



THE MENTALLY
HEALTHY
WORK PLACE ALLIANCE

Heads **û**p



Taking care of yourself after
retrenchment or financial loss



Acknowledgements

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- the Department of Employment
- the Department of Human Services - who offer a range of health, social and welfare payments and services through Medicare, Centrelink and Child Support
- ipac securities
- the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC).

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Foreword



Dealing with retrenchment or an unexpected loss of income can be challenging for many people, causing significant financial and emotional hardship.

These events can take a serious toll on people's health and wellbeing, their relationships, their families and how they see their future.

Research shows job or financial loss can increase the risk of developing anxiety and/or depression.¹ However, there are steps you can take to regain a sense of control over your current situation.

This booklet is designed to help you work through some of these steps. It contains questions to ask yourself, practical tips and useful contacts for further assistance.

Adapting to adversity and change can be difficult, but there's no shame in asking for support – everyone needs a hand sometimes.

I hope you find this booklet useful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jeff Kennett AC". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Hon. Jeff Kennett AC
Chairman, *beyondblue*

Normal reactions to significant loss or financial hardship



It's normal to experience a range of emotional reactions in response to an unexpected loss or changing circumstances. Shock, distress, anger, guilt, worthlessness, sadness, powerlessness and helplessness are all common emotions. For most people, the distress decreases or disappears with time.

Normal reactions

Common experiences include:

- problems getting to sleep or staying asleep
- tiredness and fatigue
- appetite loss
- memory and concentration problems, such as forgetfulness or vagueness
- feeling overwhelmed, anxious or fearful
- mood swings or over-reactions to small things
- muscle tension or pain
- frustration
- withdrawing from others, not socialising as much

- feeling angry, irritable or intolerant
- lowered sex drive
- physical symptoms, such as heartburn, headaches, skin rashes or stomach pains
- embarrassment and guilt - "I've let everyone down."
- loss of direction, doubt or sense of powerlessness.

If you're experiencing some of these symptoms over a prolonged period and they're impacting on your life, you could be at risk of developing anxiety or depression. It's important you talk to a doctor or another health professional. To find a health professional in your area, call the *beyondblue* Support Service on **1300 22 4636** or see page 15 of this booklet for other organisations.

Adjusting to loss or financial hardship may be especially difficult for people who have planned carefully for their financial future and, through no fault of their own, find it is suddenly undone or put on hold. Feeling anger and a sense of injustice is understandable. Some people may feel guilty or blame themselves, but it's helpful to remember that it's not your fault.

Losing your job or financial security may also trigger symptoms of grief. These include:

- shock and a feeling of numbness
- disbelief – "It can't be real."
- a sense of loss – this can be connected to the job or finances, as well as dreams and plans for the future
- confusion and trying to make sense of it – "Why has this happened to me?"
- anger – a common reaction when people feel powerless or out of control
- pining and yearning
- feeling overwhelmed
- guilt – "I wish I'd done things differently," "I've disappointed my family."
- a sense of isolation from others and feeling alone in the loss.



How to tell if a reaction is normal – or not



The distress associated with job loss and financial stress can lead to the development of common health conditions, including anxiety and depression.¹ Learning more about these conditions can help you to be aware of some of the warning signs.

Mental health professionals and general practitioners (GPs) can help you get through difficult times. It is important to seek help if you are experiencing:

- severe emotional reactions that persist beyond a normal period of adjustment (usually two or more weeks)
- an inability to function and carry out day-to-day tasks
- using alcohol or other substances to 'self-medicate' or cope
- thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

Dealing with the emotional impact



Working through your emotions and trying to remain positive will make it easier to cope with the situation. It will also reduce your risk of developing anxiety or depression.

A worksheet focusing on structured problem solving is included on page 18. This is designed to help you work out some practical steps to regain a sense of control and avoid becoming overwhelmed by the circumstances.

