

THE FAMILY TREE

PROVIDING SOLUTIONS. PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE.

Coping with Tough Economic Times

With the economic crisis showing little sign of easing - and with a known link between suicide and unemployment rates - experts warn that stressful life events such as losing a job, a home or savings can unhinge those who are vulnerable to harming themselves and others. There is some evidence that suicide rate, like the incidence of depression, rises when the economy falls.

Understanding that potential emotional problems can be associated with multiple and severe stressors, like the downward economy, loss of job, and knowing the early warning signs is the best way to help your family or support some else.

Possible Health Risks

Economic turmoil (e.g., increased unemployment, foreclosures, loss of investments and other financial distress) can result in a whole host of negative health effects - both physical and mental. It can be particularly devastating to your emotional and mental well-being. Although each of us is affected differently by economic troubles, these problems can add tremendous stress, which in turn can substantially increase the risk for developing such problems as:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Compulsive Behaviors (over-eating, excessive gambling, spending, etc.)
- Substance Abuse

Warning Signs

It is important to be aware of signs that financial problems may be adversely affecting your emotional or mental well being --or that of someone you care about. These signs include:

- Persistent Sadness/Crying
- Excessive Anxiety
- Lack of Sleep/Constant Fatigue
- Excessive Irritability/Anger
- Increased drinking
- Illicit drug use, including misuse of medications
- Difficulty paying attention or staying focused

- Apathy - not caring about things that are usually important to you
- Not being able to function as well at work, school or home

Managing Stress

If you or someone you care about is experiencing these symptoms, you are not alone. These are common reactions to stress, and there are coping techniques that you can use to help manage it. They include:

- Trying to keep things in perspective - recognize the good aspects of life and retain hope for the future.
- Strengthening connections with family and friends who can provide important emotional support.
- Engaging in activities such as physical exercise, sports or hobbies that can relieve stress and anxiety.
- Developing new employment skills that can provide a practical and highly effective means of coping and directly address financial difficulties.

Getting Help

Families in the midst of a crisis can The Family Tree, Inc. call 800/243-7337. Trained operators will provide callers with information, referrals and needed support -- especially to parents and other individuals who are caring for children including babysitters, neighbors and adolescents. The number is toll free, confidential, state-wide and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week

Youth in the midst of a suicide crisis can call 800/422-0009. The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene runs this hotline primarily geared toward youth.

Even with these coping techniques, however, sometimes these problems can seem overwhelming and you may need additional help to get through "rough patches." Fortunately, there are many people and services that can provide help. These include your:

- Healthcare provider
- Spiritual leader
- School counselor
- Community health clinic

If you need help finding treatment services you can access our [Mental Health Services Locator](#) for information and mental health resources near you. Similarly, if you need help with a substance abuse problem you can use our [Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator](#).

Specific help for financial hardship is also available, on issues such as:

- [Making Home Affordable](#)
- [Foreclosure](#)
- [Reemployment](#)

- [Financial assistance](#)

There are many other places where you can turn for guidance and support in dealing with the financial problems affecting you or someone you care about. These resources exist at the federal, state and community level and can be found through many sources such as:

- [Federal and state government](#)
- Civic associations
- Spiritual groups
- Other sources such as the government services section of a phone book

Suicide Warning Signs

Unemployment and other kinds of financial distress do not "cause" suicide directly, but they can be factors that interact dynamically within individuals and affect their risk for suicide. These financial factors can cause strong feelings such as humiliation and despair, which can precipitate suicidal thoughts or actions among those who may already be vulnerable to having these feelings because of life-experiences or underlying mental or emotional conditions (e.g., depression, bipolar disorder) that place them at greater risk of suicide.

These are some of the signs you may want to be aware of in trying to determine whether you or someone you care about could be at risk for suicide:

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself
- Thinking or fantasizing about suicide
- Acting recklessly
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life

If you or someone you care about are having suicidal thoughts or showing these symptoms **SEEK IMMEDIATE HELP.**

Other Steps You Can Take

- Acknowledge that economic downturns can be frightening to everyone, but that there are ways of getting through them - from engaging in healthy activities, positive thinking, supportive relationships, to seeking help when needed from health professionals.
- Encourage community-based organizations and groups to provide increased levels of mental health treatment and support to those who are severely affected by the economy.
- Work together to help all members of the community build their resiliency and successfully return to healthy and productive lives.

For further information on mental health or substance abuse issues please visit [The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#).

For ideas on how to best cover sensitive issues like suicide prevention in a thoughtful and constructive manner you can check out [suggestions developed by the Annenberg Public Policy Center](#) in conjunction with leading suicide prevention experts and journalists.

Adapted from SAMSA; for more information on getting through tough times: please see: <http://www.samhsa.gov/economy/op>