

When a role ends, four things go with it

A major role quietly performs four functions beyond the obvious one.

Paid work is the clearest example, but the same is true of long caregiving, military service, or a defining community role. When the role ends, all four functions can vanish at once. **The disorientation that follows is your mind registering their absence, not a sign anything is wrong with you.**

i This map is a thinking tool, not a diagnostic instrument. It helps make the four functions visible so the gaps and the supports show up where they actually are. Fill in only what is useful. Leave the rest.

NOT JUST RETIREMENT, THIS MAP SERVES ANY MAJOR ROLE ENDING

End of paid work

Retirement, planned or otherwise

Redundancy

When the role ends before you are ready

End of long caregiving

When the person you cared for has died or moved into care

Loss of partner

A role that was shared, now solo

WHAT ORDINARY ADJUSTMENT LOOKS LIKE

A period of disorientation that lifts as you rebuild

- Variable mood, especially in the first months
- A sense that the week has lost its shape
- Energy returning as new structures bed in
- Connection coming from new sources

WHAT WARRANTS A CONVERSATION WITH A GP

A low mood that is persistent and not lifting

- Low mood most of the day for two weeks or more
- Loss of interest in things that previously mattered
- Sleep, appetite, or concentration changing markedly
- Hopelessness, or thoughts you would not want to share

THE FOUR FUNCTIONS PAGE 2 MAPS

These four are not the only functions a role can carry, but they are the ones that most often go missing at once. **Naming them is what lets you find them elsewhere on purpose, rather than by accident.**

1 TIME STRUCTURE

The shape the week used to have

When you got up, where you went, what filled the middle of the day.
The scaffold under the week.

2 IDENTITY AND ROLE

Who the role made you

In your own eyes, and to others. The answer to "what do you do" when it was easy to give.

3 SOCIAL CONTACT

The connection the role carried

The regular low-effort presence of other people. The kind you do not have to organise to receive.

4 SENSE OF CONTRIBUTION

The feeling that what you did mattered

To a colleague, a customer, a community, a household. Being needed in a way that registered.

THREE THINGS PEOPLE OFTEN WANT TO KNOW

? Is this just about retirement?

No. The same map works for any major role that has ended. **Redundancy, the end of long caregiving, leaving the family home, the death of a partner, a major health change that ends an activity.** If a role quietly carried these four functions, their loss tends to show up the same way.

? What if I cannot think of substitutes?

That is what the third column is for, and a single small step is often more useful than a plan. The substitutes are usually built, not found ready-made.

? How long does ordinary adjustment normally take?

Highly variable, and the curve is rarely straight. Many people describe months rather than weeks, and the four functions tend to rebuild at different rates. **The pattern that matters is whether things are lifting overall, not whether they have lifted yet.**

REMEMBER Rebuilding scaffolds is responsive. **A period of disorientation is part of ordinary adjustment, not a sign of failure.** What warrants a GP conversation is a persistent low mood, not the disorientation itself.

Fill in only the cells that are useful. Small notes are enough.

Transitions map

Paid work, or any major role, quietly performs at least four functions beyond the obvious ones. When the role ends, all four can vanish at once, and the disorientation that follows is the mind registering their absence. **This map names the four functions and asks where each is sitting now.**

For each row, fill in only the cells that are useful. **Small notes are fine.** The point is to make the gaps and the supports visible, not to produce a complete picture.

1 **TIME STRUCTURE**
The shape that the week used to have

WHAT IT USED TO PROVIDE	WHERE IT SITS NOW	ONE SMALL STEP TO STRENGTHEN IT

2 **IDENTITY AND ROLE**
Who the role made me, in my own eyes and to others

WHAT IT USED TO PROVIDE	WHERE IT SITS NOW	ONE SMALL STEP TO STRENGTHEN IT

3 **SOCIAL CONTACT**
The regular, low-effort connection the role carried

WHAT IT USED TO PROVIDE	WHERE IT SITS NOW	ONE SMALL STEP TO STRENGTHEN IT

4 **SENSE OF CONTRIBUTION**
The feeling that what I did mattered to someone

WHAT IT USED TO PROVIDE	WHERE IT SITS NOW	ONE SMALL STEP TO STRENGTHEN IT

IF THE LOW MOOD STAYS
Rebuilding scaffolds is responsive. A period of disorientation is part of ordinary adjustment. **What warrants a conversation with a GP is a low mood that is persistent, that lasts most of the day for two weeks or more, and that is not lifting as you make changes.**