



Job Uncertainty and Layoffs: Coping When Work Feels Unstable

An explainer and weekly stability check-in · Created by Simar Gill Lowther, MACP, RP (CRPO)
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At a glance

- Waiting to find out can be as stressful as the news itself.
- Work affects money, identity, routine, and belonging, so job threats hit on many levels.
- Focusing on what you can control each week builds stability, even when the future is unclear.

Why job uncertainty is so hard

Whether you've been laid off, are hearing rumours of cuts, or work in an industry facing change, uncertainty triggers the brain's threat system. Our minds are wired to prefer a known bad outcome over an unknown one. That's why "waiting for the other shoe to drop" can feel unbearable.

Work is also about more than income. It often shapes our sense of identity, structure, purpose, and community. Losing it, or fearing you might, can bring grief, shame, anger, and fear all at once.

What the research says

A large meta-analysis found that job insecurity is linked with lower mental health, lower physical health, and reduced job satisfaction, even when people have not actually lost their jobs (Sverke, Hellgren & Näswall, 2002).

Unemployment is associated with significantly higher psychological distress, and re-employment tends to improve mental health (Paul & Moser, 2009).

Common reactions (all normal)

- Trouble sleeping, irritability, or feeling on edge
- Replaying conversations with managers or scanning for signs
- Feeling like you've lost part of who you are
- Shame, or worrying what family and friends will think
- Numbness or low motivation, followed by bursts of panic

Coping strategies that help

- **Separate facts from forecasts.** Write what you know for sure, and what you're predicting. Act on the first list.
- **Keep a daily structure.** Wake, move, and eat at regular times, especially if you're not working.
- **Know your supports.** Check your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), benefits end dates, and Employment Insurance information from Service Canada.
- **Limit "doom checking."** Set specific times to check job boards, news, or company updates.
- **Stay connected.** Isolation makes uncertainty heavier. Tell at least one person what you're going through.
- **Remember your worth.** A layoff is a business decision, not a verdict on you.

Tool: My Weekly Stability Check-In

Use this once a week, ideally at the same time. It helps you notice how you're coping and focus on what's in your hands.

This week...	My notes
My stress level (0–10):	
What I know for sure:	
What I'm worried might happen:	
What is within my control this week:	
One practical step I took (or will take):	
One thing I did for my wellbeing (sleep, movement, connection):	
Someone I connected with:	
Something I'm proud of, however small:	
What I need more of next week:	

When to reach out for support

If worry about work is affecting your sleep, relationships, or sense of self, or a layoff has left you feeling lost, talking with a therapist can help you process the loss and plan your next steps. Many workplace benefit plans and EAPs cover counselling.

Insightful Journey Inc. offers therapy in person in Oshawa and virtually across Ontario, in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. Direct billing available.

[Book a free consultation](#) · 647-982-2527 (call, text, or WhatsApp)

In crisis? Call or text 9-8-8, or call 911.

This resource is for education and self-reflection. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for professional assessment or care.

References

Paul, K. I., & Moser, K. (2009). Unemployment impairs mental health: Meta-analyses. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 74(3), 264–282.

Sverke, M., Hellgren, J., & Näswall, K. (2002). No security: A meta-analysis and review of job insecurity and its consequences. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 7(3), 242–264.

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