

Helping Children Cope in Unsettling Times: The Economic Crisis Tips for Parents and Teachers

Current world events, including the “economic crisis,” can be unsettling for young people. The sense of confusion and uncertainty experienced by many adults regarding our country’s financial situation can be transmitted to children. As a result children may be confused or fearful that they or their family are at financial risk. Adults need to help children feel in control, even if they themselves feel vulnerable or angry. Many children will NOT find the current economic crisis personally stressful. However, following general suggestions may help vulnerable or sensitive children cope.

Parents and teachers can help children understand;

- what is happening factually,
- how events do or do not impact their lives
- how to cope with their reactions.

Identify vulnerable populations.

The degree to which children are affected will vary depending on personal circumstances.

Most vulnerable are children who:

- Have families directly impacted by economic difficulties.
- Have parents currently in financial institutions directly effected by the current economic situation.
- Have suffered a personal loss from or been exposed to economic problems, and/or other stressful events.
- Live in communities seriously impacted by economic problems, and/or other stressful events.
- Suffer from mental health challenges.

Potential child/adolescent stress reactions.

Most children will not be affected by economic events and many who are will be able to cope with concerns over current events either independently or with the help of parents and other caring adults. However, some children may have more extreme reactions because of personal circumstances. Symptoms may differ depending on age. Adults should contact a professional if children exhibit significant changes in behavior or any of the following symptoms over an extended period of time.

- **Preschoolers**-thumb sucking, bedwetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior, withdrawal from friends and routines.
- **Elementary School Children**-irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration, withdrawal from activities and friends.
- **Adolescents**-sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior and poor concentration.

How to help Children Cope:

1. Be reassuring. Children will take their cues from you, especially young children. Acknowledge that the potential economic challenges and uncertainty are unnerving but the likelihood is that you and your children or students will be okay. There is a difference between the possibility of serious risk and the

probability of it affecting them personally.

2. Acknowledge and normalize their feelings. Allow children to discuss their feelings and concerns and

encourage any questions they may have regarding current events. Being an empathetic listener is very important. Let them know that others, including many adults, are feeling the same way and that their reactions are normal and expected.

3. Take care of your own needs. Take time for yourself and try to deal with your own reactions to the situation as fully as possible. You will be better able to help your children if you are coping well. **If you are anxious or upset, your children are more likely to be so as well.** Talk to other adults such as family, friends, faith leaders, or a counselor. It is important not to dwell on your worries by yourself. Sharing feelings with others often makes us feel more connected and secure. Take care of your physical health. Make time, however small, to do things you enjoy. **Avoid using drugs or alcohol to feel better.**

4. Maintain a normal routine. Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring and promote physical health. Ensure that children get plenty of sleep, regular meals, and exercise. Encourage them to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.

5. Spend family time. Doing enjoyable activities with you reinforces your children's sense of stability and normalcy. Try to do things together, such as eat meals, read, play sports or games, go for walks or bike rides, or watch non-violent, non-stressful TV. When stressed, young children may also want more physical contact (e.g., hugs, holding hands, sitting on your lap, etc.). You know your children best, and your love and support are the most important factors to their sense of security.

Adapted from previous NASP crisis handouts, October 2008.

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Should you require information on community agencies and supports available for families at this time please contact your school principal.