

Psychology of Retirement

...FMB

Ways people can come unstuck

- **Identity** - We often identify ourselves by what we do — 'I am a teacher,' 'I am an engineer,' 'I'm a builder.' Losing this tag can be very unsettling for many people.
- **Loss of the work related routines** - We may have been following a routine around going to work for so many years it is deeply ingrained. Losing that social scene and daily structure can leave us feeling lost.
- **Relationship changes at home** - Like any major life change, retirement can alter the dynamics in our relationships. If both of you in a couple retire at the same time that can bring as much disruption to the balance of things as when one of you retires.
- **Impending mortality** - Retirement reminds us that we have moved on a step in our life journey. Even if life expectancy rates would indicate we still have a good many years yet, it's still makes us contemplate the future.
- **Loss of self-esteem** - Depending on the circumstances of your retirement it can affect people deeply. If the retirement was forced or due to being "pushed out" it can have a detrimental impact on mental health.

How to have a successful transition to retirement

Here are some helpful pointers to make retirement as joyful as it should be...

Take your time. Retirement is a process that happens gradually. It will take some time to adjust, but being prepared for a dip and understanding why you might feel unsettled helps move through the transition successfully.

Find your coping mechanisms. You've been through tough times before, how did you cope? What worked well? Try to stay positive, you can't change what has happened but you can change the way you think about it.

Create a new identity and build relationships maybe you have lost your "work identity" but you can create a new one; the golfer, the gardener, the traveller. Build a new routine with your partner, family and friends to replace the structure you lost. It is important to retain a sense of purpose- whatever that might mean to you.

Maintain networks. Numerous studies have shown that friendship reduces stress, create opportunities to regularly meet with old friends or join new groups of like minded people; University of the Third Age, Ramblers Association and check you local newsletter for activities in your area. Retired people are the ones with the time to organise and enjoy lots of community activities.

Exercise. Not only will getting active increase mood-boosting, stress-relieving chemicals such as endorphins and serotonin, it'll also increase your overall health and help keep you free of illnesses. Keeping active as long as possible will help you achieve quality of life in the later stages, so use it or lose it.

“Bucket List”. Write down a list of things you want to do and things you regret not doing and then identify ways you can achieve those goals.

A new path. When you consider your options, think about whether you want to spend your free time doing something similar to what you did in your job, or if you want to try something totally different. Exploring something you've never done before can be a great way to stimulate your mind and make new friends.

Seek help. If you feel nothing is helping and you can't get back on track do seek help. You are not the first person to experience difficulties with the transition and it will get better but you might need a little help. Your GP will be able to find a solution.

Some Other Great Retirement Tips!

Just Keep Moving

Exercise not only helps you maintain physical strength and wellbeing it is fantastic for alleviating depression and boosting mood. Don't be afraid of joining a gym or exercise class, many have special sessions for those who are retired and will devise personal programmes tailored to your needs. Even if you've never set foot in anything like this before try a taster session. It's also a great way to meet people.

Stay Involved with Family

Find ways to maintain your family relationships even with those far away. Everyone loves a letter or e-mail and try out Skype/Facetime if you've never used it before, it's a great way to keep in touch with distant loved ones. Initiate family gatherings, if your home is not big enough or you feel you can't entertain suggest meeting up for a picnic or pub lunch. You don't need an excuse but birthdays and seasonal celebrations provide a good reason so don't let them pass without celebration!

Keep in touch with Friends

Even doing things like food shopping or the garden centre can be an excuse to meet up and mundane tasks can become more fun. Try and have something social planned often to avoid feelings of isolation which can make you feel down. How about the hairdressers, cinema, walk and coffee?

Use Technology

Not meaning to be patronising as many people over 50 are absolute tech whizzes and have the latest I-phone! However we know that is not always the case. We've mentioned Skype, but just scheduling telephone calls with loved ones on a particular day will make sure it happens. There are some great free messaging apps where people keep in touch with groups of people all at once such as "Whatsapp", just sharing jokes and funny photos can brighten the day. If you haven't got a tablet or smartphone now might be the time. You have got the capacity to take time to learn how to use it now and they are a very useful tool in staying connected. Facebook can be very powerful in seeing what your family and friends are up to, just ask someone who knows the app well to make sure you have the highest privacy settings if you are at all concerned.

Back to School

There are lots of options for studying academic subjects, languages and crafts at local adult education centres. Now you can also find many online courses even if you can't get out so easily. Keep challenging yourself and your brain!

Pets

You might have felt while you were working it wasn't fair to get a pet. It still might not suit if you are planning on frequently travelling. However if this is something you have always wanted a new "family member" can be a welcome distraction. Pets need structure and take up lots of time as well as being a great stress buster!

Puzzle it out!

A bit of a stereotype I know, but it works. Bridge clubs, card and board games keep the mind active, as well as providing company. Word and number puzzles keep the grey matter active.

Reconnect with your spirituality

This will mean different things to different people, but if you have been part of an organised religion at any point in your life it does provide people with meaning and a community that some find very comforting. If that's not for you, maybe you have wanted to explore meditation, yoga or other philosophies. These can also provide community and friendship as well.

Help your Community

You have now got the time to do something meaningful and make a difference. Charities and community organisations are crying out for volunteers and retired people have the skills and life experience that they need. There is something to suit everyone whether you want to work outdoors, with children, animals or at a local historical site. It is hard to feel sorry for yourself when you are helping those less fortunate and bringing joy to other people.