

ARE YOUR KIDS WORRIED ABOUT THE ECONOMY?

- Are your children asking if we are headed for another Great Depression?
- Are they offering their savings to help pay for household expenses?
- Do they seem overly irritable or anxious, especially after watching the evening news?

Recently I read an article in The News Tribune about how parents can assure anxious children who express fear about the fluctuating economy. It was a reminder to me that even when children are not in crisis, they often pick up the tension adults are feeling.

Stanley Greenspan, a professor of child psychiatry at George Washington University, said, "Younger kids tend to be all-or-nothing thinkers. So a healthy 8-year-old is more likely to worry in a more extreme way than an adult." He cited a recent example where a child was afraid their parents would not have money to buy food so the child offered to sell their iPod to help out. This type of anxiety can lead to headaches, stomach aches, acting out and a loss of interest in school unless parents can help restore a child's sense of security.

What can parents do? Mr. Greenspan advised that parents spend more time with their children, ask their children how much they know about what's going on, and then answer their questions in an age-appropriate way. Children don't need to help you balance the family budget, but they do need to know when things are tight and what they can do to help. He said if children can find a way to help others, they usually feel better and worry less.

A word of caution, according to Jerilyn Ross, the director of the Ross Center for Anxiety and Related Disorders, never lie to your children about your financial situation. She relayed the story of a parent who had just lost her job and was too ashamed to tell her child. When the girl kept bugging Mom to buy her new clothes and she refused, the child became angry and resentful. When the daughter finally found out the truth, she felt guilty, but was more willing to help at home.

What do you tell your child about the current economic situation? When you are watching the news and your children ask you what it means, use it as a chance to explain that this was all about greed. Let them know that better days are ahead. Talk about how we've been tested before as a country. Explain about Pearl Harbor and how we always come out the other end far stronger and far wiser.

Use the crisis as a way to reinforce the importance of faith, family and education. It may be an opportunity to emphasize that money and material things do not bring happiness. Let them know that you will take care of them and will get through this as a family. And, remind them that their most important job right now is to get a good education, so they will have fewer financial worries when they are adults.

By Heidi Erdmann
School Counselor
Terminal Park Elementary