Telling Family and Friends That You Have Been Laid Off

Telling people close to you that you have been laid off can be very hard. You may worry that your spouse or partner will become emotional or angry, or blame you for events you couldn’t control. You may worry that the layoff will put a strain on your marriage or relationship or your family life. You may wonder what to say to your children, to other relatives, and to friends. It’s important to talk openly and honestly with the people close to you about losing your job and to share what you are feeling and going through. Most people will be very understanding and will want to offer support, especially those who are closest to you.

**Telling your spouse or partner**

When you learn that you have lost your job, the first person you may want to tell is your spouse or partner. You may decide to pick up the phone right away and share everything that you know and are feeling. Some people wait to share the news until they get home. However you choose to share the news, it’s best to tell your spouse or partner that you’ve been laid off as soon as you can.

- **Make sure your spouse or partner bears the news from you.** Doing this is a way of showing your spouse or partner how important your relationship is to you and that you need and value his or her support.

- **Take a deep breath.** If you feel worried about the conversation, go for a walk or sit quietly for a few minutes and plan what you’ll say before you go 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. The layoff is effective . . . I have all the information for us to review together.”

- **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?
  - How will you receive the money? Will you get a lump-sum payment, or will you get the money over a period of weeks, and, if so, how many?
  - How long will your medical coverage continue?
- How will this affect any life insurance or pension funds?
- Will you receive any support in finding a new job?

You may have received answers to some or all of these questions in a letter you got from your manager or human resources department when you found out that you were losing your job. Showing your spouse or partner the letter will help the two of you work together to deal successfully with all the uncertainties that you face.

- **Be truthful.** Don’t suggest there’s a chance that the company will hire you back if you know this won’t happen. You and your spouse or partner need accurate information to make plans for the future.

- **Remember how you felt when you heard the news.** If you were angry or numb when you found out that you’d lost your job, your spouse or partner may feel the same way. Be understanding if he or she has similar feelings and needs some support, too.

- **Have the conversation with your spouse or partner in a private place where your children can’t bear.** This will allow the two of you to talk about and agree on what to say to the children about the layoff. Learning that a parent has lost a job can be unsettling for a child of any age. Getting a clear and consistent explanation from the two of you 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 about your job loss and how they respond to it. Toddlers and preschoolers may not even understand what it means to have a job. All they may understand is that “Daddy goes to his office,” or “Mommy can’t play with me when she’s working.” So they may be very happy when a parent loses a job, because they may believe this means they’ll spend more time with you.

School-age children understand the link between jobs and money. A parent’s job loss may affect them much more than it does younger children. They may be afraid that the job loss will mean they won’t be able to enjoy their favorite activities, get birthday presents, or have enough to eat. If they have friends whose parents have lost jobs, they may assume that they’ll have similar experiences — for example, if a friend had to move to another city, they may think they’ll have to move, too. Teenagers may worry that you’ll want them to get a job or that the layoff will mean they won’t be able to go to college.

No matter what their ages, children tend to worry more about their parents’ emotions than about money. They 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.
The way to keep your children from worrying isn’t to keep the news of your job loss from them or to pretend that everything will be exactly the same. If you act as though nothing will change, your children may feel betrayed if this turns out not to be true. Your children will feel confident and secure if you are truthful and if you prepare them for any expected changes.

Here are some guidelines when you talk 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 about the situation.** If you try to hide the truth, your children may worry that things are worse than they are or wonder what else you are hiding. Explain what happened without overwhelming your children with too many details.

- **Try not to become too emotional when you talk with your children about the job loss.** Try to stay in control of your emotions so that your children don’t become overly worried or frightened by the news.

- **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 because they don’t have one for him there now, 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 go to her job anymore. Unfortunately, the company cut back on the number of people who work there, and they cut Mommy’s job. But don’t worry. She’s going to look for another job, and she may find something she likes even better. You’ll keep going to your school and doing the things you usually do, like playing with Justin and Maria.”

- **A preteen or teenager needs even more information.** You might tell a teenager, “I lost my job today. I feel sad because I liked the company and my work. I’m going to look for a new job. Until I find one, you can expect things to stay pretty much the same. If we find we need to cut back on our spending for awhile, we’ll all pitch in and get through it together. So don’t worry.”

- **Help your children find ways to explain to friends what happened.** Older children worry a lot about what their friends think and may wonder what to say to them about a parent’s job loss. They may feel embarrassed about what happened and, if they don’t know how to explain it, may even pretend to friends that a parent didn’t get laid off. (“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 say, “My dad’s company laid off a lot of people and he lost his job. He’s looking for a new job.”
Avoid making promises you may not be able to keep. It may take longer than you expect to find a job. If your child asks in the fall if he’ll be able to go to camp next summer, don’t promise him that he can go if there’s a chance that you may not be able to afford it. It’s better 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 realistic. Don’t take trips or buy your child gifts that you can’t afford, hoping that these will make life easier. Actions like these may send the message that the way to deal with a crisis is to spend money you don’t have. Instead, show your children more helpful ways of coping with an unexpected change. Look for inexpensive ways to have fun, such as borrowing videos from the library or going to free activities in the park together as a family.

Encourage your children to help out at home. Knowing they are helping out in tough times makes children feel good about themselves.

Don’t burden your children with adult worries. As you encourage your children to help out, make sure you don’t involve your children in adult worries or talk about these in a place where your children can overhear you. Say that you’re watching your money carefully, not that you’re worried about the electric bill. Children who hear too many details about family problems may think that they caused them or have to solve them.

Stick to your usual routines as much as possible. Children like and need predictable routines -- eating meals at certain times, having a story at bedtime, going to a family reunion like you always do. Familiar activities like these can be a great comfort to children who are going through a confusing time, so it’s important to preserve as many as you can. It’s better to give up an expensive annual vacation than to end the music lessons that your child loves.

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
Figuring out what to tell other relatives and friends can be hard. You and your spouse or partner may have different ideas on how much information you want to reveal. And your relatives and friends may ask more questions than you feel comfortable answering.

To avoid problems, work out an agreement together about what you’ll tell friends and family, and 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, it may be best to tell them the truth up front.
If you feel comfortable telling friends and relatives that you were laid off, you might say, “My company eliminated many jobs last month, and mine was one of them. It’s too bad because I really liked my work. But I have several good leads for new jobs, and 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 any leads they might have.

No matter what you decide to say, focus on how you’re moving forward. Talk about the kinds of opportunities that you’re interested in exploring so that your friends and family can pass along any information that might be helpful. Keep in mind that layoffs have become very common, and people may respond much more sympathetically than you imagined they would. Good friends and loving family members will want to help. Even though you may not take them up on their offers, you may feel better just knowing that people are there for you.

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