

A hand holding a compass, symbolizing navigation and direction. The background is a solid blue color with a faint, larger image of a hand holding a compass.

NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY AND TAKING ACTION WHEN YOU ARE FURLOUGHED FROM WORK

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Being furloughed from work is often a stressful experience, but it can be easier to navigate if you understand the emotions you may experience and things you can do to help yourself cope. By intentionally taking action, you can better manage this season of uncertainty and prepare for future opportunities.

- WHAT IS FURLOUGH?** 3
- COMMON FEELINGS WHEN YOU ARE FURLOUGHED** 3
- THINGS THAT WILL HELP YOU COPE**..... 4
 - Pause - take a couple of days to just BE 4
 - Acknowledge your feelings 4
 - Cultivate perspective and a growth mindset..... 4
 - Assess the financial impact and take action as needed 5
 - Discuss with family..... 6
 - Maintain basic self-care 7
 - Stay professionally connected and engaged 7
 - Seek professional support..... 8
- ADVOCATING FOR YOURSELF AND OTHERS**..... 9
- REFLECTION AND ACTION PLANNING** 10
 - Questions to ask yourself 10
 - Action planning 10
- ABOUT KONTERRA** 11

WHAT IS FURLOUGH?

A furlough is a temporary unpaid leave imposed by an employer, often due to funding issues or external policy changes. Unlike a layoff, furloughed employees typically retain their employment status and benefits, with the expectation of returning to work once funding resumes. While the duration of a furlough may be unclear, it is important to take steps to manage the uncertainty, maintain well-being, and explore available resources and options.

COMMON FEELINGS WHEN YOU ARE FURLOUGHED

Being furloughed—especially if it happens suddenly and is not something you expect or want—is a major and unsettling disruption. Common responses include:

- **Shock and/or disbelief:** It may take time to process the reality of the situation, particularly if it was sudden or unexpected.
- **Anger:** You may feel frustration or resentment towards the situation, the organization, or external decision-makers responsible for funding constraints.
- **Sadness and loss:** Furloughs can disrupt a sense of purpose, routine, and connection with colleagues, all of which are vital aspects of work life.
- **Fear and anxiety:** Worries about financial security, career stability, and the uncertainty of when work will resume are natural.
- **Hope and relief:** While unsettling, a furlough may also provide a temporary reprieve from work-related stress and offer time for personal or professional development.

It is normal to experience multiple emotions at once or for strong feelings to come and go in waves. Some days may feel manageable, while others may be more challenging.

THINGS THAT WILL HELP YOU COPE

Pause - take a couple of days to just BE

Give yourself permission to take a brief pause before rushing into action. It's natural to feel pressure to make plans immediately, but allowing yourself a couple of days to rest and process what has happened can help you approach the situation with more calmness and clarity.

Acknowledge your feelings

It is normal to experience a wide range of emotions during this uncertain period. Rather than trying to suppress or ignore these feelings, allow yourself to acknowledge and name them as they arise. Feelings of sadness, frustration, or anxiety may come and go, and that is part of the natural process of coping with change.

At the same time, acknowledging your emotions does not mean dwelling on them indefinitely. If you find yourself feeling stuck in anger, resentment, or self-doubt, try to remind yourself that these emotions, while valid, do not define your entire situation. Dwelling for too long on thoughts of blame or regret can prolong and intensify stress, while cultivating perspective can help you move forward.

On difficult days, remind yourself that emotions are temporary and will shift over time. When you notice yourself caught in a cycle of negative thinking, balance it by focusing on constructive actions you can take and recognizing aspects of your situation that remain within your control. By accepting your emotions while also striving for perspective, you can navigate this time with greater resilience.

Cultivate perspective and a growth mindset

It is natural to experience sadness, anger, or fear when facing a furlough. Rather than dismissing these emotions or judging yourself for feeling them, create space to acknowledge them while also keeping perspective. Remember that experiencing difficult emotions does not mean you have failed—it simply means you are human.

At the same time, try to remind yourself of helpful truths that can provide balance and perspective:

- **This is a temporary challenge** – While this situation is difficult, it is not permanent. Change is inevitable, and new opportunities will arise.
- **This too shall pass** – Even though things feel uncertain now, they will eventually stabilize. Situations evolve, and hardships do not last forever.
- **You have overcome challenges before** – Reflect on past obstacles you have faced and how you managed to navigate them. Draw confidence from your resilience.
- **You have options and resources** – Take stock of your strengths, skills, experience, professional connections, financial resources, and support networks. These assets will help you find a way forward.
- **You are not alone** – There are people in your life who care about you and want to support you during this time. Stay connected and allow yourself to receive help when needed.
- **There are still things to be grateful for** – Even in challenging times, finding moments of gratitude can be grounding. Take time to recognize and appreciate the good things in your life, whether big or small.

