

Following Job Loss: Helping Children Cope

Children are affected differently by a parent's job loss depending on age, personality and ability to understand the seriousness of the situation. Some children will seem just fine and show no worrisome behaviors. Other children may experience some difficulty. As parents, be on the lookout for changes in mood, attitude, behaviors, appearance and time spent playing with friends. Some specific behavior changes to watch for include:

- Increased fighting/arguing
- Being more needy
- Changes in sleep/nightmares/bedwetting
- Increased or decreased appetite
- Not wanting to go to school or play with friends
- Worry about parents and family

The relationship between parents and children can be a source of great support or great stress. Open communication is important. Children know more than you think, and not talking about the job loss makes it seem off-limits. Do not hold adult conversations about job loss within earshot of your children. If you feel particularly angry or frustrated, find a private place to vent.

Consider the age of the child and keep the following in mind when talking about job loss:

- Teach calmness in the face of unsettling times. Young children imitate adults, and this is an opportunity for children to learn what resiliency looks like.
- Use language the child will understand. Words like "fired" or "laid off" can be easily misunderstood.
- Help children use creative outlets to express their feelings. Young children do not have the language skills to describe their feeling. Using art, music, puppets or books can help children express their feelings.
- Older children can understand the situation. Be open and honest, share your feelings and be available for questions. Listen to what your children are saying and you will learn what they need from you. Provide reassurance and try not to show a negative attitude.
- Remind your child that he or she is not responsible for what is happening. Explain that you lost your job due to your former employer's lack of work and that other people are in the same situation. Let your child know you are looking for another job and that finding one may take some time.
- Hold family meetings to discuss how the family's decreased income will affect activities and allowances. Explain changes, such as being at home more or dining out less. Assure your child that, "It may be hard for a while, but of course we will always take care of you."
- Maintain daily routines and schedules as much as possible. Children thrive on the security a routine provides.
- No matter how old your children are, this is a good time to be more affectionate, spend time together and find opportunities to share a good laugh.