

Parenting Positively

For Parents of
Children and Teenagers

Coping with the Recession



Family Support Agency



Barnardos



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This series was produced by the Family Support Agency and Barnardos.

The Family Support Agency provides support to families through locally based Family Resource Centres and through supporting voluntary and community organisations providing Marriage, Relationship, Child and Bereavement Counselling Services. The Agency also carries out research and provides information and advice to the Minister on family related matters. The Family Support Agency was established as a statutory agency in 2003.

Barnardos supports children whose wellbeing is under threat, by working with them, their families and communities and by campaigning for the rights of children. Barnardos was established in Ireland in 1962 and is Ireland's leading independent children's charity.

Written by Anne Conroy.

Introduction

This booklet is for parents* of children from the age of six up to teenagers who are interested in supporting their children to cope with the impact of recession on their emotional wellbeing.

It could be that your family is directly impacted by unemployment, reduced income and financial pressures, or you may be concerned about the impact on your children of the media focus on the recession and doom and gloom.

*We use the term 'parent' in this booklet when we mean anyone who has primary caring responsibility of a child whether this is a parent, stepparent, grandparent or guardian.



What is the Issue?

In recent years, Ireland has been affected by an economic recession and many families have had to cope with the impact of recession. This might involve unemployment, reduced working hours, having to move home, one parent having to move away to work, financial pressures and less money to pay for items which were previously routine.

Many parents have had to deal with increased stress and pressure in their lives. Parents who are stressed by their own personal financial situation or unemployment may unintentionally pass that anxiety on to their children.

For other families, the recession may not have had such negative financial implications, however parents may be concerned due to the amount of media coverage focused on the recession and bad news, and how to respond to this within their family.

This booklet focuses on parents supporting children's and teenagers' emotional wellbeing in the context of recession.

It will help you to:

- Understand the effects of the recession on family relationships.
- Understand the impact of recession on your child.
- Understand the signs that indicate your child may be experiencing anxiety.
- Find ways to support your child.
- Find out where you can get help and support.



Children's needs and rights

Your child has a right to be safe and treated with respect.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (which Ireland signed up to in 1992) declares that every child has the right:

- To be protected and live free of violence, abuse or harm.
- To be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.
- To be free from discrimination, bullying and harassment of any kind.
- To express their views and to have them taken into account in matters that affect them.
- To have decisions that will affect them made in their best interest.

What Children and Teenagers in Ireland Think

In 2012, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs published the results of a major survey on the views of children and teenagers aged from 7 to 18 years on what's good, what's not good and what should be changed to improve the lives of children and teenagers in Ireland.

- Children and teenagers said that the worst thing about living in Ireland is the recession and current financial situation.
- Children noted that there is no money in the country, people are not happy, children will have to pay back banks when they grow up, parents are worried about losing jobs and having less money, everything is more expensive, and they themselves may not be able to get a job and earn money when they leave school.
- Teenagers noted that the country is in a recession, the economy is going downwards, there are no jobs and the cost of living is high.

- Many were worried about the effect of the recession on their family's financial situation and their own future job prospects.

So we know that the recession and the current financial situation is the number one concern for children and teenagers in Ireland. It is striking that primary school age children were concerned about the recession and the financial problems which faced their parents, struggling to pay bills and parents' employment situation. Children were also unhappy with the excessive media coverage of topics relating to the recession.

The worst thing is the recession and parents being stressed over losing their jobs and getting their wages cut.
*[12 year-old girl, 6th class, Offaly] **

The fact that our country is in debt and to think of possibly having to leave Ireland in search of work.
[14 year-old boy, 2nd year, Mayo]

The Effects of Recession on Family Relationships

Parents who are stressed by their financial situation or unemployment may unintentionally pass on that anxiety to their children. As a parent, it can be difficult to hide the enormous stress experienced as a result of, for example, redundancy or financial pressure. Understandably, parents may be absorbed in the rollercoaster that often accompanies financial strain. Parents may find it difficult to communicate with one another and their relationship may be tense. Financial worries are more likely to result in

* Quotes from children and young people throughout this booklet are taken from the report 'Life as a Child and Young Person in Ireland: Report of a National Consultation' (DCYA, 2012).

arguments and disagreements in the home, and children may overhear these conversations discussing problems.