Cultivating a growth mindset means viewing this period not only as a setback but also as an opportunity for learning and self-discovery. Consider using this time to explore new skills, re-evaluate career goals, or engage in professional development. By shifting your mindset from frustration towards curiosity and possibility, you can take meaningful steps toward your next opportunity.

Assess the financial impact and take action as needed

Financial strain associated with a furlough can be a significant source of stress, so it is crucial to take proactive steps to manage your finances effectively. Ignoring financial concerns will only add to the burden, so address them head-on by taking the following actions:

- **Apply for unemployment benefits:** If you are eligible, apply for unemployment benefits or other forms of assistance as soon as possible to help offset lost income.
- **Assess your financial situation:** Take stock of your savings, monthly expenses, and any outstanding debts. Knowing where you stand financially can help you make informed decisions and plan ahead.

- **Adjust your budget immediately:** Reduce discretionary spending by cutting non-essential expenses. This might include dining out less, pausing subscription services, or delaying major purchases.
- **Communicate with creditors and service providers:** Many lenders and utility companies offer hardship programs or flexible payment plans for individuals experiencing financial difficulty. Reach out early to discuss options.
- **Explore short-term income opportunities:** Consider contract work, freelancing, or temporary jobs to bring in some income while waiting for your furlough to end. Let your professional network know you are open to short-term opportunities.
- **Look at household income adjustments:** If you share financial responsibilities with a partner or family members, explore whether other household members can temporarily increase their work hours or earnings to help stabilize finances.
- **Understand the impact on your benefits:** If your employer continues providing health coverage or other benefits, clarify how long they will remain in effect and what steps you need to take to maintain them.
- **Address visa and work status concerns:** If you are working internationally, determine how your furlough affects your visa status and residency rights. Seek legal advice if necessary to ensure compliance with immigration requirements.

Taking these steps can help you feel more in control of your financial situation and reduce stress during this uncertain time. The earlier you take action, the more options you will have to manage your resources effectively.

Discuss with family

If you are part of a family—and especially if your family depends primarily on your income—your furlough will likely impact them as well. Rather than carrying the burden alone, try to have open discussions with your family about what you are experiencing. Share how you are feeling and what steps you are considering moving forward.

Children, in particular, may feel uncertain or worried when routines and financial stability are disrupted. They may also imagine worst-case scenarios, so being transparent about the situation in an age-appropriate way can help reassure them. Let them know that while things may be different for a while, you are working on solutions and that you will navigate this challenge together as a family.

In addition to immediate family, consider sharing your thoughts and feelings with extended family members or trusted friends. They may offer emotional support, guidance, or even practical assistance.

Maintain basic self-care

During times of increased stress and uncertainty, self-care is often one of the first things we neglect—ironically, it is also when we need it the most. Prioritizing your physical and emotional well-being will help you navigate this challenging time with greater resilience.

- **Get enough sleep:** Stress can disrupt sleep patterns, but rest is crucial for maintaining emotional balance and mental clarity. Establishing a regular sleep routine and limiting screen time before bed and during the night can improve sleep quality.
- **Eat nutritious foods:** When under stress, it's easy to reach for processed foods or skip meals altogether. Aim to nourish your body with balanced, nutritious meals that sustain your energy and mood.
- **Stay physically active:** Movement is a powerful stress reliever. Whether it's a daily walk, yoga, or a workout, staying active can improve your mood and overall wellbeing.
- **Make time for relaxation and enjoyment:** Engaging in activities that help you unwind—such as reading, meditating, journaling, or creative hobbies—can provide emotional relief and perspective.
- **Set small, manageable goals:** Accomplishing small daily tasks can create a sense of structure and control, helping to combat feelings of helplessness.

Rather than seeing self-care as indulgent, recognize it as an essential foundation for your ability to adapt and take action. Taking care of yourself allows you to be better equipped to make decisions, seek new opportunities, and support those around you.

Stay professionally connected and engaged

Maintaining professional relationships can provide emotional support and open doors to new opportunities, and remaining engaged in professional activities can help maintain a sense of purpose and prepare you for a return to work or alternative opportunities:

- **Stay in touch with colleagues and connect with industry peers:** Connect with friends and acquaintances in your line of work. Many new opportunities open up through existing relationships, so invest in those existing relationships and look for ways to connect with others who are already working in your area of interest.
- **Stay informed:** Keep up-to-date with developments in your organization and the broader sector.
- **Upskill and learn:** Use this time to take free or low-cost professional development courses, attend webinars, or strengthen technical skills relevant to your field.
- **Consider temporary work or volunteering:** If financially feasible, short-term consulting work or volunteering can provide professional engagement and networking opportunities.
- **Update your resume and LinkedIn profile:** Review your LinkedIn profile and any other social media profiles to ensure they look up to date and professional. Consider enabling #OpenToWork from your LinkedIn profile so that anyone viewing your profile immediately knows you are open to opportunities. Anyone considering hiring you *will* look at these profiles, so ensure they represent you well.

