

## **Message to Parents**

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Current economic difficulties add significant stress to most families. The nature of this stress extends beyond difficulty paying bills, but can also have a significant impact on physical health, mental health, and family relationships. Children often become confused by changes in their parents and experience increased stress that can lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental health and behavioral issues.

Each of these issues can fuel a cycle that leads to more and more stress and tension within families. Below are tips and strategies for parents to help their family cope and remain strong during difficult times.

## **Tips for Parents**

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- **Know your finances.** Nonspecific stressors often take a greater toll on physical and mental health than those that are clearly defined. Instead of worrying about “finances” 24 hours a day, create a budget that gives you some control over the situation. Financial advisors can also help you gain greater understanding of financial options.
- **Create a plan with the family.** The “out of control” feeling of financial worries impacts everyone in the family. Use this opportunity to get everyone on the same page. Spouses should come up with a feasible plan that both can agree on. Use this opportunity to teach kids can about finances that can help them feel like a part of the solution and teach valuable skills for adulthood.
- **Plan low cost/free activities.** Going out to eat and watching movies are fun things to do, but expensive for families. Use your imagination to find inexpensive activities to do together. Not only do such activities save money, but they are often better at providing quality time, reduce kids’ dependence on material objects, and promote creativity and positive life skills. For a list of ideas, visit BRAINS website at [www.brainspotential.com](http://www.brainspotential.com).
- **Teach kids about finances.** Rather than saying “We can’t afford that,” help children understand that you are choosing to spend money carefully. Telling kids that you can’t afford their favorite toy can leave them wondering

- if the family can afford more important items like house and food. Instead, try teaching them that you only have a certain amount of money to spend, and you are choosing to spend it on other things. Although frustrating to kids, this can teach a valuable lesson for later in life.
- **Take care of yourself.** Often one of the first things to suffer during times of stress is self-care. The less you take care of yourself, the more stress builds. Plus, neglecting your own needs typically leads to higher long term costs for health care, mental health issues, less work productivity, and many other issues. Self-care can include maintaining hobbies, exercising, eating a balanced diet, scheduling family time, and doing other activities that take your mind off financial worries for a while.
- **Take care of your family.** Stress can make people more irritable, less patient, and can generally place strain on relationships. It is important for married couples to nurture their relationship, support each other, and provide a unified front to kids. Families should also schedule time to have fun, talk, and provide support. Eat dinner together, turn off the television, or plan a family activity.
- **Be careful what you say.** Children take you literally. Don't resort to dark humor about going broke or ending up in the poorhouse. They may not know what a poorhouse is, but they'll figure it can't be good.
- **Model effective coping skills.** Recessions typically coincide with increases in alcohol abuse, drug use, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, and many other destructive behaviors. Not only do children learn from parents how to cope, but many such behaviors are expensive and increase financial and relationship stress.
- **Help children develop language to express themselves.** Children often don't have the language to express their emotions, and they can react by 1) internalizing emotions, which can lead to depression or anxiety, or 2) externalizing emotions in the form of aggressive and/or controlling behaviors. Teaching kids to use words can empower them to create positive changes in their own lives.
- **Remember that little kids have big ears.** Even if you don't discuss the situation with kids directly, they can sense that something is wrong, especially

if you're worried about your own finances or that you might lose your job. If you ignore the situation, kids may imagine it's worse than it really is.

- **Protect children from adult issues.** Parents walk a fine line between being honest with children and burdening them with too much information. Talk to other adults or read about how much information is age appropriate for your child. Remember, children are perceptive and notice when parents are overwhelmed.
- **Turn off the TV.** It's one thing to be well informed, but exposing your kids (and yourself) to a steady stream of hyped-up headlines and downbeat news is bad for your psyche.
- **A little honesty goes a long way.** Kids don't want or need to know all the details of your balance sheet. They just want to know that, hard times or not, they will have a roof over their heads and food on the table...and that things will get better.
- **When in need, seek help.** Adult and child mental health issues increase during times of prolonged stress. Marriages are more likely to fail. These issues are not inevitable results of financial difficulties, but they require extra attention to deal with them effectively. If your mental health, your marriage, or your children are suffering, seek help. Many insurance policies provide mental health coverage, and if not, providers are often willing to work with you or provide affordable referrals to meet your needs.

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**Banking on Stress: Helping Kids Cope with Economic Stress at Home**  
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Bradley Bridges, LMSW, *BRAINS Therapist*  
(616) 365-8920  
bbridges@brainspotential.com

Nick Grinzinger, *Edward Jones Financial Advisor*  
(616) 791-2199  
nick.grinzinger@edwardjones.com