Parents who are stressed may find it difficult to respond to the normal challenging behaviour of their children. It is not easy to respond reasonably and consistently to your children and teenagers if you are stressed or feeling depressed. Stressed parents may find it difficult to have warm, positive experiences with their children.

Parents may also feel guilty about not being able to buy children what they want and, while trying to compensate, respond inconsistently, for example, allowing some misbehaviour one day and not allowing it the next day.

If you are stressed by your financial situation, it is important that you get support to help you to cope with financial and related problems. There is also a lot you can do to help children cope and being sensitive to their needs can make a big difference.



How Might the Recession Impact on my Child's Emotional Wellbeing?

The impact of the recession on children and teenagers will vary depending on the family circumstances, the age of the children and their stage of development, the children's temperament and how the parents cope with the consequences of recession on their family.

- Children and teenagers may have been used to a lifestyle where they had easy access to clothes, the latest technology, going out with their friends, family holidays, treats etc. In the changed family circumstances this may no longer be the case.
- Children may have to miss out on things their peers might take for granted. Parents should be aware of the importance of image and peer group, particularly for older children and teenagers.
- Children may be aware of the financial pressure their family is under and the subsequent stress their parents feel, and be worried about that.
- Children may have to cope with an older brother or sister emigrating for work reasons which may cause upset or a sense of loss within the family.
- Concerns about losing a home and having enough to eat are particularly troubling to younger children.
- Children may experience inconsistent parenting arising from their parent's financial distress.
- Children and teenagers may be stressed by having to adjust to significant changes in their lives such as having to move home or the perceived stigma of parental unemployment.
- Children may have to adjust to one parent working away from home and the difficulties of maintaining a relationship with the absent parent.
- Teenagers may be worried about the wider economy and the impact of unemployment on their future careers.

How Might it Affect their Behaviour?

The following behaviours may cause concern that children are feeling anxious about the impact of the recession:

- Anxiety about the future, for themselves and / or the family.
- Being irritable, with cranky responses and behaviour.
- Pessimistic comments about life.
- Increased fighting and arguing with other family members.
- Increased demands for parental attention.
- Younger children being clingy and anxious about being separated from their parents.
- Children offering to help with family finances (without being asked).
- Physical complaints such as not sleeping or unexplained stomach/ headaches.

In addition to the above, behaviours that might indicate that a teenager is experiencing anxiety arising from the impact of recession include:

- Anger and disillusionment. Teenagers may hold onto these feelings longer than usual.
- A lack of self esteem and a general distrust of the world. Teenagers may become withdrawn.
- Taking part in rebellious or risky behaviour such as drinking or using illegal drugs.
- Getting into trouble at school.

I don't like the way there are no jobs available in the country because of the recession.

[17 year-old boy, 6th year, Unknown]

What If I Am Worried about my Child?

It is important to remember that each child is a unique individual and their day to day experiences, family life and personal circumstances will impact on their development and behaviour.

If you are concerned and notice patterns of withdrawal, anxiety, depression or illness, your child may be experiencing serious problems. If you notice behaviour that is uncharacteristic and outside the 'norm', additional support may be needed. You will need to talk to your son or daughter as soon as possible. It may be helpful to link in with professionals such as the school counsellor, year head or your GP. Check out the finding help section at the end of this booklet for other services which may be able to help.

The teenage years are a time of transition between childhood and adulthood and for your child a time of great emotional change. You might also wish to read the booklet in this series on Teenage Wellbeing, see link below.

