



The Parent Place Newsletter

May-June 2009

Is the Ailing Economy Stressing Out Your Kids?

By Dana Thompson

For the past year, the unfolding global financial crisis has brought a daily barrage of sobering news: millions of workers out of jobs, companies going under or begging for bailouts, plummeting stock prices and vanishing retirement funds. On some level, the downturn has affected all of us. Whether you're suddenly unemployed or are scouring your family budget for ways to rein in expenses, it's a stressful time. This is also true for children, but, unlike most adults, kids don't always have the skills or the understanding to deal with stress in healthy ways.

Steven E. Curtis, a child clinical psychologist and author of the book *Understanding Your Child's Puzzling Behavior: A Guide for Parents of Children with Behavioral, Social and Learning Challenges*, encourages parents to recognize that, while overall, children are remarkably resilient, issues like the current recession do affect kids. "When parents are worried," Curtis says, "kids pick it up like sponges." Here are some highlights about the emotional effects the financial crisis may have on kids.

- **Be Aware** - Unless events directly alter children's lives, many parents may assume their children are not influenced by negative news. Children do, however, experience stress. Curtis encourages parents to observe their children, keeping an eye out for anything that seems different in their behavior.
- **Hang Out with Your Kid** - Between school and extra-curricular activities, kids' lives tend to be fairly structured. Sometimes just having down time with your child and doing nothing is a good way to get her to open up about anything that might be bothering her.
- **Talk to Your Kids** - Parents sometimes have a tendency to hide problems or big issues from their children, but it's better that kids hear it from mom and dad, rather than from a neighbor, TV or the radio. Don't be afraid to be honest with your children - while their ages may influence the amount of detail you share, it's important to be open about the things that worry you. "If you don't talk to them," Curtis says, "they'll often make the issue worse."
- **Be There and Be a Good Listener** - Let your kids know that you are available for them and are willing to listen when they need you. Many parents try to fix their children's problems right away, but that's not always possible. "It's important to just listen and acknowledge what they are feeling," says Curtis, "and not try to fix everything immediately."
- **Minimize Any Change to a Child's Routine** - If the financial downturn has hit your family hard - if you have lost, or fear you might lose, your job or your house - do your best to keep as much consistency as possible. If you have to move, try to keep your kid in the same school. If you have to relocate to some place new, try to keep some other aspect of your child's life consistent for his sense of security and comfort.
- **Teach Stress Management** - People aren't born knowing how to manage stress. These are learned skills. They need to be taught. Help your children change the way they talk about themselves from negative to positive; help them work through any performance anxiety by helping them learn to relax, through exercise and through talking about their feelings.
- **Emphasize Resilience** - Throughout history, humanity has overcome a lot of problems. We will bounce back this time, too. As Helen Keller once wrote; "Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it." Tough times are opportunities to develop strength of character.
- **Teach Children Success Principles** - It's important to teach your children to stick with activities or situations, even when it gets tough. Children need to learn to complete tasks, so they can develop an appreciation for following through and finishing a job.
- **Put Things in Perspective** - Help your children know that they aren't alone. People have challenges everywhere, and while kids' problems are important, they are not the only ones struggling.
- **Look for the Good** - Help your kids look for the positive in any given situation, instead of focusing on the worst-case scenario. Kids can be very dramatic and sometimes they need a good reminder that life isn't all bad.
- **Reach Out** - By reaching out to others - perhaps a neighbor in need or a local food bank - children can learn to overcome their own feelings of fear and aloneness, while also putting things in perspective.
- **Focus on Small Things** - Kids need to adjust their goals, just like adults. Helping them to focus on small steps and successes can help them to stop worrying about large failures or events out of their control.

Curtis encourages parents to let their kids "tell the end of the story." Kids, as a rule, believe anything can happen - it's good to encourage them to focus on the positive things that may come out of a seemingly bad situation.

