

PARENT Talk



When Unemployment Hits Home

If you are newly unemployed, you may be starting a job search, paying bills and worrying about where the next paycheck will come from. Amid all this, you may unintentionally overlook the emotional needs of your children.

When a parent loses a job, it affects the whole family. Even young children can perceive changes at home, such as a parent who no longer goes to work. A parent's job loss can undermine a child's sense of security. Fortunately, parents can take actions to prevent a child's emotional stress.

Show emotions in private

Your first task as a parent is to remain calm and avoid showing anger and panic in front of your children. Kids view their parents as powerful, protective figures. If youngsters hear parents expressing hostility about being laid off or fear about the future, they can feel at risk. Try to discuss options in private with your spouse.

Keep explanation simple

Your next step is to explain your job loss to your children in terms they can understand but will not fear. Decide on a simple explanation to give your kids. Explaining job loss helps youngsters replace fear and uncertainty with knowledge. Remain open to children's questions even if you do not have the answers immediately. The amount of information to share with children depends on their ages and abilities to understand the situation without feeling fearful. Be honest and tell your child what you can; then provide an answer after you have had time to think it over.

Kids may imagine being hungry and homeless. Through bits and pieces of information gained through television, a youngster may have incomplete and unrealistic expectations. Reassurance from parents is necessary. Children need to hear from their protectors that there will be adequate food, clothes,

and a warm home. Listen to children, and gently probe for their concerns. Begin to understand your children's feelings.

Children may still ask for 'things'

Because youngsters often have difficulty understanding the connection between job loss and less money to spend, they may continue asking to do or buy things the family can no longer afford.

Depending on their ages, children may not be able to generalize from one situation to the next. A negative response to a child's request to go to the movies may not inhibit the child from asking again later. While you may not be able to afford some new toys, you can learn to remain calm and to suggest affordable alternatives.

Encourage creativity

Use budget constraints as opportunities to encourage creativity. Work with your children to plan low-cost or no-cost activities together. Helping children cope with these changes may take some time and patience.

Job loss is difficult for families to cope with. However, it may provide an opportunity to spend more time with your children. Take advantage of that opportunity. Your example will help them cope with difficult situations in their own lives.

If you need help ...

Call GHS Crisis Line at (810) 257-3740, where a counselor is available 24 hours a day. TTY users call (810) 232-6310.