[Teenage Well-being - For Parents of Teenagers](#)



Media Focus on Recession

In recent years, media coverage has focused a lot of attention on the recession, rising unemployment, the house prices crash and so on. Some children will not pick up on this negative media coverage, however others may tune in to it and may want to discuss it with you.

- As far as possible, try to monitor your child's exposure to the media. This can be difficult to do, but younger children should only be exposed to media that is age appropriate.
- Take the lead from your child, in other words respond to their questions or concerns.
- Keep doom and gloom assessments to a minimum. Children and teenagers do not need to take on the concerns of the adult world.
- Try to maintain a positive outlook. Children will be influenced by your positive or negative outlook. Try to think positively and share that with your children.

The recession, parents losing jobs, being worried about jobs for when we grow up because of the Government.
[11 year-old boy, 5th class, Tipperary]



How Can I Support My Child to Cope with the Impact of Recession?

We know that children and teenagers are concerned about the recession and its negative effects. Parents who are stressed by their financial situation or unemployment may unintentionally pass on their anxiety to their children as well.

There is a lot that you can do to help your children to cope. Talking with your child and being aware of their concerns can make a big difference. It is important that parents get support for themselves to help cope with financial and related problems.

The most important thing you can do is to get support for yourself

Try to have an outlet for yourself which helps you to deal with the stress such as talking with a family member or friend, or taking part in sport or some other activity that you like. Gaining control of your own stress will mean that you are better able to help your children.

Sometimes it can be difficult to talk to someone in your family or a friend, you may feel embarrassed or not know where to start. If so, there are other people you might find easier to talk to, where you can talk in confidence – you are not alone. See the list of support groups at the back of this booklet for some people who might be able to help.

If the recession is having a negative impact on your relationship with your partner there are support services who can help you talk through your issues. See the back of this booklet for some services that may be of help with this.



It is important to share your worries, but not with your child

Children are very good at tuning in to their parents' emotions. Children often overhear parents' conversations and it is very difficult to prevent them from becoming aware of the pressure you may be under. Try to keep yourself calm around them so that they do not take on your fears or anxiety.

Discuss what is happening with the recession

Take your cue from your children. Ask them whether there have been any discussions about the recession in school and talk to your child's school about what discussions have been taking place. It might be a good idea to talk to your child's teacher about what is happening and find out what supports the school has in place. Explain to your child that everyone is affected to a different degree. Give children space to bring up any concerns they might have about your family situation.

Talk to your child about the family situation

Talk to your children about family problems in a way that is appropriate for their age and level of understanding. Every family situation is unique. It may be appropriate for one or both parents to sit down with the children as a family and explain what is going on in simple terms. This could be followed up by one-to-one conversations that give the child a chance to ask questions and to express their feelings. For example, you might ask a younger child, 'What did you think about what mum and I told you about me losing my job? Do you want to ask any questions?'

With teenagers it is important to make them aware of the situation without overwhelming them. Trust your own judgement as to how much information to share with them.

Involve children in problem solving

If possible, involve children and teenagers in discussing your family situation and ideas about how to adjust to your situation. It is important, however, not to overburden children with the full picture. Teenagers do not need to take on the responsibility for responding to what may be a family crisis, but they can be involved in discussing some of the changes which may have to happen such as not being able to afford family outings/holidays and trying to save on energy/telephone bills. Discuss ideas about things you can do to save money and cut costs in the home.

Maintain family routines

As far as possible, maintain family routines and rituals. Children and teenagers benefit from routines as they can provide reassurance when other parts of family life may be challenging, so try to maintain family mealtimes or other regular family activities.

Acknowledge the challenges of one parent working away from home

If your family has to deal with one parent working away from home, you will understand the emotional impact that may be felt by both parents and the children involved. Prepare your child for what is happening, explain that the parent is moving away to work and maybe show them photos and pictures of the area they are moving to.

