

Ten Tips for Families in Tough Times

Dr. Richard Gallagher appeared on *ABC World News with Charles Gibson* in a segment about kids and the economy.

Tough times also bring opportunities for families to come together and value the things that really matter. Here are some suggestions:

1. A strong social support network is a strong protective factor against stress. Make sure that contacts with friends, extended family, coworkers, and neighbors are maintained.
2. Be part of a community or religious group. Encourage kids to join scouts or other social groups
3. Plan to eat meals together. Family meals are a safe place where everyone can talk about their day, listen to each other and try out ideas. Encourage kids to be creative in planning meals in different places or in new forms - a picnic, brunch, a community dinner.
4. Be sure that each family member gets enough exercise and sleep, which are good antidotes to anxious or depressed feelings.
5. Help others by volunteering and donating time to worthy organizations. It is never too early—have toddlers share toys, have your child go with you when you bring food to a neighbor, encourage your teen to volunteer in an after-school program—these actions allow children to appreciate what they have and gives them a sense of their ability to contribute to the good of others.
6. Explore fun, low cost activities. Plan trips and explore new places (museums, parks, concerts, etc.) in your area. Find unusual and inexpensive restaurants, making the point that you're helping the economy.
7. Establish a regular schedule for family conferences to keep everyone informed on how the drop in income will affect everyone's life. Discuss, in age-appropriate terms:
 - a. Life style changes, such as changing recreation and vacation plans
 - b. Decisions about priorities for spending money; planning a budget
8. Involve children in helping out at home - babysitting, household chores.
9. Be a model for your children on how to solve problems, how to deal with a crisis, how to make decisions. When they see you handle a situation with confidence they learn that they too can handle life's challenges.
10. Help children focus on the positive aspects of their lives and on the activities over which they have control.

The good news is that kids are resilient and are generally optimistic. Help them develop a hopeful outlook for the future. Children who believe that they can take steps to make their lives better and who believe that adults are working to create a better world have good mental health even in troubling times.

Date Published: February 2, 2009