Ask yourself the following:

- Are there any particular worries or concerns that I can't get out of my mind? If so, what are they?
- How much exercise am I getting?
- What are my sleep patterns and diet like?
- Am I drinking alcohol, smoking or taking drugs more than before the loss?
- How is my general health? Should I go to the doctor for a check up?

- Are there any pre-existing medical conditions that may be aggravated by a period of stress?
- Do I have family members and friends to whom I can turn for support?

Tips to help you stay on top of your emotions

- Write down your worries. You may find it useful to write down your concerns and then use the problem-solving strategies on page 18 to work through some practical steps to address them. Identify the specific feelings you are experiencing and the concern or worry that may be underlying each of these feelings. For example, are you worried about not being able to pay the rent or your mortgage, or are you feeling ashamed about losing your job? Writing these down may help you decide which issues to tackle first.
- Get support. Identify friends and family members you can talk to and who will help you remain positive.
- Stay healthy. Try to maintain a balanced diet and get some regular exercise, such as walking. Evidence shows regular exercise can boost mood.² For more information, visit www.beyondblue.org.au/staying-well
- Avoid drugs and alcohol. You may be tempted to 'self-medicate' or try to temporarily escape your reality. Not only can drugs and alcohol worsen your emotional state and increase your risk of developing depression, they will also place a further drain on your finances. For more information, visit www.beyondblue.org.au/drugs-alcohol
- If you have a pre-existing medical condition that may be aggravated by stress, talk to your doctor to see if there is anything you can do to minimise any negative effects.
- Don't expect to have all the answers. Remind yourself that it's OK to feel unsure about the future.
- Be patient with yourself. Recovery from any significant loss takes time.
- Draw on your strengths. Try to recall a tough time that you've managed to overcome in the past. Think about what worked then and apply it to your current situation.
- Choose your news. Think objectively about what you see or read in the media and try not to get swept up in unnecessary panic about the state of the economy.
- Realise you are not alone. By sharing your story with supportive friends and colleagues, you may find they're going through a similar situation.

- Try to see the positives. While this is difficult to do when you're in the midst of the crisis, you can try to view this time of uncertainty as an opportunity to re-evaluate your goals and perhaps take on new challenges.
- Don't obsess or ignore. It may be tempting to keep constantly checking the financial news, or conversely, to completely ignore your financial problems by not opening bills. Think about your previous routine and try to stick to it, such as paying bills as you receive them.
- Become a volunteer. For many people, the most difficult part of retrenchment is the loss of contribution and lack of interaction with friends and colleagues in a work environment. Working as a volunteer for an organisation you believe in may fill this gap while you're between jobs. For more information about volunteering contact Volunteering Australia on 03 9820 4100 or www.volunteeringaustralia.org



Taking care of your family

It's important to take care of yourself so that you can provide for others. While you're looking after yourself, be aware that your family members may also be having a difficult time. A distressing event such as losing a job or financial hardship can contribute to pressure and tension in the family.

Ask yourself the following:

- Have I discussed the situation with my partner and the impact of these changed circumstances? Do I feel confident that we can address this?
- Have my partner and I explained to our children what has happened?
- If not, how can we approach it so it doesn't cause distress or scare them?
- Is my family OK? Do they need extra emotional support?
- What steps can I take to ensure that life remains as normal as possible for our children?
- What enjoyable activities can we still do as a family?

It's important to explain to your family the impact your situation may have on household spending. Reinforce that this is likely to be only for a limited time, for example temporarily cutting back on your children's after school or sporting activities. Emphasise that this isn't anyone's fault and it happens to a lot of families. Try to set aside enough time to participate in regular activities with your family, especially your children. It's important to respond to this situation as a family.



Dealing with the financial impact



While there is little you can do to change the state of the economy, there are steps you can take to restructure your finances. This will help you to manage your funds and smooth the transition while you look for another job. You may be entitled to financial assistance or interim payments to help you through this period. Contact the organisations listed in this booklet to check your eligibility.

