

Helping Children and Teens with Continued Stressful Times

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The American Psychological Association's (APA) extensive study on stress in America in 2010 found many individuals continue to report high levels of stress due to financial difficulties, a poor job market, and a national economic crisis. Yearly surveys by APA have indicated that historically, the top five sources of stress, in order, continue to be money, work, the economy, family responsibilities, and relationships.

Parents may be surprised by the impact that parental stress was found to be having on children. In fact, the APA study found that approximately 69% of the parents surveyed believed that their stress levels had little or no impact on their children. However, children and teens are often very sensitive and reactive to the anxiety and depression of their parents

The study demonstrated that children and teens are in fact reacting to parental complaints and statements about the widespread economic struggles with higher levels of depression and anxiety. A whopping 91% of the children surveyed reported that they could tell when parents were stressed. Perhaps less surprising, children reported they could tell their parents were stressed by how much their parents complained and argued at home.

Some important points emerged from the study:

- When parents are stressed, children pick up on it.
- Children who perceive their parents as stressed were more likely to report stress themselves.
- Even when children observe parents talking about stress, children and teens may not talk about their own stress, anxiety, or depression.
- Stressed children reported common stress-related symptoms such as difficulty sleeping, problems with attention, upset stomachs, and headaches.
- If your child is withdrawn, acting out, or seems to be voicing a lot of physical complaints – it may be related to emotional problems.
- Levels of stress and stress-related symptoms were more prominent amongst overweight children.

For many adults, when the front door closes as they come home to their castle, it is not uncommon for parents to feel a need to vent frustrations to their partners, complain about bosses, or to lament pay cuts, or other economic stressors. However, parents should be cautioned that even when parents think children and teens aren't paying attention – they are likely picking up far more than parents realize. It is likely these comments undermine one of children's and adults most fundamental needs, the need for security.

Here are some tips for coping with stress around your family:

- Think before you speak when your children or teens are present. If your child or teen has access to your social media outlets, remember this also applies to posts, Tweets, and blog entries.
- Realize children and teens don't always understand when parents are "venting", using sarcasm, or just talking about a worst case scenario.
- Talk with your children about *their* worries, anxieties, fears, and concerns. You may be surprised at the weight they feel they are carrying.
- Talk with your children about what they might be hearing from friends, siblings, other family members, and neighbors.
- Recognize "spillover". Spillover is when your stress, anxiety, worry, or depression may be getting so overwhelming that it is hard to control and spills over into your home and family life.
- Recognize depression in yourself. Up to 10% of the population will suffer depression at some time in their life. Common symptoms involve sleep difficulties, loss of motivation, irritability, trouble concentrating, loss of sense of pleasure, which tends to last for more days than not over a period of weeks. When faced with external stress such as the economy it is easy to miss symptoms of frustration and anger as indicants of depression. The good news is that depression is very treatable.
- Recognize if your child or teen is becoming depressed. Childhood and adolescent depression rates are rising. Children and teens can show somewhat different symptoms of depression than adults. Read more about recognizing child and adolescent depression in our CPANCF.COM Articles and Archives section. Seek assessment and treatment for your child if you suspect they are depressed.
- Consult with a psychologist if you find that you continue to spillover or have concerns that depression is developing or persisting. A trained psychologist can help you learn how to effectively cope as well as providing you a space to deal with your problems outside of the home.

- Recognize that your emotional health impacts your child's health and that taking care of yourself is part of effective parenting.

Further Reading and Information:

For more information about the APA 2010 Study:

*Dollars and Sense: Talking to your Children about the Economy
Stress in Tough Economic Times*

Coping with Economic Stress - a Battle Plan

Identifying Childhood and Adolescent Depression