If you have a spouse or partner, don't expect them to provide 100% of your moral support. Keep the lines of communication open, but realize you may need to find another person who understands what you've been through. They may be grieving and scared, too.
  7. **Join a support group.** Getting together with other people who understand what you are experiencing can be very helpful. Check with your local unemployment office or look online.

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## Financial Strategies

Many people underestimate the time it will take to recover financially from a job loss. They continue with their current spending, often using credit cards to fill in the gaps. Those debts can quickly add up and become unmanageable if it takes longer than expected to land a job at your previous pay.



Here are some financial steps you need to take to protect yourself in the situation of a job loss:

1. **Find out right away whether you are entitled to unemployment benefits, and if so, how much.** Visit [www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov) and click on “unemployment” for information on unemployment benefits and links to your state’s information. Find out the rules and apply immediately to avoid delays. But don’t forget that unemployment benefits count as taxable income. If you don’t withhold taxes on them now, you may end up with a larger-than-expected tax bill come next April.
2. **Check your benefits.** Find out what kinds of severance you may get, whether you can keep the money you’ve accrued in a company retirement plan and where it is, whether your company will offer job placement or resumé writing assistance, and whether you have unpaid overtime or vacation pay that you’ve earned. If you aren’t leaving on negative terms, you should at least ask your supervisor for a reference letter and some suggestions for your job search.

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3. **Make a budget.** This can be a real chore when things are going well, and even worse when you are under the stress of a reduced income. But if you don't have a good sense of what your monthly expenses are, it's very easy to run up a lot of debt very quickly. Make sure to note every expense you have, even the small ones, and use this opportunity to see what you may be able to cut or cut back while you find new employment.
  4. **Create a plan for your bills.** If you believe you will have trouble making the payments on your bills, get help sooner rather than later. If you wait too long you may make mistakes that could lead to bankruptcy. You can try calling your creditors to work out a lower payment arrangement on a temporary basis, but keep in mind that if your unemployment stretches out longer than expected, they may not be sympathetic. It can be very helpful to get the assistance of a credit counseling agency that can work with your creditors on your behalf so you can focus on your job search.
  5. **Stay insured.** If you were covered by health insurance, you may be able to continue your coverage under COBRA. You'll likely have to pay the entire premium, plus a 2% administrative fee, but it can be better than going uninsured. It's also a good idea to talk with an insurance agent about your options for getting temporary or individual health insurance, which in some cases may be cheaper than COBRA. You may also check out the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare. Since coverage is based on the individual's income, it may be a cheaper alternative.

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6. **Make contingency plans.** While it may be difficult to think about, consider your contingency plans if you can't find a job soon at your old salary or higher. Do you have assets you could sell (e.g. a boat, an extra car)? Could you downsize to a less expensive home? Do you have a cash value life insurance policy you could tap? Just be careful that you don't wipe out everything you own without getting a professional review of your options. Raiding your retirement funds or tapping your home equity to pay the bills may seem like a good idea at the time, but if your job loss extends longer than you expect, you could end up with nothing to fall back on.
  7. **Get creatively frugal.** Look at all expenses and see where you can make changes until you're back on your feet. Eating out, for example, may seem like a necessity when you are busy working but could be stopped while you have more time to shop and cook.
  8. **Ask for help.** Many people who have worked hard all their lives are ashamed to ask for help from government and community agencies when they need it. Don't be. You pay for that help when you're working through your taxes and the money you give to support charitable organizations. Find out what resources are available in your community and get the help you need.
  9. **Understand your options.** Learn what your options are if you can't make your house or car payment. You should always talk with your creditors before you fall behind, but understanding what can happen in those situations may help alleviate the fear of the unknown. Lenders may offer forbearance, which can temporarily reduce or pause your monthly payments while you look for another job.

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10. **Consider crowdfunding.** Sites like [www.GoFundMe.com](http://www.GoFundMe.com) enable you to raise money from peer-to-peer donations. If your situation is especially dire, consider posting a fundraiser online.