The following section provides tips and poses questions for you to consider. You may find it useful to write down

your responses, discuss them with your partner, a close family member/friend, or just think them through.

Ask yourself the following:

- Do I have a clear understanding of how this change will affect my financial circumstances?
- Have I made a list of my expenses and income?
- Have I thought realistically about areas where household budget cuts can be made?

- Have I thought about how my family and I will manage financially until I find another job?
- Do I think I can do this on my own or do I need professional financial advice?
- Do I know what financial assistance is available to help me now or do I need assistance to find out what I'm eligible for?
- Do I have the option of seeking short-term assistance from family or friends if I need to?

Depending on your circumstances, you will probably need to review:

- your budget
- your regular payments e.g. credit cards, loans and rent/mortgage
- your superannuation.

It's important to write down a summary of your financial situation before you see a financial counsellor or talk to your bank. Use the 'Expenditure planner' form on page 22 of this booklet to assist with this process.

What you can do

Draw up a budget

A budget can help you work out how much money you'll need to cover costs while you're going through financial difficulty/unemployment.

Contact your bank

In order to have some control over your financial situation, contact your bank or organisations to whom you owe money as soon as you can if you need to make any changes to your loan repayments. Most financial organisations have policies covering assistance for customers who are experiencing financial hardship.

Assistance from Department of Human Services

Department of Human Services social workers provide short-term counselling, support and information to help you through a difficult time and refer you to other services. Call 132 850 and ask to speak to a social worker, or visit a service centre to be referred to a social worker.



If you've lost your job



Information about your entitlements

The first step is to find out about your entitlements and the best way for you to deal with any money you may receive. See the 'Who can help?' section on page 15 of this booklet for organisations that can advise you about managing your entitlements.

Help finding a job

If you have been made redundant you may be eligible for immediate access to personalised employment services through a local jobactive provider. These services are free and available nationwide.

To find out more, including contact details for your nearest jobactive provider, visit www.employment.gov.au or call 136 268.

Payment of your entitlements

If you have lost your job because the company has closed, and your employer cannot meet your outstanding entitlements due to liquidation or bankruptcy, you may be entitled to payments through the Fair Entitlement Guarantee (FEG).

Go to www.employment.gov.au/feg to find out more or call the FEG Hotline on 1300 135 040.

Financial information for retrenched workers

Department of Human Services Financial Information Service (FIS) Officers can help if you have been or are about to be retrenched. They provide information on termination payments, superannuation, Centrelink payments and services, as well as taxation implications. To speak to a FIS Officer or to request information materials, call 132 300.

Make a plan

If you receive a redundancy offer, it's a good idea to start planning straight away. Seek professional financial advice prior to making any decisions. Make sure you understand the advice you receive and ask questions if you don't.

Consider how to use your redundancy payment

Redundancy payments are designed to provide income for a period of time after you leave work. Before investing your redundancy payment in a way that may

limit your access to it, such as rolling the money into your superannuation fund or paying off large debts, think about how long you will be looking for a new job. You may need the money for living expenses during this time.

Centrelink payments

If you receive a redundancy payment, you may need to wait for a period of time before you are able to receive a payment. If you apply for a payment, such as Newstart Allowance, your income and assets will be assessed to see if you are eligible. To find out more, call 132 850.

Re-organising your superannuation

Leaving your job may mean having to transfer out of an employer superannuation fund. Seeking appropriate professional advice about what to do with your super may make things clearer and help make your decisions easier.





Insurance and superannuation

Talk to your superannuation fund about any benefit entitlements that apply on retrenchment. If your superannuation includes life or disability insurance, check whether it will continue when your employer stops contributing. You might consider continuance insurance or income protection coverage which can ensure that you and your family receive a proportion of your previous income. This generally needs to be done within 30 days of leaving an employer.

