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Coping in Unsettling Times: Economic Difficulties Tips for Students

The United States and the world are going through pretty tough economic times. Lots of people and businesses are just fine but many people feel uncertain about jobs, gas prices, and the banking system. Concerns can be especially worrisome if your family is directly affected. The best way to deal with your concerns and sort out your questions is to talk with your family, friends, and teachers. The following suggestions can help.

Be aware of your feelings. To be a good citizen it is important to be interested in what's happening in the world. However, sometimes world events make some people feel confused, angry, or anxious. Worries about what may happen to your family or community may make it hard to concentrate in school or even to sleep at night. It is always better to deal with these feelings than pretend they don't exist. Talk to your friends, parents or another trusted adult if you find your reactions getting in the way of your typical daily activities (like eating, going to school or having fun). It helps when you realize you are not alone. **Tell an adult if you or a friend feels distressed or overwhelmed.**

Don't dwell on a "worst case scenario." There are no guarantees in life, but the strong likelihood is that you and your family will be okay. This is true even if your family is struggling or facing a change in circumstances, like having to sell your house. American citizens have weathered a number of tough times and always recovered.

Maintain your normal routine. Keep up with your schoolwork and extracurricular activities to the extent possible. Sometimes simply helping out around the house, going to a practice, seeing a movie, listening to music, or reading a favorite book can help make you feel more in control.

Take care of yourself. Stress or anxiety can affect your health and being rundown can affect your outlook. Get plenty of healthy food, exercise, and sleep. Limit your caffeine and junk food. Spend time with friends in person instead of online. Above all, don't use drugs or alcohol. They may **temporarily** mask unpleasant feelings but can ultimately make problems worse.

Focus on your strengths. Identify what you have done in the past that helped you cope when you were worried or upset. Focus on the things you do well in daily life but also don't be embarrassed to ask for help, particularly if you have extra responsibilities because a change in your family's situation. Most people are happy to lend a hand.

Take advantage of school. Now more than ever is a good time to realize the importance of a good education. Getting good grades and developing good problem solving skills will help you get and keep a job, even when the economy falters. A high school and college education will give you better choices as an adult.

Do something positive to help others. Contributing to the community helps us feel more in control and builds a stronger sense of connection. Consider helping classmates or other families in the community who may need babysitting, errands run, yard work, etc.; volunteer at local shelter or community center; get involved with a project at school or through your faith community.

Vary your news sources. Be sure to get your news from multiple sources, print, radio, T.V. and Internet, to gain as broad and accurate an understanding of the facts and range of viewpoints as possible. Watching endless T.V. or visiting the same websites is unlikely to help you understand the truth and may only make you worry.

Keep current events in perspective. People frequently say things like “We might be headed for another depression.” But it is important to remember that tough times are part of human history. The United States and others in the world have weathered many crises, including terrorism, disease, natural disasters, economic downturns, and war. For the most part, we have emerged stronger and more resilient each time.

Avoid excessive blaming. When tensions are high, some people exert excessive energy trying to fix blame. While questions regarding national leadership and financial institutions may be legitimate, in general, it is unhelpful to view other citizens as “good guys or bad guys.” Most people are good and ultimately care about the same things: security, freedom, and opportunity.

Differentiate between fact and opinion. They are not the same. Fact is what actually happens. Opinions are how we feel about what happens. Our opinions should be based on fact, not rumor or supposition. Everyone has a right to their own opinion and the ability to express it reflects our most important right: freedom of thought and speech.

Explore and express opinions respectfully. You can discuss ideas without attacking others. Avoid accusatory or derogatory language like, “That’s stupid” or “People like you are the problem.” Try stating your thoughts with opening phrases like, “I believe” or “Have you thought about” instead of “Anybody who” or “No one should.”

Be prepared for grownups to seem upset. Many adults have strong feelings about current events. They may be upset that national elected and financial leaders seem to have failed to protect the interest of the American public. This is part of living in a democracy and capitalist economy. This is a good time to really learn about the issues and engage in discussions and the political process. Remember: your parents' and teachers' first priority is to help you understand what is happening and ensure your welfare.

Think positively. Everyone experiences ups and downs in life. You will be fine if you spend time with your family and friends, focus on what you can do, are willing to express your thoughts and feelings, and keep in mind that you have long and positive future.

For further information, talk to your parents, teachers, school psychologist or counselor. Or visit our website at www.nasponline.org.

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