## Job Search Strategies

1. **Review yourself.** You've had job evaluations in the past. Now it's time for you to evaluate yourself. What are your skills? What have you most enjoyed about your past jobs? What didn't you like? What would you like to do more of? Spending some time in reflection may help you think of new jobs or careers you'd like to try.
2. **Prepare the "paperwork."** You are likely to be filling out a lot of applications, so gather your information. Where did you work, and when? What were your job duties and accomplishments? Put all this information in a short resumé and keep a longer version for your personal reference. You should also update any online career profiles, such as your LinkedIn or Indeed pages.
3. **Review your credit report.** Most employers conduct a background check. That often includes a review of the job applicant's credit report as well. Check yours in advance to make sure it's correct and up to date.
4. **Keep your eyes open.** Personal references are the best way to find and get a job. Contact everyone you know for ideas and suggestions of potential jobs and employers. Ask if you can use their name when contacting a referral, and don't forget to thank them afterward.



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5. **Go on a hunt.** Look for jobs online, in your local newspaper, and through local employment agencies.
  6. **Network.** Find local networking events in your area where you can connect with other professionals and promote yourself. You can have business cards made inexpensively online through websites like VistaPrint.com or you can have them printed at an office supply store. Make sure to take plenty of cards with you to each event and follow up immediately with any connections you make.
  7. **Visit the library.** Your local library should have a large number of books that can be helpful for everything from writing a resumé to figuring out what you want to do next. *Changing Careers for Dummies* by Carol McClelland and *Cool Careers for Dummies* by Marty Nemko are just two examples. You can download library books online, so you can get these resources even if you don't have time to visit your local branch.
  8. **Prepare for job interviews.** Choose clothing you want to wear to interviews and ask for feedback from family members or friends. Practice answering interview questions. Pull together documents you'll need (generally driver's license and Social Security card).
  9. **Consider a career change.** If you worked in an industry that is declining or sending jobs overseas, you may want to consider a career change. Before you do, however, see if you can find a way to work or intern in some capacity in that new field. You don't want to spend two years becoming a medical assistant, for example, only to learn you don't like working with patients!

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10. **Work on your side gigs.** Ridesharing and food delivery apps always need more drivers, and it's easier than ever to find freelance jobs online. You may not earn very much compared to your former salary, but taking on multiple side gigs can help you make ends meet while you continue your job search.
  11. **Temp it.** Temporary work may not be your first choice, but it can help pay the bills. If you treat it like a "real job," you may even be asked to stay on after your temporary assignment is over. The best part about temping is that you get to try out different employers and jobs without making a long-term commitment.
  12. **Start your own business.** Your own business could be a way for you to shift gears and earn good money doing what you choose to do, but it's also very risky. Most new businesses don't make it through the first two years. If you are going to start a new business, choose one with a solid track record and get advice from others with experience. Consider temping and starting your business on the side until it takes off. Unless you have plenty of money in savings and investments, now is not the time to take a chance on an unproven idea.

### **Avoiding Job Application Scams**

*Be very careful about providing personal information to a prospective employer over the internet. Some identity thieves have used fake job openings to gather information about consumers. These job postings can appear very legitimate. Before you provide personal information over the internet, call the company through a published number and verify that the job posting is legitimate.*

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## Additional Resources

Search for jobs on:

[LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com)

[Indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com)

[Glassdoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com)

[Monster.com](https://www.monster.com)

### **COBRA:**

Frequently asked questions about COBRA are answered on the US Department of Labor's website at:

[dol.gov/dol/topic/health-plans/cobra.htm](https://dol.gov/dol/topic/health-plans/cobra.htm)

National Employment Law Project:

[nelp.org](https://nelp.org)

Unemployment Insurance Information:

Links to information about state unemployment benefits can be found at [careeronestop.org](https://careeronestop.org)