Accessing your superannuation early

If you are off work for an extended period of time, are experiencing hardship, and have been receiving Centrelink payments, you can apply to access some of your superannuation under 'hardship provisions'. You would need to apply through your superannuation fund and you may have to pay tax on any withdrawals you make.

Setting up regular payments for living expenses

To create a sense of stability while you're between jobs, consider setting up your own 'pay system'. Deposit your redundancy payment into a separate account and arrange for a regular amount to be automatically transferred weekly or fortnightly into a different account which you access for living expenses. This can help with budgeting and creates a sense of normality and regularity to your cash flow.

Who can provide support?



beyondblue

www.beyondblue.org.au

☎ 1300 22 4636

✉ Email or 💬 chat to us online at
www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport

Learn more about anxiety, depression and suicide prevention, or talk through your concerns with our Support Service.

Help for mental health conditions under Medicare

You may be eligible for a Medicare benefit for individual consultations with a psychologist, Accredited Mental Health Social Worker or occupational therapist in mental health if you have been referred by a GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician.

For more information, visit
www.beyondblue.org.au/getting-help

Employment services

Department of Human Services

www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/themes/job-seekers
132 850

Call 132 850 to discuss individual circumstances or 132 300 to make an appointment with a Financial Information Service (FIS) Officer.

Social workers can provide short-term counselling, support and information to help you through a difficult time and refer you to other support services. Call 132 850 and ask to speak to a social worker, or visit a service centre to be referred to a social worker.

Fair Work Australia

www.fairwork.gov.au
13 13 94

Get information on your rights after retrenchment plus general advice on other workplace-related matters.

The Fair Work Ombudsman can provide information about rights and obligations for employees and employers. A fact sheet on termination of employment is available from the website.

Employment Services Providers

www.employment.gov.au/jobactive
13 62 68

Free service to help job seekers find jobs, providing resources and support.

JobAccess

www.jobaccess.gov.au
1800 464 800

Free information and advice service about the employment of people with disability.

Mental health support lines

Lifeline

13 11 14

24-hour crisis support, information and referral (local call).

Suicide Call Back Service

www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au
1300 659 467

Free national telephone counselling service for those at risk of suicide, their carers and those bereaved by suicide.

Relationships Australia

www.relationships.org.au
1300 364 277

National community-based organisation providing relationship support to people regardless of age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, or cultural or economic background.

MensLine Australia

www.menslineaus.org.au
1300 78 99 78

Anonymous telephone support, information and referral for men with family and relationship problems, especially around family breakdown or separation (local call).

SuicideLine (Vic only)

www.suicideline.org.au
1300 651 251

24-hour counselling, crisis intervention, information and referral (local call).



Financial counselling services

Australian Securities and Investments Commission

www.moneysmart.gov.au

1300 300 630

Provides tips and advice on managing money.

The Salvation Army Moneycare

www.salvos.org.au

13 72 58 (dial 4)

Free, confidential financial counselling service.

Financial Counselling Australia (FCA)

www.financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au

1800 007 007

FCA is the peak body for financial counsellors in Australia. The national help line will automatically divert to a counsellor in your local area.



Structured problem solving worksheet

You may find it useful to photocopy this worksheet and re-use it.

For people who are stressed, it is common to feel overwhelmed by problems. Thinking about how to begin tackling issues can feel equally difficult.

It can be helpful to have a methodical way of dealing with problems and making decisions. By using structured problem solving, you can feel more in control of problems and less overwhelmed by them.

The key elements of this method include:

- identifying and pinning down the problems that have contributed to you feeling overwhelmed
- thinking clearly and constructively about problems
- taking stock of how you've coped in the past, your personal strengths and the support and resources available to you
- providing a sound basis for important decision-making.

With this method, you can work on a single problem or follow the process to tackle a number of issues.



Getting started

To help you get started, it's useful to deal with one problem that is specific and has the potential to be solved.

Step 1

Write down the problem causing you worry or distress.

