

## Families Taking Charge Sources of Friendship and Support

### Introduction

People experiencing unemployment report they feel better if they have the support of family and friends. Your informal support networks are the personal ties you have with others. Friends, relatives and other people you turn to for comfort, advice or help are your “support system.” Your informal support networks help in many ways. For example, they can be:

- someone to listen to your concerns.
- someone to brainstorm ideas and help you think about alternative plans.
- someone to comfort you when you’re down.
- someone to help with material needs.

### Your Support Network

To help you identify your support system, answer the following questions.

- Who listens to you when you need someone to talk to?
- With whom do you share good and bad news?
- Who appreciates you for what you do?
- Who stands up for you, even when they might not totally agree with what you’re doing?
- When you need advice, to whom do you go?
- When you have a problem, to whom do you turn?
- Who helps you make decisions when you need to think through options and consequences?

The people you named for each of these questions are an important part of your life. You depend on them. They form your informal support network. In turn, you also give them support.

As you look over the people you named, ask yourself these questions:

- Are there one or two people (spouse or friend) whose names shows up often? Are you leaning too heavily on these members of your support network?
- Are there needs you have that are not being met? Which of these needs are most important to you now?
- Who else could fill the needs you have?
- Who could help you meet your needs if you were to take the risk of asking?
- What specific steps could you take to expand your support network?
- What things can you do this week? Next week?

### Building A Support Network

Part of your daily goal should be continuing and making friendships that will add to your support network. This process is like making a patchwork quilt: a variety of different pieces are added over the years. Sometimes an unusual piece adds some special quality that you had not expected. Sometimes, too, you’ll need to patch over places where the material has faded or worn thin.

Supportive friendships often come about indirectly from working and socializing with others. In order for this to occur, it is often necessary to first reach out to others by:

- taking time for your family.
- volunteering your time to community groups and organizations.
- visiting your neighbors.
- joining a club or hobby group.

## **Community Agencies**

A variety of agencies in your community can also be a source of help during unemployment. Typical helping resources are:

## **Unemployment Compensation and Job Service Offices**

While you were employed, your employer was probably contributing to the unemployment compensation program on your behalf. If there is a chance you're eligible for unemployment compensation, go to your nearest Unemployment Compensation office immediately. Take your social security card.

At the claims counter, you will receive help on how to file an initial claim. The payments are calculated from the first day you file, so filing promptly is to your advantage.

You may be eligible for public assistance under the following circumstances:

- if there is a delay between when you apply and the time your unemployment checks begin arriving
- if you are ineligible for unemployment benefits
- if your benefits have run out

## **Human and Social Services Assistance and Services**

Your county Social Services Department may provide financial assistance and services, as well as information on other community resources.

Several assistance programs, such as Food Stamps, Medical Assistance, and Fuel Assistance, are coordinated through this office. Your financial resources and family income is used to determine if you are eligible. Call to find out what records to take with you.

While they process your application, your county Social Service Department may refer you to other agencies for immediate help. In some counties you may be referred to the clerk of your town for general assistance. This varies from county to county and your Social Service Department can advise you.

## **Fuel Costs**

Help with fuel costs may be available. Contact your county Social Services Department for information. Your utility company may also have information on how to apply.

## **Health Services**

The county Public Health Department can provide information on free low-cost preventive health services, including blood pressure testing and other screening programs. Flu shots and immunizations may also be available for a minimal cost.

Other health services vary from community to community. Your county Public Health Nurses' office can tell you what is available. There may be clinics, health fairs and other services available for no or low cost.

Indian Health Services are available at most reservations for individuals who qualify.

Your preschool-aged children may be eligible for other health services through other programs. The WIC nutrition program and the Head Start Project are two federal programs that closely monitor the health of eligible children.

## **Food**

Emergency food supplies may be available at local food pantries. Some churches and community agencies provide free or low-cost meals. Your children may be eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches. Some schools also provide breakfasts. Contact a school counselor.

If you have children under age five, you may be eligible for WIC, the Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children. This federal program provides nutrition counseling and food vouchers to pregnant and breastfeeding women and their children under age five.

## **Clothing**

Local thrift shops and garage sales are sources of low-cost clothing. Recycling clothing may be another option, including sweaters into hats, mittens and slippers and converting adult garments to child garments. Veteran's Benefits

## Veteran's Benefits

Veterans of U.S. military service and their dependents may be entitled to a variety of benefits from the federal government and the Commonwealth of Virginia, including:

- monthly pensions to surviving spouses and dependent children of veterans who have died
- monthly payments and/or tuition and books while attending school or receiving training or completing
- “veterans’ points” added to examination scores when applying to enter state service and various special employment

## Day Care Subsidies

If your income and family savings are below certain levels, you may be able to get help from your county Social Services Department to pay for child care so you can work or get job training. You don't have to be eligible for Aid to Families with Dependent Children in order to get this help.

To find out more, ask a social worker at your county Social Services Department about “day care services funded by the federal Social Services Block Grant.”

## Family Counseling Services

Losing your job is one of the most stressful events a person can experience. Unemployment can be personally devastating and can trigger the same reactions you might feel during other serious crises, such as divorce or the death of someone you love.

Sometimes things may get so difficult and out of control that you may need professional help. In every community, resources such as the family doctor, mental health professionals, support groups and clergy exist. They can help you deal with extreme levels of stress and the physical and emotional trauma that often accompany them.

## Financial Counseling

Managing the money you do have requires careful budgeting. Your local Extension family and consumer sciences agent can help with budget and resource management advice and resources. Bank loan officers, utility company consumer service personnel, or mortgage companies can also help with planning for payment of specific bills.

## Conclusion

Your support system may help you through the stress of unemployment. By reaching out to others and taking advantage of their support and friendship, you can gain strength to deal with your problems and an ability to take control of your situation.

In addition to your personal support network, you can call upon community agencies for support. Help is available. Being ready to seek it and knowing how to find it are challenging but manageable tasks.

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