

Solutions

FAMILY SERVICES  EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

NEWSLETTER

Issue 36

Lifestyle Changes: Retirement

Spending more time with friends and family, discovering new hobbies, traveling the world, going back to school, starting your own business...for many people retirement is a much-anticipated event. It is a time of freedom, when workday obligations can be left behind, and there's plenty of time to spend on the things you enjoy most.

While we are often told to begin planning and saving for retirement as early as possible, retirement is more than just a financial change. Retirement is a major life transition, and requires more than money, or even good health, to become a successful and happy lifestyle choice.

Transitions

Retirement is more than a one-day event. It requires adjustments in all areas of your life, including your available income, your relationships, your daily routine, your responsibilities and even your personal identity. All these changes can create unexpected stress and unhappiness for the recently retired person.

In fact, a study by the Conference Board of Canada found that one-third of all Canadians have trouble adjusting to retirement. The people who have the least trouble are those who took the time before retirement to plan for the emotional as well as financial challenges of not working.

The number one reason for dissatisfaction in retirement is *boredom*. (Money worries and poor health are less frequent complaints than you would expect!) Without the daily routine and social contact of the workplace, many people find themselves feeling alone and disengaged from their usual social circle.

Even married couples are affected. Retirement means changes not only to relationships with friends and co-workers, but also big changes to life with your spouse. After a few days at home you may discover your idea of the perfect retirement is very different from your wife or husband's. Tensions may also appear if you expect your spouse to fill the void of lost social contact at work – an impossible task for any one person. In addition, spouses who are already retired, or spend most of their time at home, may find their newly retired wife or husband constantly “underfoot.”

To avoid these types of problems, it is important to discuss your retirement plans with your spouse, family and friends, and prepare yourself financially and psychologically for the day you quit work.

Planning

It is important to think about and plan your retirement before your last day on the job. How do you feel about retiring? If you are anxious or have other negative feelings about it, you may not want to plan at all. But planning is essential and will prevent you from feeling lost and unhappy while adjusting to retirement life.

The best thing to do is to think of retirement as a new opportunity. The average person spends more than 40 hours a week at work. You now have an extra eight hours per day to pursue your own interests, such as returning to school, traveling the world, volunteering for a favourite cause, starting a new hobby, or even moving to a place you've always wanted to live.

Get out a pen and paper and make a list of all the things you would like to do, and then prioritize them. Keep in

* Permission to photocopy with credit given to Jennifer McCarthy, Family Service Canada Consultant.

Lifestyle Changes: Retirement (*continued*)

mind your financial means, your family's needs and your personal values and dreams, while you do this. The list will make a fantastic start to your retirement planning. It will help you decide what is most important to you, and provide an exciting blueprint for the next phase of your life.

But planning means more than just big projects and exciting new adventures. You should also think about how your daily routine will change, and how you would like to spend an ordinary day. Now that you don't have to get up at 6am to go to work, will you sleep in? Are you a morning person?

It may seem silly to plan such small details, but it is important to acknowledge your life is changing, and consider what those changes will be. Setting a new routine will also help you deal with the loss of direction you may feel without a work to set the rhythm of your day.

Relationships

Our lives are closely connected to those of our families and friends. When you make a big change in your life, such as retiring, your action will undoubtedly affect those closest to you. It is important to plan for your retirement with friends and family in mind, if not involved, in the process.

Married couples should discuss their expectations, and begin to seek out activities or hobbies they can do together. While you will also want to maintain and develop independent interests, spending time together, especially when discovering something new, will bring you closer and help ease the strain this major lifestyle change may have on your relationship.

If you are single, you should start to develop a strong network of friends and interests outside of work. Despite best intentions, friendships based in the workplace often fade once you are outside that environment. Talk to people who have already retired, and ask them what went well and what didn't. Their experiences will help guide you through this important transition, and they may be able to help introduce you to a whole new circle of friends.

Working

While people tend to look eagerly on retirement as an end to the "daily grind," more and more Canadians are continuing to work past their official retirement day. For

some financial necessity keeps them in the workplace, but many others discover they miss the self-fulfillment and satisfaction from a job well done. Retired workers may decide to return to the workforce in a number of ways, such as starting a new career, taking part-time work, volunteering for their church or community, or even starting their own business.

If you are planning to begin a new career or start your own business, it is a good idea to begin preparing in advance. Will you need to acquire new skills? What kind of financial resources are needed? Who will be your clients or important contacts?

Many employers are now trying to keep valuable, experienced workers on the job by hiring them as consultants, short-term contractors, or part-time workers. If this sounds interesting to you, you may want to discuss these options with your employer before you leave your job.

There are also many temporary employment agencies around to help you make your transition back into the workforce. Several of these actually specialize in older workers.

Enjoying Yourself

Remember, there is no right or wrong way to spend your retirement. What you do depends on your own personal wants and needs. While it is always a good idea to plan, don't put all your eggs in one basket. Plan several different activities and projects, and don't be afraid to take on new opportunities as they come up.

Finally, be patient with family, friends and yourself. Retirement is a major lifestyle change and it will take awhile to adjust, relax and fully enjoy your new life. Keep a positive attitude, and make the most out of this new phase of your life.

References:

50 Plus (Canadian Association of Retired Persons).
Online at: <http://www.50plus.com>

Canadian Senior Years.
Online at: <http://www.senioryears.com>

Retired Worker Canada.
Online at: <http://www.retiredworker.ca>

Seniors Canada On-line.
Online at: <http://www.seniors.gc.ca>

Family Services offers confidential professional assistance on a wide variety of personal and work-related issues. For more information on your EAP, call:

1-800-668-9920