

**We give special thanks to the following Indiana individuals and organizations for taking the time to assist Northeastern Center in this important task:**

Matthew Bell, State Representative and LEAP of Noble County, Ligonier  
Jodi Birkey, Center for Healing and Hope, Goshen  
Dan Engber, Shipshewana  
Elías García, Bienvenido Facilitator, Goshen  
Rebecca Gascho, LaCasa of Goshen, Inc., Goshen  
Julia Gingrich, Church Community Services, Elkhart  
Ron Guengerich, Silverwood Mennonite Church, Goshen  
Michael Heinbaugh, Ligonier United Methodist Church  
Vonda Horst, Church Community Services, Elkhart  
Ken Ludwig, LaGrange  
Israel Mujica, Concilio Hispano of Goshen  
Jeff Mumaw, Clinton Frame Mennonite Church, Goshen  
Linda Nyce, Ph.D., Goshen College, Goshen  
Robert Reyes, Ph.D., Goshen College, Goshen  
Joe Rueff, Eye2theWorld, Goshen  
Rubén Santos, Templo Sinaí, Goshen  
David Schrock-Shenk, Intrinsic Solutions, Goshen  
Jason Shenk, Roosevelt Center, LaCasa of Goshen, Elkhart  
Judge Scott Vanderbeck, LaGrange  
Margarita White, Celebrate Diversity Project, Ligonier  
Eva Woodworth, Ligonier  
Linda Yerick, Noble County Community Foundation, Ligonier

**Personal and Community Development**



**'Talk it out'**



**Personal and  
Community Development**

**NORTHEASTERN  
CENTER**

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Ligonier, IN [www.nec.org](http://www.nec.org)

# 'Talk it out'

The following materials are provided by the Northeastern Center, Inc. located in Ligonier, Ind. Northeastern Center is a community mental health center that for the last 30 years has provided behavioral health services to residents in northeastern Indiana.

Northeastern Center and various community partners have embarked on a journey to create spaces where individuals and families can work at talking out what is transpiring in their lives due to recent job loss, financial difficulty, home loss, and other losses that are being experienced during this time. These spaces are called "Talk it out" support groups. Northeastern Center would like to recognize that the idea for starting these support groups came from Waterford Mennonite Church (WMC), located in Goshen. In the fall of 2008 WMC established a men's support group as a way of supporting men who had experienced job loss. One member of this group shared with Northeastern Center that the support group helped him understand what might happen if he lost his job. In following WMC's lead, Northeastern Center convened leaders and individuals from northeastern Indiana to think through the "Talk it out" support group idea.

Northeastern Center initiated calls to various organizations, business leaders, educators, school personnel, and religious leaders to brainstorm the idea of creating "Talk it out" support groups for individuals and families in the wider community. Several community meetings and individual meetings were conducted in December 2008 in Ligonier and Goshen. Community members and leaders assisted Northeastern Center in thinking through the "Talk it out" support group idea.

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## 10 Tips for Coping with the Economic Downturn

1. Make a budget for all your bills. If you can't pay the full amount, pay the minimum. Let creditors know you're working at it (see No. 9).
2. Take on a roommate to help with living expenses.
3. If you need a support group, go to a church, Internet chat room, or your home library.
4. If you don't have your GED (General Educational Development) diploma, enroll in classes.
5. Enroll in online classes.
6. Offer advice to others. Be that person others can talk to.
7. Have a family night or date night. Walk downtown or visit the local museum.
8. Cut back where you can. Use your money to pay bills; don't use your money on things that have little value.
9. Talk to creditors. Ask them to see if you can drop your payments as low as possible during this time.
10. Exercise.

*Adapted from Eva Woodworth*



## How to Reduce Stress and Live Happier

1. Don't work more than 10 hours per day.
2. Save at least a day and a half per week to enjoy yourself and engage in pleasurable activities.
3. Spend at least a half hour on each meal.
4. Eat slowly and chew your food well; examine your eating habits in general.
5. Cultivate the habit of listening to relaxing music.
6. Practice relaxation and/or meditation at least twice (or three times) per day for not less than 15 minutes each time.
7. Smile and respond warmly every time you meet up with someone you know.
8. Plan a vacation each year.
9. Dedicate 10 minutes a day (or 20 minutes four days a week) for physical exercise, preferably outdoors.
10. Cultivate the habit of walking, talking, and moving around.
11. If your emotional or sexual relationships generate stress, look for somebody to counsel you about them.
12. If you aren't satisfied with your job, take inventory and look for other options. But don't quit your job until you have another one lined up.
13. Cultivate a more creative than competitive pastime (for example, gardening) and dedicate time to it.
14. Get regular massages or attend a yoga class.
15. Concentrate on the present, avoiding the tendency to worry about past events or future uncertainties.
16. Express your feelings openly and without antagonism.
17. Don't depend on drugs/alcohol or blame other people for what happens (or doesn't happen) in your life. Accept personal responsibility for your own decisions and actions.