While these trying economic times may seem overwhelmingly difficult, challenging times are nothing new. Every generation has had to deal with problems beyond their control. While bringing resolution to the financial crisis is important, it is equally important for families to use this time as an opportunity to build children's reliance and ability to deal with adversity, since they will experience situations throughout their lives that cause them stress. "Throughout time, people have had hurdles to overcome," Curtis says. "It's important for kids to learn how to stay positive and keep moving forward."

Seems like good advice for all of us.

For more information, see Curtis' Web site at www.lifespanps.com.

Dana Thompson is a freelance writer and mother of two.



The Parent Place
A signature program of Thrive
Bozeman-400 E. Babcock @ 587-4734
Belgrade-92 N. Broadway @ 388-1300

The Parent Place Partners

Montana Children's Trust Fund, Greater Gallatin United Way, Gilhousen Family Foundation, First Presbyterian Church, Broadway Flying J Travel Plaza

Ages and Stages of Reading

While your child pushes peas around their dinner plate, you could be boosting their academic skills. Numerous studies show that children who regularly eat meals with their families have a larger vocabulary and score higher on academic achievement tests. Due to the conversation that happens at the dinner table and the family bonds that are built. Kids learn about the rules of conversation; parents and kids learn from each other about what's going on in their lives.

Look forward to the mess of eating, and the joys of a bath afterwards. Have a routine, if baby is hungry before you are ready, start them with the veggie or fruit. Another idea is to feed baby and then have baby eat one part of dinner together, such as dessert. As your child become older give them a task to help you make dinner. Washing veggies or setting the silver ware on the table. Your child's taste buds change and what was spit out may become a favorite, keep trying new foods. Make dinner an event that isn't rushed, limit distractions and enjoy that family conversation time.

Two to Four Years

At the University of Illinois, researchers found that children ages 7 to 11 who did well on school achievement tests were the ones who ate meals and snacks with their families. Children need to have both context and content to make the connections that enrich their vocabulary. Children are more likely to learn new vocabulary by figuring out how some-one is using words in context rather than learning by direct instruction or giving its dictionary definition. For example, when a mother tells her young child not to sing at the table because it's rude - from the context, the child begins to understand what 'rude' means. With older children, discussing world affairs, current events or homework research topics can help provide context and related vocabulary.

Across the ages

Use family dinner conversation to plan an activity. Ask family members about a family vacation or outing that they would like to plan. You can use the dinner hour to discuss the logistics, costs, and the pros and cons of the activities suggested. Get your family to agree on the outing and put the date on your family calendar.

With just a little effort to take time to eat dinner as a family, you'll be helping your child build language skills, learn table manners and create strong family ties. It's worth it!

School Age

The meal doesn't have to be fancy and it can be at home, a picnic in the park or at a restaurant. If you're eating at home engage your children in setting the table, helping with the preparation and clean up. If you keep it simple, it will be easier to focus on sharing time and conversation together. Children who were exposed to rich vocabulary at meal-times at ages 3, 4 and 5 were more likely to have better verbal skills continuing on up through sixth grade. Family dinners provide that rare opportunity to have longer conversations. And longer conversations, provide children with a chance to think, to hear words they may not be familiar with and enhance linguistic development.

Teenager

In a Louis Harris Associates survey of 2,000 high school seniors, those who ate dinner with their families four or more times a week scored better than those who had dinner with family members three or fewer times a week. In a Harvard study that followed 65 children over eight years, researchers looked at a host of activities - play, story time, family events and family dinners - to see what factors most fostered healthy child development. Family dinners came out ahead. So have your teenager prepare one part of the meal and enjoy the conversation that will flow while spending

CALENDAR of EVENTS



The Thrive Golf Tournament please register

Join us at playgroups and gym day!
Both are Free and
NO registration is required.

Playgroups

Bozeman Parent Place
Mondays 10-11am
Belgrade Parent Place
Tuesdays 10-11am

Bozeman Gym Day 10:35-11:35

Belgrade: Quaw School
Wednesdays 11:15-12:15pm

“Becoming a Love and Logic Parent”

Love and Logic was designed to help you find specific answers and actions for some of those difficult moments in child rearing. These simple techniques are effective with all children, from toddlers to teens.

