

# ***TAKING CHARGE in Challenging Times***

## **ACCEPTING YOUR FEELINGS**

People respond to a personal crisis with many feelings: anger, anxiety, outrage, self doubt. They may be hostile - lashing out at those closest to them. Or, they may become moody and depressed. Their tension may show up as restlessness, loss of appetite, loss of interest in sex, insomnia, and feelings of apathy and exhaustion. While some of these symptoms may be unpleasant, they are normal, predictable reactions of people experiencing a loss or critical change in their lives.

The first step to accepting feelings is to sort out and identify your feelings. Some feelings - often those that are painful - may become so buried you may not even be aware they exist. Recognizing these strong feelings, understanding why they may be present, and dealing with them in positive ways are important. Refusing to accept your feelings can cause physical and emotional damage.

### **Reasons For Your Anger**

One of the first feelings you will probably identify is anger. Anger is a powerful emotion that is often viewed negatively. Unchecked anger can be an emotional "time bomb" exploding when triggered by little things such as a glass of spilled milk or a spouse asking how the job hunt went today.

Looking beyond the anger, you may begin to uncover many other emotions hidden underneath. Anger may stem from feelings of failure, being unappreciated, exploited, manipulated, or humiliated. Anger may result in feelings of helplessness, worthlessness, frustration, anxiety, guilt, fear, or resentment. Once you begin to look at the variety of feelings behind the anger and to

understand the hidden feelings, you can find ways to express your feelings in a positive manner.

### **Getting Rid of Your Anger**

- Look behind your anger. Remember exactly where you were when you first felt it. Who was with you? How did you feel at the time?
- Ask yourself if your anger is reasonable. Are you expecting too much from yourself or others? Are you looking at your situation objectively?
- Look at your reaction to the anger. Was the behavior justified? Did it increase your stress level or threaten your relationship with those around you? If so, look immediately for appropriate ways to discharge your anger. Talk to others about your feelings, change what you can about your situation, view it more realistically, or use relaxation techniques to vent your stress. Read "Coping with Stress" for more information.
- Anger is often fueled by blame. Blaming yourself or others is a way to avoid the real problem. The energy you spend blaming could be better spent on working to understand your feelings.

### **Damage to Self-Esteem**

Feeling good about yourself, or having high self-esteem, is one of the most valuable assets you can have. Self-esteem develops as we grow from childhood into adulthood. The love and acceptance we get from parents, family members, and friends shapes our self-esteem. It is linked to how competent and successful we feel.

Having positive feelings about yourself is easier when things go well. When things take a turn for the worse, you often lose some of your self-confidence and begin to doubt yourself.

Whether it is your first experience with tough times, or you have been there before, you may feel a sense of loss that extends well beyond losing your income. Work contributes to your identity. It helps define who you are and makes you part of a larger community. Working helps you feel you belong and are important because you have something to contribute.

In many ways, losing a job or part of your income is like losing part of yourself. Your lifestyle suddenly changes. Schedules and routines that controlled a large part of your time are no longer there. You lose contact with your support system of co-workers and friends.

Many unemployed people report going through a process of grief and mourning in response to a job loss. This loss is characterized by stages of denial, anger, depression, and finally acceptance. With the help of those around them, most people eventually work out ways of dealing with their feelings. They make adjustments that help them recover from their loss and put it in perspective. Others may find coping more difficult and may require professional help.

### Understanding Your Feelings

If you are not used to thinking about your feelings, identifying them during this stressful period may be difficult. Use Worksheet 6 "Thinking About Your Feelings" to list feelings you may have experienced since your life situation changed. As you read over the list, think about which feelings you have experienced and when you experienced them.

Remember, it is okay to have these feelings. They are all natural reactions to a difficult situation. Recognizing their existence and accepting them is important to your physical and emotional health.

### Steps to Accepting Your Feelings

- *Recognize your feelings; do not try to ignore them.* Although it is sometimes painful, confronting your feelings and looking realistically at your situation are important steps in the coping process.

- *Talk with your family.* The feelings you have may be shared by other family members. By talking about your feelings, you can help each other express, vent, and accept these feelings in constructive ways. Together you can provide support and reassurance to one another that can help build more positive self-esteem.
- *Talk with others.* Do not keep your feelings bottled up inside. Talking to others who have been or who are in similar situations can provide needed support. By discussing your feelings, you will find you are not alone.
- *Take emotional health breaks.* Think of ways to reduce the emotional tension and stress you are experiencing. Take some time for the things you enjoy. Include regular physical exercise in your daily routine to help you work off your worries and help your overall well-being.
- *Make the most of your time.* Do not get in the habit of sleeping late or spending your time in front of the television. How many times in the past have you wished you had more time to spend with your kids, to work on projects around the house, visit friends, go fishing, or catch up on some reading? When stress is high and you are feeling down, you may not be in the mood to try new things. But these feelings do not last forever. Once you have worked them through, put your time to good use. Working on projects, starting a hobby, or doing volunteer work can help you feel more productive and may lead to new employment opportunities.
- *Evaluate your situation.* If it looks like your situation may be permanent, shift gears and begin looking for other types of work. You may want to get help analyzing your skills and finding out about any additional training that can help you qualify for another job or career. Doing this before your benefits run out can increase your prospects for reemployment.
- *Recognize the need for professional help.* The feelings associated with a job loss are very powerful and may be difficult to deal with on your own. Talking to a trained professional can help you work through your feelings and restore your self-esteem.

Worksheet 6

Thinking About Your Feelings

	As a result of your personal situation, which of these feelings have you experienced?	What can you do to decrease the negative feelings and increase the positive feelings?
Peace		
Frustration		
Love		
Worthlessness		
Loneliness		
Anger		
Happiness		
Depression		
Hate		
Pride		
Fear		
Joy		
Anxiety		
Guilt		
Relief		
Sadness		
Anticipation		
Others:		