*Adapted from "Author Unknown"*

## Welcome to 'Talk it out'!

At a time when many individuals are losing their jobs and even their homes because of the faltering U.S. economy, we think it's important to talk with others about what's going on in our lives. In this "Talk it out" support group we hope you find a space where you can share about your life transitions, goals, and plans for the future. We understand that you may have questions and uncertainties about the future, but by gathering with others who are in a similar situation we hope you will receive support, as well as create new aspirations and dreams for improving your life.

### The purpose of 'Talk it out'

- Provide an atmosphere where individuals and families identify their common strengths and common needs.
- Increase opportunities for dialogue with others who may be experiencing job/home loss or financial strain due to the increasingly weak economy.
- Provide members of the community opportunities for meaningful participation in the group.

#### Community resources: additional support and/or crisis interventions

If you need to see a trained counselor, contact:

Northeastern Center Ligonier (Ind.) Outpatient Office 260-894-7179 Crisis line: 1-800-790-0118 after 5 p.m.	Oaklawn (Goshen, Ind.) 574-533-1234 Madison Center (Elkhart, Ind.) 574-262-9197
Northeastern Center Kendallville (Ind.) Outpatient Office 260-347-4400 Crisis line: 1-800-790-0118 after 5 p.m.	Park Center (Fort Wayne, Ind.) 866-471-2700 Park View Behavioral (Fort Wayne, Ind.)
Bowen Center (Albion, Ind.) 1-800-342-5653	260-470-8787

We encourage you to look in the phone book or on the Internet for private clinicians who provide mental health services.

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## Talk it out: Session 1

### Our strengths and our needs

When difficult times strike, we don't usually think about the positive aspects of our lives. We tend to think about everything that is going wrong. (Remember George Bailey in the Christmas movie "It's a Wonderful Life"?) Talking about our strengths even when times are difficult is a great way to bounce back. Let's share some things that are going well ... things we feel good about.

1. Talk about the positive qualities that you have. What are you good at doing? What gives you pleasure?
2. What are some positive things about your family? Even with the tough times now, what is going well in your family? If you don't have work, what is good about not having work? Are you spending more time with your children?
3. Talk more about your family. Tell us about your children. How are they helping you deal with this difficult situation? Or are they hindering you?
4. Tell us about your friendships and what they mean to you, especially now.
5. Tell us what you do in terms of recreation. What is your favorite exercise or hobby?
6. Talk about your health. What is good about your health right now? What is keeping you healthy?
7. What are some common needs that individuals in the group have during this time? What can the group do to help meet these needs?



### Things to do as a group

- Make a list of activities you could do together, and then do one of those activities this week.
- Make a list of things you can do to help your fellow group members and/or community neighbors.
- Tell each other stories of when you helped someone else.
- Write each other positive notes and read them aloud to the group.
- Take construction paper, glitter, and some glue and make a happy face and give it to someone.
- Take pictures of your family or support group.
- Make a collage of pictures.
- Bring four or five pictures to the next session and talk about your family.
- Watch a movie about hope.
- Go to a local food pantry or thrift shop and volunteer.

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## Talk it out: Session 5

### What can we offer our community?

Even though times are difficult, most people are willing to help others in time of need. It's good to reflect how you can help others during their time of difficulty. For some, when difficult situations arise, their self-esteem is affected. Some people begin to feel worthless, while others think they've lost their identity. Often people forget about the many positive things they can offer their community during difficult times. In fact, being there for others can help one gain perspective and be better able to cope with one's own situation. At a time when there's uncertainty about whose job will be next, it's very important to understand what you can offer those closest to you, as well as other members of your community.

1. Talk about a time when you helped someone get through a difficult situation. What happened, and how did you help?
2. Talk about a time when you and your family or friends helped your neighbor or an organization that needed help.
3. What can you offer your support group?
4. If you have remained positive during this difficult time, what would you tell others about how you were able to stay positive?
5. Talk about what is most important for you when you help others.
6. Talk about what it's like to be a part of a support group that not only takes care of its members but makes it a priority to help others as well.



### Things to do as a group

- Spend time talking about when you have overcome difficult situations.
- Take time to call another family and invite this family over for food, games, and conversation.
- Go to local food pantry or thrift shop as a family and volunteer your time.
- Spend time together talking about the positive qualities that each person in the group has.
- Visit a local nursing home and ask if there are ways you can help the residents.
- Visit a local healthcare center and offer to volunteer your time.