One day class in Belgrade \$100 per person and \$125 couple call to register or register on line at www.allthrive.org under programs - Parent Place—classes. Payment is required a week before the class in order to ensure your spot!

Exciting News! Thrive has partnered with WIC to provide services in Belgrade at the Parent Place on Wednesdays starting May 6th. You can call 582-3115 with any WIC questions.

New Parent Forum! The forum is designed to allow parents time to discuss a topic with each other, while kids are supervised in another room. Hope you can check out this new event! Bozeman is the 4th Friday, May 22 10-11am and Belgrade is the 2nd Friday, June 12th 10-11am.

Please call to register to ensure enough childcare providers. 587-3840 or on-line at www.allthrive.org – under programs-parent place-classes.

Dynamite Dads

All dads and male role models are invited to enjoy an evening of fun and dinner with your kids! The events are free, but please call to register at the Bozeman Parent Place 587-3840.

Or on-line at www.allthrive.org under programs - Parent Place-classes

May 20, 2009, 6-7:30pm: Fishing at the Bozeman Pond!

We will have limited supply of fishing gear.

June 17, 2009, 6-7:30pm: Pioneer Museum

Come explore the museum with us!



The Bozeman Parent Place

400 East Babcock
M-Th from 8-5, Fri. from 8-4.

The Belgrade Parent Place

92 N. Broadway
M 1-5, T 9-12, F 9-12

www.allthrive.org
587-3840 or 388-1300

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Dad's Corner

Parenting is the hardest and at the same time the most gratifying job you will ever have. You may not feel like it but you as a dad are Superdad to your little ones. I have seen many little ones puff up and say "My Dad can ..." in other words 'My Dad is Superdad!' As a now graying Superdad just remember that you have super power tools you get to use. The most powerful is words that are spoken with truth in love. One day my daughters learned how to use this power as well. They were having a difference of opinion and one said 'I love you too!' which caused them to get the giggles when they realized that she really did love her even though they didn't agree with each other right then. Many differences of opinion were defused after that by quietly saying 'I love you too'.

My dad was a dairy farmer who happened to also be a career military officer. Hard work was the order for the day which started at 4a.m. praise was seldom given except for going above and beyond the call of duty so to speak. I have found praise to be a very powerful tool that Superdads can use. Recently, Colten ,my grandson decided that he wanted to build a foosball marble game. It took us two weekends to get it built and he needed encouragement and some help to figure some of the things out. He was excited to try it out with his friend and little brother and when it worked it was their praise that made his smile sparkle and his eyes twinkle. He was ready to tackle building the deck that needs to be built on our house as his next building project! I must say it is no small project either!

The next power tool I have found to be a little hard to use but it gets easier to use with practice. It is admitting that you were wrong and saying 'I am sorry'. One summer day I threw out all of the kids sleds because they were in my way. The first major snowfall sent the kids on a scavenger hunt to find them after they enlisted the 'search and rescue squad', my wife, out to find them I had to confess that I had thrown them out, say that I was sorry, and replace them. I noticed that the kids forgave easier by doing this and they even started saying I am sorry quicker and meaning it.

The last few tools I have found to be of value to increase dad's superpowers are relaxing and having fun sliding down the stairs on a sheet of cardboard or any other spontaneous fun. Forget the 'no Sir', 'yes Sir', 'no excuse Sir' stuff. Remember that your child is a gift that God has entrusted to you to give love and purpose to. I once heard someone say that children need to hear; I believe in you, you can count on me, I treasure you, I'm sorry, please forgive me, because, no, and I love you.

Mike Barnes- dad of 3, and grandfather of 2

**We would like to send out a special thanks to Sterling Bank for providing food
At DD in April and to Cashman's Nursery for Hosting us!**