Step 2

Think about your options for dealing with this problem. Try to think broadly, including good and not-so-good options. List all possible approaches without evaluating any of them at this stage. Use an extra sheet of paper if you need more space.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Step 3

Go down the list of possible options and write down the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages	Total (for use in step 4)
1			
2			
3			
4			



Step 4

Remember that there may not be a perfect solution and your best option may have disadvantages. Sometimes one advantage may be so powerful that it outweighs many disadvantages or the number of advantages equals the number of disadvantages and you still can't decide what to do.

To work these issues through, assign a value to each of the advantages and disadvantages. This will help you to identify the best solution from your list, particularly if the number of advantages and disadvantages are similar.

Write a score out of 100 (based on level of importance or strength) next to each advantage (giving a positive value e.g. +20) and disadvantage (giving a negative value e.g. -50).

Cutting household expenditure

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages	Total
1. Cut down calls to mobile phones	Save \$\$\$ +50	Inconvenient -40 Trouble getting kids to co-operate -80	-70
2. Cancel Lee's swimming lessons during term three	Save \$\$\$ +60	Lee has made progress last term and might lose momentum -50 She enjoys the classes -60 All her friends are in the lesson -70	-120
3. Cut down on electricity and water usage	Save \$\$\$ +70 Save water and energy +50 Good for the environment +40	Increased effort to switch off lights and appliances -30 Difficulty getting family members to comply -70 Difficulty breaking old habits -50	+10

Work out a total score for the advantage column and for the disadvantage column and then add them together. This will give you either a positive or negative score for each option. The solution which is best for you at the time is the one with the highest score.



Remember it's possible that all of your options may have negative scores. If that's the case, the lowest negative option is your best solution. This approach can help you make a decision when none of your alternatives seem particularly appealing.

Step 5

Identify the best method and option(s) to deal with the problem.

Step 6

Write down the detailed steps needed to carry out this option(s). List the resources needed, such as time, money, skills etc. and the barriers to overcome.

Resources needed:

Barriers to overcome:

a. _____

a. _____

b. _____

b. _____

c. _____

c. _____

d. _____

d. _____

Step 7

Take action and implement the plan you've outlined above.

Step 8

Review your progress in carrying out your plan, after a period of time.

What have I achieved?

What still needs to be done?

You may decide that your circumstances have changed and you need a new plan. Follow the steps again to reflect your current situation.



Expenditure planner

This worksheet will help you to get a clear picture of what regular expenses you have, what you owe and what you own. From this, you can work out what income you will need during this period to cover your expenses and how you might be able to reorganise your assets.

You may find it useful to photocopy this worksheet and re-use it.

Expenses

Work out your regular expenses. Remember to use the same time frame that you chose for your income e.g. weekly, fortnightly or monthly.

Next, add up the totals.

Household expenses

Rent	\$
Repairs	\$
Gas	\$
Electricity	\$
Water	\$
Telephone/mobile	\$
Rates	\$
Body corporate fees	\$
Cable/TV	\$
Furniture	\$
Appliances	\$
Gardening	\$
Groceries	\$
Pest control	\$
Internet	\$
Computer games/software	\$



Printer cartridges/refills	\$
Antivirus software	\$
Sub total	\$

Education expenses

School fees	\$
University or TAFE fees	\$
Tuition	\$
Books and uniforms	\$
Camps/excursions	\$
Sub total	\$

Personal expenses

Clothes and shoes	\$
Hair and beauty	\$
Laundry/drycleaning	\$
Sub total	\$

Debt repayments

Mortgage	\$
Car loan	\$
Credit cards	\$
Personal loans	\$
Store cards	\$
Lay-bys	\$
Sub total	\$

Savings

Superannuation contributions	\$
Regular savings	\$
Regular investments	\$
Sub total	\$

