

# The Economic Blues and Children

By Paula Santonocito



There is no doubt: The economic downturn and a sluggish job market have taken a toll on families throughout the United States. Recent [studies](#) show that the loss of a job and decline in income impacts everyone in a family, and children in affected households manifest behavioral changes at home and in school.

A job loss can be difficult for a two-parent household. But what happens when a single mother and sole wage earner loses her job?

Several [studies, including one conducted in 2004](#) by Ariel Kalil, a University of Chicago professor, and Kathleen M. Ziol-Guest, assistant director of the Institute for Children and Poverty in New York, find that children of low-income single mothers who experience unemployment have a higher rate of dropping out of school, and they tend to suffer more, both emotionally and psychologically.

Sometimes the signs are obvious, and sometimes not. Behavioral changes in children with an unemployed parent, particularly when the parent is a single mother, may range from irritability, to withdrawal from normal activities and friends, to anger and depression.

## Addressing the Stress

Therefore, it's important for parents to ease the stress and anxiety their children feel. But as the only role model, a single mom wants to be especially conscious of the vibes she's sending out.

With this in mind, here are some dos:

- Do talk openly about the situation to your children.

Even young children know more than you might realize.

- Do let them know life has its ups and downs.

This doesn't necessarily have to be a negative message; rather, it can provide children with a realistic view of the world.

- Do exude confidence that things will improve. Staying positive in front of your children will help alleviate some of the stress and anxiety they feel about your job situation.

When doing this, be aware of your facial expressions and your mannerisms, as well as your words. Again, children can be very perceptive.

- Do know that if you have a bad day, it's okay to say so.

Share the basics about what's affecting you, whether it's a specific disappointment, like a job you wanted but didn't get, or it's more general, like you're tired. It helps to explain the situation in a way children will understand: "It's like when you lose an important soccer game."

- Do try and seek emotional support from adult friends, family members, and a counselor, if possible.

Turning to others will ensure that you don't dump too much on your young family members.

### **Avoiding Common Pitfalls**

And here are some don'ts:

- Don't blame yourself for your situation.

Your children will be fearful if they think you are incompetent.

- Don't blame other people.

Saying your boss didn't like you will cast you in a bad light in your children's eyes.

- Don't brush off questions they may have about your employment situation or how it affects their lives.

Honest answers are best.

- Don't share a plan that will impact their lives until it's definitive.

For example, saying, "I applied for a great job, but we may have to move if I get it" will create unnecessary stress. You may not get the job. Wait until the situation materializes.

Admittedly, the economic blues may still occasionally cloud your family's days. However, as long as you are aware that your employment and financial circumstances affect your children, and you take appropriate steps to help them understand what's happening, everyone should be better equipped to weather tough times.

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