



# MINI-GUIDE FOR WOMEN SIDELINED FROM THE WORKFORCE

Long before the pandemic, women were regularly forced to put their careers on the back burner. Whether caring for children or sick or elderly relatives, women were more likely than men to take on caregiving responsibilities that compete with their working life.<sup>1</sup> Since the onset of COVID-19, that disparity has grown,<sup>2</sup> and with many businesses being forced to shutter their doors, women are leaving the workforce in droves – often involuntarily.

The impact of taking an extended absence from the workforce is multi-faceted, often affecting a woman's mental, financial, and professional well-being, along with other areas. Not all women are struggling, but for those who are, the right combination of support and practical actions can ease the burden and help them emerge more resilient on the other side.

## QUICK STATS

- In a survey of the mental health effects of COVID-19 in Canada, women, especially those with children at home, were among the groups most likely to feel both anxious and depressed.<sup>3</sup>
- Those who have lost their job or are no longer working because of COVID-19 are more likely to have moderate-to-severe anxiety levels and were more likely than other groups to report feeling lonely.<sup>4</sup>
- In an annual survey of women in the U.S. workforce during 2020, mothers were more than twice as likely as fathers to worry that their caregiving responsibilities would cause their work performance to be judged negatively.<sup>5</sup>
- Seventy-six per cent of U.S. mothers with children under the age of 10 listed child care as one of their top three challenges during COVID-19, compared to 54 per cent of fathers.<sup>6</sup>
- One-third of working mothers in Canada have thought about quitting their jobs during COVID-19.<sup>7</sup>
- During COVID-19, women of colour in Canada have faced far higher unemployment than white women (10.5 per cent compared to 6.2 per cent for white women, as of November 2020).<sup>8</sup>

## MENTAL HEALTH

- **Stay connected.** When you lose daily interactions with your co-workers, your social circle can feel much smaller – but it’s just as important now as it was before. Maintaining those positive relationships can help reduce stress and increase your mood, so the extra effort it takes to reach out to someone or respond to others who do is worth it.
- **Focus on what you can control.** Change is hard, especially when it involves something like leaving a job. Stay grounded during this transitional period by focusing on the areas of your life – big or small – where you do have control, and remind yourself that not everything has changed.
- **Take care of yourself.** It can be tempting when you’re out of work to fall into unhealthy habits (e.g., neglecting personal hygiene, eating less nutritional foods, increasing substance use, going without exercise, staying up all night). Healthy habits are important for coping with stress and can help protect your mental health.
- **Be kind to yourself.** There is no shame in taking time off from work, whether it’s voluntary (e.g., parental leave) or unplanned (e.g., a layoff). Show yourself the same compassion you’d offer a friend going through a similar experience.
- **Resist comparing yourself to others.** Remember that you’re running your own race. Although it may feel like you’re falling behind or missing out professionally compared to your peers, everyone’s path is different. Focus on your own journey, whatever shape it takes.
- **Maintain your identity.** Your career can play a big role in your personal identity. When you’re away from the workforce, make time to pursue non-work-related interests and hobbies.

Read more about coping with the mental health effects of unemployment in our [newsletter](#).



### Additional Mental Health Resources

[Wellness Together Canada](#)

[MHCC COVID-19 Resource Hub](#)

[Canadian Mental Health Association](#)

# WORK

- **Nurture your confidence.** When you've been away from the workforce, it can be easy to lose confidence in yourself and your abilities. But you are capable of more than you think – your capacity to shift your responsibilities is evidence of that. In moments of self-doubt, reflect on your past accomplishments and talk to others about the strengths they see in you. We often underestimate ourselves in ways our friends and family don't.
- **Keep one foot in the door.** Whether or not you plan to return to your job (or even stay in the same industry), you could benefit by maintaining some connection to your former field of employment. That could mean staying in touch with former supervisors (who can serve as professional references), updating your LinkedIn page or personal website, or sharpening your skills with online courses, volunteer work, or community projects.
- **Do your research.** Search for jobs that interest you and speak with those around you. Networking can open many doors, even if its just finding new ideas or different options to explore. For a neutral opinion, consider speaking with a career counsellor or completing an online career assessment.
- **Reframe your experience.** The skills you've acquired from past roles – both paid and unpaid – can be reframed to fit different opportunities. If you have a gap on your resume, because you spent time as a stay-at-home mother, for example, think about the abilities you gained during that time (organization,

time management, responsibility, etc.). You could also reorganize your resume to a skills-based format (rather than a chronological one). If you're hoping to shift career paths, think about the transferable skills that could be widely applied, such as teamwork, communication, or problem solving.

