

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Telling Family and Friends That You Have Been Laid Off

Telling people close to you that you've been laid off can be hard. You may worry that your spouse or partner will become emotional or angry, or will blame you for events you couldn't control. You may wonder what to say to your children, to other relatives, and to friends.

Telling your spouse or partner

The first person you may want to tell is your spouse or partner. The layoff affects your partner directly.

Make sure your spouse or partner hears the news from you. Remember that with social media, some layoffs are tweeted or texted instantly. If this is a risk in your situation or if a friend from work might call, text or call your partner right away. Say when you'll be home to spell out the details. Getting to your partner first shows how important your relationship is to you and that you need and value their support.

Take a deep breath. You're absorbing a shock. If it makes sense, go for a walk or sit quietly for a few minutes and plan what you'll say before you leave for home. You may also want to choose a route home for work that minimizes traffic frustrations, allows you to go slower or take more time, or otherwise creates a sense of space between work and home.

Be direct. Share the company's decision as a statement of fact. You might say, "I received some bad news at work today. The company announced layoffs and my job was eliminated, effective in two weeks. I have all the information for us to review together." If you don’t have all the information yet, share as much as you do know and advise your partner of what is unknown at present.

Share as much information as you have. Your spouse or partner may ask questions like these:

- Why were you laid off?
- Is there any chance that you'll be rehired if conditions change?
- How much severance or other compensation will you receive? When?
- How long will your benefits continue?
- How will this affect life insurance or pension funds?
- Will you get any help finding a new job?

You may have received answers to some or all of these questions in writing from your manager or human resources (HR) when they told you that you were losing your job. Review this letter with your partner. If you do not have answers to your partner’s questions, acknowledge that. Those same questions have likely occurred to you as well. Make notes of unanswered questions and follow up on them with your HR contact.

Be realistic. You and your spouse or partner need accurate information to make plans. For example, don't suggest that there's a chance the company will take you back on if you know this won't happen. Be clear about severance package details (amount of pay, timing for payments, etc.) and health insurance end dates.
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Remember how you felt when you heard the news. If you were shocked, angry, or numb, your spouse or partner may feel the same way at first, especially if you didn't have any warning and discussions about possible redundancies. Be understanding if they need some support, too.

Have the conversation with your spouse or partner in a private place where your children can't hear. Agree on what to say to the children about the layoff. A clear and consistent explanation from the two of you when you are both calm will help your children adjust to the news.

Telling your children and helping them adjust to the news

The ages of your children will play a role in how much you tell them. Toddlers and preschoolers may not even understand what it means to have a job. They may look forward to spending more time with you.

School-age children understand the link between jobs and money. They may worry more than younger children. Will they have to give up their favorite activities, birthday presents, or new clothes? Is relocating for a new job a possibility? Teenagers may also worry that they'll need to get a job or that there won't be money for college.

No matter what their ages, children need their parents to provide a safe and secure world for them. If they sense that you are very upset, they may become upset, too.

Here are some guidelines for talking with your children about a job loss:

If you are in a two-parent family,have the conversation together with your spouse and children.

Be honest and use a calm, matter-of-fact tone. Explain what happened without overwhelming your children with too many details.

A preschool child doesn't need a lot of information. You might say to a child who is 4 or 5 years old, "Daddy won't be going to his job anymore, so he's going to be looking for a new job. When he gets one, he'll go to a new place to work."

A school-age child can handle more information. To a child who is 8 or 9, you might say, "Mommy isn't going to her job anymore. She's going to look for another job she likes even better. You'll keep going to your school and doing what you usually do, like playing with Justin and Maria. We can talk about this anytime you have questions."

A preteen or teenager needs even more information. You might tell a teenager, "I lost my job today. I'm disappointed because I liked the company and my work. I'm going to look for a new job. Until I find one, we may need to cut back on our spending for a while, but we'll all pitch in and get through it together. I want you to ask me any questions you may have about my job search or the layoff whenever you want to."

Help your children find ways to explain to friends what happened. Older children may worry more about what their friends think. They may try to hide what happened, for example, saying, "My father is home on vacation." Talk with your children about what to say to friends who ask why you are suddenly home during the afternoon. Your child might simply say, "My dad's looking for a new job."

Avoid making promises you may not be able to keep. Take a “wait and see” approach to any activity or plan that involves significant expense or would require vacation time on your part. For example, you might have to say, "We'll try our best to send you to camp next summer, but let's wait to decide until we see how quickly I find a new job." Be sensible and realistic.Don't take trips or buy your child gifts that you can't afford. Look for inexpensive ways to have fun, such as having a picnic or going to free activities in the park together as a family.

Stick to your usual routines as much as possible. Children like and need predictable routines - eating meals at certain times, a bedtime story, going to the annual family reunion. Maintaining your routines will also help mitigate negative feelings like fear or helplessness.

Be a positive role model.Show your children that it's possible to get through tough times with love, a positive attitude, and a sense of humor.

Telling relatives and friends

Telling relatives and friends can be a way to start moving forward. Sharing the news eases the burden for you and can lead to real support or even needed help. However, if you are concerned that family members may over-react or respond in ways that would not be helpful, use these tips to prepare before telling them:

Work out an agreement with your partner or spouse about what you'll tell friends and family, and then stick to your plan. Remember that you don't owe anyone an explanation for why you left your job or what financial arrangements this involved. But if you anticipate needing to ask your parents or in-laws for help later, consider telling them the truth up front.

If you feel comfortable, tell friends and relatives that you were laid off. Talk about the future, perhaps saying, "I'll miss my old job, but I'm hoping to be able to find work in the same field soon." If friends or relatives know people in your field, don't be shy about letting them know you would appreciate leads they might have. You can tell them that you plan to use LinkedIn or other professional sites, but ask them not to post on your behalf. You'll want to control your own social media efforts.

Assume positive intent. Most people, especially our close friends and family members, mean well; they may not always be able to help. Sometimes the people who love you the most may offer advice or opinions that seem negative or dismissive. Just thank them for their concern and then change the subject to something else. Some of your best support may come from people who aren’t close to you who have worked through a similar situation.

Focus on your future and how you're moving forward. Talk about the kinds of opportunities that you're interested in exploring so that your friends and family can keep an eye out and pass along helpful information. People may respond much more sympathetically than you expected. Even though you may not take them up on their offers, you may feel better just knowing that people are there for you.