



Enterprising Rural Families™

Chat This Month

Reminder: The chat this month is scheduled for North America: Pacific Time- 6 p.m., Mountain Time- 7 p.m.; Queensland, Australia: Eastern Time-12 Noon. The topic is “*Families In Financial Stress.*”

Suggested Progress by

Group: In order to stay current, by the end of this month you should be completed to:

Antarctic – Second Week of Module 4

Arctic – End of Module 2

Atlantic – End of Module 1

Baltic –

Bering –

Black –

Caribbean -

Coral –

Indian –

Mediterranean -

Pacific -

Red -

An Online Newsletter March, 2005 Volume 1, Issue 3

FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS COPING WITH FINANCIAL STRESS (Part 2)

(Part 1 of *Families and Individuals Coping with Financial Stress* dealt with the impact of financial stress on families and individuals. Part 2 talks about ways families and individuals cope with this stress.)

Losing a job, experiencing a bad year in the business, downsizing, inflation and more can result in tremendous changes. These changes can also lead to a decrease in income and security.

You can recognize financial stress by the pressures it imposes on your family:

- You worry over bills, especially ones that are overdue; interest on revolving credit accounts keeps piling up when you only make small payments on bills.
- You worry over not being able to buy everything you want, especially if your children have to do without the things they want, the things other children have, or the things you want them to have because you never had them as a child.
- You worry because you can't save any money. Every family should have a savings plan, shouldn't they? But you put off saving until later.
- You feel social pressures because you can't keep up with the neighbor's lifestyle, as well as the economic pressures of creditors or bill collectors.
- You may have family tensions leading to arguments -- husband vs. wife, parents vs. child. You may get flak from your in-laws.
- Even headaches and high blood pressure may result from these financial pressures.



Financial stress can be defined as a condition that occurs whenever income is less than desired outgo. If you are a victim of financial stress your only solution to the problem is to balance income and outgo. This balancing act can take two forms a) either increased income or b) decreased desired outgo (1).

There are actions couples and families with children can take to cope with financial stresses and the challenges that arise from these pressures.

Contact e-mail for course

information: eRuralFamilies.org



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Act immediately. If a person is laid off, family income could drop dramatically. Shock and disbelief are common first reactions. At such a time it is important to avoid withdrawing or becoming isolated. Instead, take a constructive approach. A displaced worker, for example, could immediately take advantage of unemployment benefits and other employment services.

It is important to bring a family together to explain the family's situation. Children will know when there are difficulties at home so leaving them out of a discussion will only increase their anxiety. By discussing coping strategies together, a family can create a survivor attitude.

One of the first things a family needs to do is to prioritize and decide what things constitute essentials and what are extras. Then a family can budget for important things such as a mortgage, health costs, utilities, and food and delay or eliminate non-essential items.



Keep the family updated and involved.

Keep children involved. It is important to let children actively contribute to a family during this time. For example, if a mother has to work longer hours because a father is out of work, and she is the one who normally fixes the meals, parents can let their kids help prepare dinner. Making sure that children continue with their household chores helps give them a sense of control over the situation.

It is important to remember that they are also learning how to handle frustration and crisis. By watching how their parents act in such a situation, children are learning about coping skills.

Take care of one's self. When in the middle of a financial, personal or family crisis, maintaining control is important. Staying healthy boosts the endurance and energy needed to deal with problems and stress. When stressed, there is a tendency to neglect health habits, which then can lead to more stress.

Eat well, get enough sleep, exercise to relieve stress, and limit the use of alcohol. A family could also take long walks to benefit their health and increase their time together.

Maintain routines. Keeping family routines such as eating together, participating in youth activities and maintaining family rules and school expectations can give the family a sense of stability and can reassure children. Families should also continue outside activities when possible and affordable. However, they may need to be lower-cost alternatives. Instead of skiing at a ski resort, for example, cross-country skiing could be considered. Continuing activities can help a family maintain a support network with others.

Get a handle on the situation. Remember that other people have been in similar situations of economic upheaval, and, hard as it is, they have learned to overcome their difficulties. Don't keep anxiety and anger bottled up. Talk with someone trusted and close about feelings of anger, confusion and fear. Family members and others can help in times of stress.

Try to take one thing at a time. There may be many changes to face, but it is not beneficial to try to resolve all problems at once. Solving one problem at a time gives a sense of control over the situation.

Finally, keep occupied, active and involved. The loss of a job can result in extra time to think about troubles. Naturally, time is needed to plan for the future and to find a new job, but consider spending some of the extra time helping with a community or church project. Doing something for others will not only help them but will also help to build personal feelings of self-worth (2).

You may be ready to look at your basic lifestyle and decide to get just as much out of living but without the need to buy, buy, buy. Living a simpler lifestyle requires planning, decision-making, and more cooperation among family members. But it can result in a calmer, happier family life and a feeling of greater value from the money you spend. It won't occur unless you take some special steps to identify why you can't live within your income, and unless you make changes that will put less demand on financial resources.



Keep occupied, active and involved.

And, it won't occur unless you have the personal strength to stick with the decisions you have made (1).

Coping with the stress and pressure of reduced income is not an easy task for individuals or families. There are no easy answers or quick cures. However, by reducing and prioritizing spending as quickly as possible and working within a family to establish priorities, make decisions and minimize anxiety, individuals and families can help strengthen and prepare themselves for the future.

For more information on this topic and the management of rural family enterprises, check the Enterprising Rural Families website at <http://eRuralFamilies.org>.

References:

1. Turner, J. (2001, August). Coping with financial stress: Money management newsletter. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences.
2. Weigel, R. (2002, September). Coping with financial stress. Laramie, WY: Cooperative Extension Service.

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Get a handle on stress. Try to take one thing at a time.



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March, 2005 Volume 1, Issue 3