

# Emotionally Preparing for Retirement

Retirement is a time of which most of us have dreamed. It seems like such a wonderful idea to have fewer responsibilities, be on vacation all the time and do as we please. Retirement can be all these things, but it is just as important to plan for retirement emotionally as well as financially.

Retirement is often considered the culmination of our "life's work", but it is really just the next step in our life's journey. Most of us have had the structure of working, volunteering or caring for children in our lives, and this structure has given us purpose and meaning. Work often defines who we are when we introduce ourselves and how our day is determined or structured. Work also fulfills personal needs such as camaraderie, challenge, focus and power. Those needs don't go away when we are ready to retire.

## There are seven stages or phases to retirement.

- 1. Pre-Retirement:** Usually begins 3-5 years prior to retiring. We begin dreaming about retirement and it gives us time to plan. We start thinking about the financial realities and how we might want to live during this time period, our options and what is available to us.
- 2. Near Retirement:** Occurs about 1- 1 ½ years before retirement. Retirement starts to become real. It is no longer just something in the future and is more imminent. You have an actual date and your primary task is preparing for the retirement by getting details about your benefits, income and health coverage. You begin emotionally gearing up for separation from work and coworkers. It is helpful to begin preparing for the challenge by also considering what you are moving toward and beginning to develop a long-term plan.
- 3. Honeymoon:** Retirement is a time of rest and relaxation and feels like an indefinite vacation. Initially we may have the lower activity of having less demands or increased activity of completing projects we have had on hold. People who have had a full life outside of work prior to retirement are more likely to experience immediate returns. This phase also includes the primary task of continuing to plan for the long term. It is important to structure routines and to pace yourself so that you can avoid an emotional letdown.
- 4. Routine, Rest and Relaxation:** This stage includes the acceptance and adjustment to the flexibility of retirement, settling into the routine and taking time to rest and relax and enjoy the fun things life can hold.
- 5. Disenchantment:** Reality begins to set in and can create a period of disappointment, uncertainty and regret because it wasn't as good as we thought or imagined it would be. This can lead to self-esteem issues. Sometimes a significant disruption in life can throw us off such as health issues for us or a loved one, or other family problems. Some people can become depressed, isolate themselves from others or do things they would not normally do or feel overwhelmed by the drastic change that has occurred in their life.
- 6. Reorientation:** We learn to accept and enjoy the roles of retirement. We develop a new sense of self-worth. We realize that occasional disenchantment may be normal and even begin to anticipate it. We continue to evaluate and reevaluate by looking at our expectations (realistic vs. unrealistic), taking inventory and brainstorming about what we want from our life. We embrace responsibility and opportunity, take good care of ourselves and balance our life with a diversity of interests and relationships.
- 7. Stability:** Retirement has become routine and structure is comfortable and settled. It feels as if this is what you had been striving for and are no longer planning but living it. The windfall of free time is converted to self-fulfillment.



Remember that retirement can cause strains in relationships during this time as well. It is a change for our family and friends. Family members, especially spouses or partners may feel threatened if the retiree takes over their roles. It can cause family tension due to the change in routine. Differences of opinion over future use of time can occur and being together more can put additional stress on an already strained or distant relationship.

There are several keys to a successful retirement. Begin by assessing what work has meant to you: daily structure, friends, goals, etc. Consider how you will fill those needs that work met in the past. Look for substitute activities that give you purpose and meaning such as part-time work or volunteer work, clubs, physical activities and other opportunities. It can be very helpful to think about doing things you have always wanted to do but never felt that you had the time before.

There are three things that you can do to make yourself a successful retiree: Have a well developed plan - don't just shoot from the hip or go with the flow but be completely aware of the issues surrounding this phase of life and consider how you want to meet all your needs; know what you want to do day in and day out - have an accurate idea of what it will be like and know that it may be a time of trial and error; maintain a positive attitude toward retirement by embracing the change and the challenge.



It is important to follow some decision making caveats: Don't rush to make grand changes. Don't feel wedded to your first choice of activity – you can change your mind! Recognize that decisions at this stage are complex. Make informed decisions by educating yourself, talking to other retirees, reading books, etc. Avoid filling the retirement vacuum with a host of mindless and meaningless activities.

As you are preparing for retirement, take advantage of seminars, workshops and books that provide food for thought. You can find many articles about successful retirement at [www.concernservices.com](http://www.concernservices.com). If you feel you need more assistance or are having difficulty with an issue, a counselor may be helpful in sorting things out. Remember, retirement is what you make of it! Understand that adjustment and transition is both a challenge and an opportunity and that it takes time. Remain fully committed to your planning and process effort as it will be well worth it!

Information taken from CONCERN Services training.

**Don't retire from something, retire to something.**



[ak.concernservices.com](http://ak.concernservices.com) | 513 891 1627 | 800 841 5002