Seek professional support

If you are struggling, reach out to a mental health professional, peer support group, or qualified coach. Professional guidance can help navigate the emotional and practical aspects of this season. Humans are relational and thrive best in the company of others and when they are receiving support from other people. Reaching out for help when you are struggling is not being weak, it is being strong and smart enough to use an advanced coping skill.

ADVOCATING FOR YOURSELF AND OTHERS

If furloughs in your sector are widespread, collective action may be an avenue to explore:

- **Engage with professional associations:** Many organizations have advocacy groups that can provide updates, support, and lobbying efforts for policy changes.
- **Communicate with leadership:** Where possible, maintain dialogue with your organization's leadership about expected timelines, potential funding sources, and opportunities for furloughed staff to contribute in the interim.
- **Stay connected with sector-wide initiatives:** Join professional communities and advocacy groups focused on supporting displaced or furloughed workers in your sector.

REFLECTION AND ACTION PLANNING

Questions to ask yourself

Charting a course through furlough and adapting to uncertainty takes time. By focusing on what you can control, maintaining stabilizing routines, and seeking connection and support, you can navigate this season with greater confidence and less anxiety. Taking small, intentional steps can make a significant difference in managing stress and clarifying or creating opportunities for the future. To help you apply these strategies, consider the following reflection questions:

1. What aspects of this situation are within my control, and what can I let go of?
2. What emotions am I experiencing, and how can I acknowledge them while maintaining perspective?
3. What financial steps can I take right now to manage expenses and maintain stability?
4. Who in my professional or personal network can I reach out to for support, guidance, or potential opportunities?
5. How can I use this time productively to build new skills, gain experience, or explore different career paths?
6. What daily or weekly routines can I establish to support my wellbeing and bring a sense of stability and normalcy?

Taking time to reflect on these questions and create an action plan can help you approach this period with greater clarity and direction.

Action planning

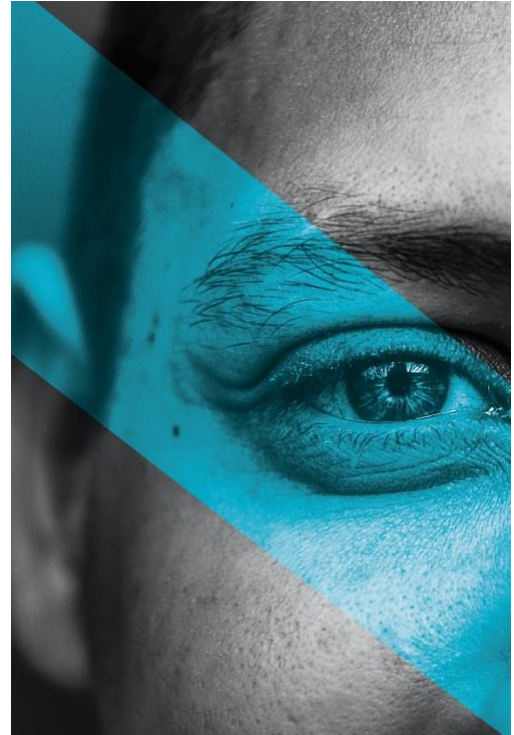
- Review your responses to the reflection questions.
- Identify up to three specific actions you want to prioritize.
- Write them down and set a plan to integrate them into your daily or weekly routine.
- Check in with yourself regularly to assess progress and adjust as needed.

ABOUT KON TERRA

At KonTerra, we specialize in supporting clients that operate in complex and high-stress environments where organizations and their staff face difficult challenges.

When staff work in high-pressure roles or locations with elevated exposure to threat, suffering, graphic content, or conflict, they are at risk of experiencing overload, attrition, and stress reactions such as burnout. The KonTerra Group works directly with individuals, leaders, and teams to equip them with tools to better understand and manage the challenges they face.

Providing support in a meaningful way is only possible with the right people. The experience and sensitivity of our counselors, trainers, and coaches allows us to work with clients in a way that is unique. Our specialists all share two attributes which equip them to deliver excellent support: all are veteran mental health clinicians (master's or doctoral-level); and experienced supporting staff in high-stress and high-stakes environments and roles.



Services delivered by our uniquely positioned professionals include:

- Individual Counseling and Coaching
- Virtual and Onsite Training and Educational Events
- Staff Wellbeing Assessments
- Manager Support and Consultations for Organizations and Leaders
- Critical Incident Response Services

If you are interested in learning more about any of the above services, please contact your KonTerra Account Manager or email: info@konterragroup.net.