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## Talk it out: Session 2

### The importance of positive thinking

If you've lost your job or home, it may feel as if things are out of your control. However, what you're feeling and thinking is normal. Not having a job or a home could lead you to become depressed. Take some time to reflect with others about what has happened.

#### *What's going on?*

1. How long did you work for the company that laid you off?
2. In your own words, describe what it was like to work at your factory, plant, or place of work.
3. If you've lost your home, talk about your home and what you miss most about being in the house you recently had to move out of.
4. Talk about what has been going through your mind now that you don't have work or are having difficult times.
5. What has been the hardest thing about your situation?
6. Reflect and share your thoughts about the importance of positive thinking even though times are difficult. What are you doing to remain positive during this difficult time?
7. Reflect with others what is happening to your family because of your difficult situation. If you have children, what do you tell them?
8. Who have you asked for help to deal with this tough time? What was their response?
9. Describe the skills you already have and say what other skills you might need to get another job.
10. Talk about where to go to get new-job training.



### Things to do as a group

1. If you have some or all of the above symptoms, share with the group what has been going on with you.
2. Talk about how you are dealing (or not dealing very well) with these symptoms.
3. Ask your friends for advice on how to best address these symptoms.
4. Talk about how your family relationships are affected because of these issues.
5. Talk as a support group about what you, together, can do to deal with these symptoms and issues. Talk about who can offer professional help if it's needed.

If you feel that the support group alone isn't enough to deal with your situation, we advise you to also seek help from a religious leader, trusted friend, and/or professional counselor. It's important to seek help or talk to someone you trust in order to avoid consequences that would be hurtful to you and your loved ones.



## Talk it out: Session 4

### What's going on with your health?

All of us at some time in our lives experience times of sadness because of difficult situations. People confront a serious illness, lose a loved one, experience a failed relationship, lose a job—or maybe their children have grown up and moved out of the house. These situations are common for everyone. When people experience difficulties, their bodies begin to tell them how they are handling (or not handling) the tough times. Things like fatigue, inability to sleep, loss of appetite, overeating, or excessive drinking can be signs that something is wrong.



Am I becoming depressed? Let's look at some symptoms of depression. Honestly ask yourself whether you have some or all of these symptoms.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Deep sadness
- \_\_\_\_\_ Changes in sleep patterns
- \_\_\_\_\_ Feelings of hopelessness
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mood swings
- \_\_\_\_\_ Excessive crying
- \_\_\_\_\_ Poor appetite
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lack of interest in daily activities
- \_\_\_\_\_ Difficulty concentrating
- \_\_\_\_\_ Feelings of guilt
- \_\_\_\_\_ Distancing oneself from people
- \_\_\_\_\_ Suicidal thoughts

### Things to do as a group

Here are a few ideas for you to consider as you deal with your current situation. It is our hope that you remain positive.

- Take a walk with another group member.
- Exercise regularly with other group members.
- Talk to a friend or family member.
- Participate in activities that other group members enjoy.
- Read a book together.
- Spend time meditating together.
- Spend time visiting each other's home or church.



## Talk it out: Session 3

### Keeping our emotions in check

For some, when difficult situations arise, angry outbursts are more common. At a time when uncertainty about whether you will get a job or not, it's important to understand your emotions so you don't hurt the people who live closest to you.

1. Reflect with others how you react when you become angry.
2. What makes you angry, and how do you deal with your anger?
3. Reflect with the other members of the group on whether or not your family thinks you're more uptight and less patient these days than, say, two years ago. How do your children or family members feel about how you're handling the present situation?
4. If this difficult time has changed the way you relate to your family, what can the group do to help you channel your anger and frustration about your challenging situation in a positive manner?



5. What's the best way to deal with the anger you have toward the company that laid you off?
6. What's the most constructive way to deal with the anger you have toward the bank that took away your home or is threatening to do so?



### Things to talk about as a group

- “Our family has a lot of bills, and we don't know how we're going to make our next payments. The income my wife and I make doesn't cover the bills. I feel that I'm impatient with the children. I'm cranky, and I'm yelling more at the kids. What should I do so I don't get out of control?”
- “Our family feels lonely, and we don't have anyone from my family who lives nearby. We moved to this community eight months ago, but we haven't made very many friends. How can we get connected to other families?”
- “We bought a nice house and thought it would be ours forever. The payments were high to begin with, but we thought we could make them. It turns out I got laid off, and my wife's income wasn't enough to make the house payment. We had to leave our new home, and now we live in an apartment. (Some of our friends in a similar situation have moved in with relatives.) What should we do to feel OK about this?”