- **Take chances.** When you're ready to return to work, don't let the fear of rejection keep you from pursuing an opportunity that interests you. The right employer won't overlook you because you've had time away from the workforce, and you may be surprised by the training they are willing to provide when a candidate is the right fit. If there's an organization you'd like to work for, find out who to talk to and give them a call. If you don't try, you'll never know.
- **Be willing to negotiate.** When you do return to workforce, don't hesitate to negotiate your salary if it appears that there may be some flexibility. While it can be intimidating to initiate negotiations, the potential increase in earnings could help offset some of the financial stress that may have occurred during your absence. If you feel you're worth more than what's being offered, or you cannot justify accepting an offer due to the costs of child care, commuting, etc., have an honest discussion with your employer about what a fair offer looks like to you.

If you're an employer preparing to welcome a woman back to work, consider these [tips for employers](#) for a smoother transition.



## Additional Workplace Resources

[Free Self-Assessment Tool](#)

[Government of Canada Career Quizzes](#)

[Government of Canada Job Bank](#)

### Provinces and Territories

[Employment Resources](#) (Nova Scotia)

[Returning To Work Resources](#)  
(Newfoundland And Labrador)

[Employment Assistance](#) (New Brunswick)

[Career Counselling](#) (Prince Edward Island)

[Employment Assistance](#) (Quebec)

[Employment Counselling](#) (Ontario)

[Training and Employment Services](#) (Manitoba)

[Career Services](#) (Saskatchewan)

[Employment Services](#) (Alberta)

[Women's Employment Resources](#) (British Columbia)

[Career Services](#) (Northwest Territories)

[Employment Support](#) (Nunavut)

[Employment Services](#) (Yukon)

# FINANCES

- **Be willing to talk about it.** If leaving the workforce has left you in a challenging financial position, speaking with a trusted friend or professional can help you process your thoughts and reduce stress. Remember, while it can be an intimidating topic, there's no shame in facing up to financial hardship.
- **Give yourself permission to grieve your losses.** Losing an income and benefits is a big change with many ripple effects. It's OK to mourn what you've lost, whether it's your previous lifestyle, your financial security, or anything in between.
- **Seek professional support.** Don't let embarrassment or self-stigma prevent you from seeking professional guidance. Speaking with a financial adviser can help you make sure your financial decisions are rooted in logic rather than fear.
- **Use 211 to connect with essential services.** Call 211 to find out about the community and social services programs in your area. They can direct you to local food cupboards, emergency housing options, and other resources to help make sure your basic needs are met.
- **Explore financial benefits.** You may be eligible for different forms financial support. In the wake of COVID-19, benefits and services have changed and expanded.

Find out if you qualify for additional support through the resources listed below.



## Additional Federal Government Financial Support Resources

[Benefits Finder](#)

[COVID-19 Benefits and Services](#)

[Family and Caregiving Benefits](#)

1. Moyser, M., & Burlock, A. (2018). *Time use: Total work burden, unpaid work, and leisure* (Catalogue No. 89-503-X) (Women in Canada: A gender-based statistical report (7th ed.)). Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/54931-eng.htm>
2. Leclerc, K. (2020). *Caring for their children: Impacts of COVID-19 on parents* (Catalogue No. 45280001). Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00091-eng.pdf>
3. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, & Delvinia. (2020). *Women, parents and younger adults more likely to feel anxious and depressed during COVID-19*. [https://www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/women-parents-and-younger-adults-more-likely-to-feel-anxious-and-depressed-during-covid-19?utm\\_content=130167886&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook&hss\\_channel=fbp-7025509551](https://www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/women-parents-and-younger-adults-more-likely-to-feel-anxious-and-depressed-during-covid-19?utm_content=130167886&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&hss_channel=fbp-7025509551)
4. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, & Delvinia. (2020). *Women, parents and younger adults more likely to feel anxious and depressed during COVID-19*.
5. McKinsey and Company. (2020). *Women in the workplace: The impact of COVID-19*. [https://wiw-report.s3.amazonaws.com/Women\\_in\\_the\\_Workplace\\_2020.pdf](https://wiw-report.s3.amazonaws.com/Women_in_the_Workplace_2020.pdf)
6. McKinsey and Company. (2020). *Women in the workplace: The impact of COVID-19*.
7. The Prosperity Project. (2020, September 10). *National survey cites family pressures and guilt as ongoing workforce barriers* [Press release]. <https://blog.canadianprosperityproject.ca/one-third-of-canadian-women-consider-quitting-jobs/>
8. Gordon, J. (2020, December 15). *Black, minority women in Canada left behind in COVID-19 job recovery*. CTV News. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/business/black-minority-women-in-canada-left-behind-in-covid-19-job-recovery-1.5232390>

For more information, visit [www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/covid19](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/covid19)



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