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Introduction

Being out of work can affect far more than your income. It can touch your confidence, your sense of identity and how you feel about your future.

This workbook has been created to support you through that experience in a practical, respectful and hopeful way. It is designed to help you recognise the skills you already have, rebuild your self-esteem and sense of self-worth, and feel more confident about looking for work and securing employment. It also acknowledges that many of the messages you received growing up, and the events and relationships you've lived through, may have shaped how you see yourself today.

Rather than judging you or assuming what your journey has been, this workbook invites you to explore your experiences at your own pace. Across the sessions, you will look at self-esteem, negative cycles of thinking, optimism, communication skills, interview skills, resilience and practical tools such as CV writing and application forms. The aim is not to 'fix' you, but to support you in noticing your strengths, challenging unhelpful beliefs and building a more hopeful, realistic view of what you are capable of.

You may be reading this at a time of stress, uncertainty or change. You might be feeling low, anxious, frustrated or simply tired of trying. All of those feelings make sense. This workbook is designed to be a companion rather than a test. It offers space to reflect, learn and practise new ways of thinking and responding, with the understanding that change takes time and small steps.

You are the expert on your own life. You can choose how much you share, and you can take breaks when you need to. If any part of the workbook brings up strong emotions, it is okay to pause, talk to someone you trust, or seek additional support. Your wellbeing matters as much as your employment goals.

Above all, this workbook is based on the belief that you have value, skills and potential, even if unemployment, past experiences or other people's messages have made that hard to see. You are more than your job status, and you are not alone in wanting a future that feels more secure, meaningful and hopeful.

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is designed to guide you through a series of sessions that build your confidence, strengthen your skills and support you in preparing for employment. Each session includes information, reflective activities and practical tools. Working

through these sessions step by step will help you understand yourself more fully and develop the skills you need for moving forward.

You may find some parts easy and others more challenging. That is completely normal. Change takes time, and learning new ways of thinking or responding can feel unfamiliar at first. What matters is that you stay engaged, take your time and allow yourself to learn at a pace that feels manageable.

Some activities may feel more personal or bring up strong emotions. If this happens, it is okay to pause, take a breath, or talk to someone you trust. You can return to the workbook when you feel ready. Your wellbeing is important, and taking care of yourself is part of the process.

This workbook can be used on your own, with a tutor, or as part of a group. If you are completing it within a course or programme, your tutor will guide you through the sessions and activities. If you are working independently, you can move through each session in order, using the reflective questions and exercises to deepen your understanding and build your confidence.

You do not need to have all the answers straight away. The activities are designed to help you explore your thoughts, experiences and skills, and to support you in developing new strategies for moving forward. Each session builds on the last, helping you to recognise your strengths, challenge unhelpful beliefs and prepare for employment with greater clarity and confidence.

Above all, this workbook is here to support you. It is a space for learning, reflection and growth — and every step you take is a step toward a more hopeful and secure future.

Session One: Unemployment and Self-Esteem

Understanding How Unemployment Affects Confidence, Identity and Wellbeing

Purpose of the Session

This session explores how unemployment can affect your self-esteem, confidence and sense of identity. It helps you recognise the impact that being out of work may have on your thoughts, feelings and wellbeing, while also supporting you to identify your strengths and the skills you already have. Through guided activities, you will begin to understand the difference between low and high self-esteem, reflect on how unemployment may be affecting you, and consider the benefits of work and the obstacles you may need to overcome. The aim is to help you build a clearer, kinder and more balanced view of yourself as you move toward employment.

Unemployment and Self-Esteem

Being unemployed can have an impact on your self-esteem and sense of self-worth. Depending on the circumstances that have led to unemployment, it may cause a more negative view of yourself and your capabilities. You may have recently lost your job, be long-term unemployed, or may never have worked, but being without work is likely to create some sense of doubt in your abilities and a lack of confidence to do a work-related task well.

This workbook is designed to help you recognise the skills you have and to help boost your self-esteem and sense of self-worth, enabling you to confidently look for work and secure employment.

Activity: Think about the characteristics of someone with low self-esteem and list them below.

Here are some of the characteristics of someone with low self-esteem that may match those you identified.

- A lack of confidence to do anything well.
- A feeling that they lack control of their lives.
- Placing little value on ability to do anything well.
- Denying successes.
- Finding it difficult to set goals and problem solve.
- Give up trying.
- Perform well below their capabilities.
- Self-limiting beliefs become a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- A constant fear of failure.
- Setting goals that are too high, then feeling a failure when they aren't met

Activity: Now list the characteristics of someone with high self-esteem

Here are some of the characteristics of someone with high self-esteem that may match those you identified.

- They have a happy fulfilled life.
- Do what they like to do with confidence.
- Can make their own choices on how to run their lives.
- They can recognise their own potential and integrate all their abilities in a more fulfilled and balanced way.
- They feel lovable and competent.
- Know their own strengths.
- Aware of their weaknesses and limitations and are less likely to set themselves up constantly for failure.
- Have a firm sense of their identity.