



Mental Health and Coping with Unemployment An Occupational Therapy Perspective

Occupational therapy is a health care profession concerned with a person's independence in and satisfaction with the everyday activities and roles that give meaning in life.

Unemployment, whether sudden or expected, is a major life event and can affect your mental health. Work has many benefits such as forming part of your identity; providing a routine and purpose in life, social outlets and a regular income. Losing your job and all its benefits can feel like you are no longer in control of your life. Your self esteem may suffer; you may feel anxious, worried or low. Finding new work can be difficult and frustrating and this can also affect your mental health.

If you are unemployed there are several things you can do to look after your mental health:

- **Routine:** Do your best to maintain a healthy routine. Get up early and go to bed at a reasonable hour. Plan your days to ensure that you have a balance of productive and leisure activities such as housework, grocery shopping, job searching, going for a walk, meeting a friend, reading the daily newspaper.
- **Social Support:** Keep in touch with your friends. You may feel different or lose confidence around your friends who are employed now that you are unemployed. Remember that your friends and family value you for more than your job. Isolating yourself can contribute to feelings of depression and low self-worth. If you feel lonely during working hours consider joining a local club or group and meet some new people.
- **Sort out your Finances:** Financial difficulties are stressful for you and your family. If you are eligible for unemployment benefits, claim them as soon as you can. Write up a realistic weekly budget, make adjustments if necessary and seek help from agencies providing financial support if you need it e.g. the Money Advisory and Budgeting Service (MABS).
- **Productivity:** Unpaid work can give you a lot of the benefits of paid jobs. Make a list of jobs that need to be done around the house and get stuck in or try voluntary work. Volunteering is a great way to keep active, learn new skills, meet new people and provide you with a sense of purpose and achievement. Tell everyone you know that you are looking for work; a lot of people get work through "word of mouth".
- **Re-train:** Now could be a good opportunity to update your skills or to pursue that career you've always wanted. Link in with local agencies such as FAS or enquire about back to education allowances.
- **Eat Well:** When you have extra time on your hands or if you feel down you may find that your eating habits change. Do your best to have a healthy diet. Not only can this keep you in good physical health, it can have a positive effect on your mood too. Eat three healthy balanced meals a day and drink 1½ litres of water. If you need to snack, stick to healthy options such as fruit and nuts.
- **Keep Active:** Physical activity is good for your mental health. Try to incorporate at least 30 minutes exercise into your day such as a brisk walk or cycle.
- **Seek Help:** If you find that feelings of low mood or anxiety persist, please see a health care professional such as your GP.

If you would like to see an occupational therapist to discuss your specific needs ask your G.P. for a referral or find a list of occupational therapists at www.aoti.ie