Insurance

Home and contents	\$
Car	\$



Health	\$
Income protection	\$
Life	\$
Trauma	\$
Sub total	\$

Medical expenses

Doctor	\$
Medicines	\$
Dentist	\$
Eye care	\$
Tests/pathology	\$
Chiropractor	\$
Physio	\$
Sub total	\$

Transport expenses

Car registration	\$
Parking	\$
Fuel	\$
Repairs/maintenance	\$
Public transport	\$
Motorist association	\$
Tollways	\$
Sub total	\$



Holidays

Weekends away	\$
Short holidays	\$
Annual holidays	\$
Pet expenses	\$
Sub total	\$

Other expenses

Childcare	\$
Child support payments	\$
Gifts	\$
Donations	\$
Hobbies	\$
Sporting activities	\$
Subscriptions	\$
Newspapers and magazines	\$
Movies and DVDs	\$
Restaurants and take away	\$
Alcohol and cigarettes	\$
Pet food	\$
Other pet costs	\$
Birthday parties	\$
Music/dance lessons	\$
Books	\$
Music	\$
Memberships	\$
Cinema and concerts	\$
Sub total	\$
Total expenses	\$

Adapted from: Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC).
Extract from *Your Money* booklet available at www.moneysmart.gov.au or by
calling 1300 300 630.



What you own

Assets	You	Your partner	Jointly owned
Family home	\$	\$	\$
Home contents	\$	\$	\$
Cars	\$	\$	\$
Bank accounts and cash management trusts	\$	\$	\$
Term deposits and debentures	\$	\$	\$
Managed investments	\$	\$	\$
Shares	\$	\$	\$
Superannuation	\$	\$	\$
Rental properties	\$	\$	\$
Allocated pensions	\$	\$	\$
Other	\$	\$	\$
Total	\$	\$	\$

What you owe

Liabilities	You	Your partner	Jointly owned
Mortgage on family home	\$	\$	\$
Investment loans	\$	\$	\$
Personal loans	\$	\$	\$
Credit cards	\$	\$	\$
Other	\$	\$	\$
Total	\$	\$	\$

Source: ipac securities.

Things to remember

- While the impact of retrenchment or significant financial loss may be distressing, what you are feeling is likely to be a normal reaction to the situation you find yourself in.
- You are not alone. Many people find themselves in a similar situation. Remember, this is not your fault.
- Help is available. Talk to others about what you are going through. There's no shame in asking for support from family and friends.
- If things are building up and getting on top of you, it's important to seek professional support.

References

- ¹ Price, R.H., Choi, J.N. and Vinokur, A.D. (2002). Links in the chain of adversity following job loss: How financial strain and loss of personal control lead to depression, impaired functioning, and poor health. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 7(4), 302-312.
- ² Jorm, A.H., Christensen, H. Griffiths, K.M., Korten, A.E. & Rodgers, B. (2001). *Help for depression: What works (and what doesn't)*. Centre for Mental Health Research: Canberra. Dunn, A.L., Trievdi, M.H. Kampert, J.B.et al. (2005). Exercise treatment for depression efficacy and dose response. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 28(1), 1-8.

HOPE. RECOVERY. RESILIENCE. Find out more at www.beyondblue.org.au



Where to find more information

Heads Up

www.headsup.org.au

Heads Up is all about supporting Australian businesses to create more mentally healthy workplaces. Access a wide range of resources, information and advice for all employees, and create a tailored action plan for your business.

The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance


www.workplacementalhealth.com.au

A national approach by business, community and government to encourage Australian workplaces to become mentally healthy for the benefit of the whole community and businesses, big and small.

beyondblue

www.beyondblue.org.au

Learn more about anxiety, depression and suicide prevention, or talk through your concerns with our Support Service. Our trained mental health professionals will listen, provide information and advice, and point you in the right direction so you can seek further support.

 1300 22 4636

 Email or  chat to us online at www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport

mindhealthconnect

www.mindhealthconnect.org.au

Access to trusted, relevant mental health care services, online programs and resources.



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