

How to Support a Friend after a Job Loss

Unfortunately, almost everyone knows someone who has lost their job recently. Whether it's a close childhood friend, a neighbor or a friend from work, knowing what to say and how to act can be difficult. While there are no real 'rules' for dealing with the situation, especially if you have survivor guilt because you still have a job at the company your friend was fired from, there are some guidelines that can help.

- **Be a friend.** While this may seem obvious, all too often the instinct is to avoid someone, even a friend who has been fired, like the plague. Why? Some people use the excuse that they don't know what to say - which may be true. But the real truth is that job loss has some of the same effect on people as death - what if I'm next? It gets you in touch with your own mortality on the job. So, don't let your own fears get in the way of being there for your friend.
- **Be a good listener.** If you haven't been fired, you don't know how it feels. Especially if you have never been fired during a recession when jobs really are scarce. And, even if you were fired in the last recession, unless you are also newly unemployed, spend most of your time allowing your friend to vent and talk rather than waxing on about how you understand. Listen and offer encouragement.
- **Let your friend take the lead on the discussion.** Some people want to talk about their worries, others do not. Let them know that you are thinking about them and you are there if they want to talk. Then, if they want to talk about being laid off or fired, listen. If they don't, talk about sports, kids, gossip about others or talk about whatever the two of you usually like to talk about.
- **Maintain the relationship.** The most important thing for both of you is that you maintain the relationship. Losing a job is not only difficult because of the loss of income; it is also difficult because of the loss of social support and friendships on the job. Make sure you have your work friend's personal email so you can continue to email those jokes back and forth. Go to lunch together or call them up just to say hello.
- **Don't push on job opportunities or ideas.** The last thing your friend needs is to feel like a slacker because they are not following up on every job lead you send them. If they ask for your help, by all means give it. But otherwise, stick to being a friend and being supportive rather than pushy.

The recession will pass and jobs will be available again. The key is to maintain good relationships even when you are no longer working together. Healthy friendships are an important part of good health.