



LOVE notes

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When Your Spouse is Unemployed

Unemployment rates continue to soar, affecting millions of American couples and families. You may have been lucky enough to remain unaffected in this way by the struggling economy, but chances are that you or someone close to you is in a marriage where one or both spouses currently face unemployment.

The Impact of Unemployment on Marriage

Research shows that unemployment can be harmful for some marriages. When a spouse is unemployed, the risk for separation and divorce increases. And the longer a spouse goes without finding a job, the greater the risk. For some couples, however, unemployment may actually strengthen their marriage. So why is it good for some and bad for others?

The fact is that although unemployment may be the beginning of the end for some couples, MOST couples do survive bouts of joblessness with only a slight drop in marital satisfaction. Having a strong marriage to begin with is an important factor. Couples who are closer and have already developed successful coping strategies

to handle other stresses in their marriage are better equipped to deal with the added stress of an out of work spouse.

So What Should I Do?

As the spouse who is not unemployed, you can play an important role in supporting your husband or wife. The strain of unemployment can result in increased depression, anxiety, and lower self-esteem for both partners. But when you play the right kind of supportive role, you can help ease some of this strain for both of you and prevent the unemployment from having such a negative impact on your relationship.

Here are some tips:

- 1. Provide motivational support.** The search for work in today's economy can be a long one, and it's easy to feel beaten down and lose motivation. You don't need to get the pom-poms out and be your spouse's perky cheerleader, but you should let them know that you still believe in them.
- 2. Provide unconditional regard.** Your spouse should know that your love for them does not depend on

whether or not they are successful.

3. Don't be too helpful. When you go out and do job searches for your spouse and try to get too involved, it can feel threatening. Although you think you're just trying to help, it may seem that you don't have faith in your spouse's ability to find a job on their own.

4. Focus on the relationship. Put your energy into things you can do to become closer and stronger as a couple. Spend quality time together that is often hard to find when your spouse is working

Overall, stay positive for yourself and remind yourself that unemployment is usually a temporary situation. Though it may strain some marriages, it is possible to come through successfully or even strengthened by the experience.

Cooper, C. L., Robertson, I. T., McKee-Ryan, F. M., & Kinicki, A. J. (2002). Coping with job loss: A life-facet perspective. In C.L. Cooper & I. T. Robertson (Eds.), *International review of industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 1-30). West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons.