

Grief After Losing a Job, Career or Sense of

A gentle guide for understanding and support

Purpose

When work loss affects much more than income

Losing a job, retiring unexpectedly, redundancy, business failure or becoming unable to work can create real grief. Work can provide identity, structure, relationships, status, financial safety and purpose. When it disappears, you may be grieving several losses at once.

Understanding this kind of grief

- Shame can make people hide employment grief, particularly when they believe they should simply 'move on' and find another role.
- Loss of routine can affect sleep, motivation and mood as well as finances.
- If your identity was strongly connected to your profession, you may temporarily feel unsure who you are without it.
- A new role does not have to recreate the old one. Purpose can be rebuilt through many areas of life, often gradually.

A gentle reminder

You do not have to prove that your grief is serious enough to deserve care. Loss is personal. What matters is the impact it has on you.

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Therapy & support that may help

Therapy is not about taking grief away or making you forget. At its best, it gives you a safe relationship in which the loss can be spoken about, understood and carried with less isolation.

Person-centred counselling - space to process identity, confidence, anger and uncertainty.

Career counselling or coaching - useful for exploring strengths, values, practical next steps and new directions.

CBT-informed support - may help challenge harsh self-judgements and avoidance that develop after a setback.

Peer or redundancy support - connecting with others can reduce shame and isolation.

You do not have to start therapy simply because you are grieving. Some people are supported well by family, friends, community, reading or peer support. Others value professional help. Cruse Bereavement Support also offers bereavement information, helpline support, groups and one-to-one support in the UK.

When to reach for more help

Consider speaking with your GP or a qualified mental-health professional if grief is making everyday life feel persistently unmanageable, you are experiencing severe or worsening distress, trauma symptoms are dominating daily life, or you are worried about your safety. If you feel you may act on thoughts of harming yourself, seek urgent help through emergency services or a crisis service.

A few things that can help between difficult waves

- Reduce expectations on the hardest days. Grief uses physical as well as emotional energy.
- Keep basic needs visible: fluids, simple food, medication, sleep routines and fresh air where possible.
- Choose one or two safe people you can be honest with rather than feeling you must explain yourself to everyone.
- Create a small ritual of remembrance or acknowledgement if that feels right for you.
- Notice triggers and anniversaries in advance and plan extra gentleness around them.
- Allow moments of laughter, interest or rest without treating them as betrayal.

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Books I would recommend exploring

Books cannot tell you how you should grieve, but sometimes another person's words help us recognise something we have not yet been able to say ourselves.

Transitions

William Bridges

A classic exploration of the inner process of adapting to major life changes.

Designing Your Life

Bill Burnett & Dave Evans

Practical exercises for exploring new directions and possibilities.

The Gifts of Imperfection

Brené Brown

Explores worth, vulnerability and loosening the link between achievement and identity.

A reflection to take with you

If my job title disappeared from the way I describe myself, which qualities, values and parts of me would still be there?

From me to you

Please be gentle with yourself. Grief is not a test you pass, a set of stages you complete, or evidence that you are failing to cope. Sometimes the most helpful thing we can do is make a little more room for what is already there. You are allowed to take this one day - or one hour - at a time.

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