

Job Changes and Reactions to Stress

When an unexpected stressor occurs, such as restructuring your job, it is normal to experience a wide range of reactions. Sometimes these reactions will appear immediately after the event, or sometimes they may not appear for several days, weeks, or even months. While unpleasant, these reactions are normal and usually temporary.

How strongly an event impacts the individual determines his or her response. A person's past experiences, values, attitudes, beliefs and support can also be a factor in how one responds to stress. Every response to change or stress is unique to the individual and should be handled with sensitivity. What may affect one person, may not affect another, but that doesn't make the feelings of loss or stress any less valid. A range of common reactions are listed below:

EMOTIONAL	PHYSICAL	MENTAL	BEHAVIORAL
Anxiety	Fatigue	Confusion	Isolation
Fearfulness	Twitching	Forgetfulness	Increased alcohol use
Numbness	Nausea	Distractibility	Increased drug use
Uncertainty	Headache	Impaired memory	Restlessness
Depression	Sleep problems	Poor judgment	Jumpiness
Anger	Sweating	Poor concentration	Interpersonal problems
Guilt	Dizziness	Flashbacks	Appetite changes
Irritability	Intestinal problems	Past traumas remembered	Sleep disturbances
Grief	Breathing problems	Intrusive thoughts	Reduced sex drive
Vulnerability		Nightmares	Outbursts
Disbelief		Suspiciousness	

While each of these can be an expected response to stress, there are things that can be done to reduce their impact and to help restore normal feeling and functioning:

- Remember you are normal and experiencing an expected, temporary response to an experience of stress and/or loss.
- One helpful effective method for dealing with personal stress is talking – to friends, loved ones, ministers or sometimes a counselor.
- If talking isn't possible, try writing out your thoughts and feelings. You might want to write to someone who is special, or to pretend you are writing to that person. You might want to write out your feelings to yourself. What is written needn't be sent or shared with anyone else; just putting words to feelings is often helpful in clarifying emotions and reducing your stress.
- Moderate physical exercise (walking, stretching, etc.), alternated with periods of relaxation, may be helpful, but consider seeing your doctor before starting any new exercise program to determine what type and amount is appropriate for you.
- Drug use, including alcohol and tobacco, should be avoided. Instead, substitute other stress-reducing activities. While drugs may temporarily ease symptoms of stress, they also mask emotions and feelings and could exacerbate stress reactions.
- Concentrate on what you can control in your life, and work at letting go of those things you cannot control.
- Use your support system – your friends, family, pets, religion, hobbies, sports, etc. Most people want to help but do not always know how. Tell people what you need and want, as well as telling others what you don't want.
- Pamper yourself. Be self-nurturing. Get plenty of rest and eat balanced, nutritious meals.
- Be patient with yourself. Avoid being critical. Recurring thoughts, restlessness, etc. will eventually stop. Give yourself permission to recover at your own pace. Remember that you are normal and having a normal reaction to a stressful event. Be as loving to yourself as you would be to a loved one going through the same situation.

Job changes can trigger many feelings of loss. Below are some elements of loss and ways to respond to it:

LOSS	HELPFUL ACTIONS
Loss of identity/Belonging	Determine how your previous skills and experience can apply to the current situation. Make connections between the past and the future, then let go of the past. Remember who you are apart from your work.
Loss of Control	Use “downtime” to examine your options. Give up your need to feel totally safe and comfortable. Determine what areas you have control over and use that information to reclaim a sense of control within your immediate environment.
Loss of Meaning	Develop and seek ways to find meaning in your life. Connect with those things that give you a sense of purpose, pleasure and place in the world.



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