Children who know the family plan are usually able to cope better with changes. This will also prevent the child from thinking that they are in some way responsible for the parent moving away.

It helps to maintain regular contact with the absent parent, made easier by Skype, email, texting and new technology. You can access the internet at



your local library or through friends. It is also important to keep the parent who is away from home involved as far as possible in parenting decisions and what is going on in the family. Be prepared, however, for ups and downs, felt by both parents and children, associated with the comings and goings of a parent working away from home.

Minimise other changes

Some changes such as moving home or not being able to take part in certain activities might be unavoidable. Too many changes at once can be overwhelming. Try to keep other major changes to your child's life to a minimum.

Say no empathetically

When having to say no to requests from your children that involve spending money, try to acknowledge that not getting their request is hard for them rather than sounding off about their selfish demands in hard times. Be aware of the risk of bullying as children may be picked on for being different due to, for example, not having the latest trainers or money for school activities. You can read more about coping with bullying in our booklets for parents available in this series. See links below.

[Coping with Bullying - For Parents of Children Aged 6-12](#)

[Coping with Bullying - For Parents of Teenagers](#)

Encourage healthy eating and exercise

Try to promote a balanced diet, getting adequate rest and plenty of exercise to guard against health problems and increase emotional wellbeing.

Partake in free and low cost activities

Find opportunities to do free or low cost activities to maintain family connections and provide opportunities for fun.

Focus on the positive

Help your children to focus on the positive aspects of their lives. In particular, encourage your children's education and do not let any negative thinking about the future act as a demotivation to children reaching their full potential.

Remember...

- Children and teenagers may be concerned about the recession and its negative effects.
- Parents who are stressed by their financial situation or unemployment may unintentionally pass on that anxiety to their children. It is important that parents get support for themselves to help cope with financial and related problems.
- There is a lot that you can do to help your children to cope.
- You should be alert to your child becoming anxious or having difficulty coping and should respond sensitively. Seek help and support if necessary.
- Most children will adjust to the changes which come about in their family from time to time. Coping with change is a learning experience that will enhance children's resilience.

Finding Help

Barnardos

Christchurch Square, Dublin 8

T: 01 453 0355

E: info@barnardos.ie

www.barnardos.ie

Family Support Agency

4th Floor, St Stephen's Green House,
Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2

T: 01 61 14100

E: info@fsa.ie

www.fsa.ie

Family Resource Centre National Forum

A support network working with the Family Resource Centres (FRCs) located in communities throughout Ireland.

E: info@familyresource.ie

www.familyresource.ie

Accord

Accord provides confidential marriage and relationship counselling.

Columba Centre, Maynooth, Co Kildare

T: 01 5053112

E: admin@accord.ie

www.accord.ie

Aware

Aware supports people coping with depression.

72 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin 2

(national office)

T: 01 661 7211 E: info@aware.ie

www.aware.ie

Centre for the Prevention of Self-harm or Suicide

Pieta House provides free, specialised treatment for people who have suicidal thoughts or engage in self harming.

Head Office: Pieta House Lucan

Lucan Road, Lucan, Dublin

T: 01 6010000 www.pieta.ie

Childline

Childline is for young people up to the age of 18.

T: 1800 66 66 66 Text Talk to 50101

www.childline.ie

Crosscare Teen Counselling

Crosscare focuses on prevention and crisis support for teenagers.

Clonliffe College, Dublin 3

T: 01 836 0011 E: info@crosscare.ie

Headstrong

Headstrong supports young people's mental health.

16 Westland Square, Pearse Street, Dublin 2

T: 01 472 7010

E: info@headstrong.ie

www.headstrong.ie

Health Service Executive

The HSE has primary care services all over Ireland.

T: 1850 241 850

E: infoline1@hse.ie

www.hse.ie

Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

This association provides a link between those who are looking for counselling and those who provide it.

21 Dublin Road, Bray, County Wicklow

Locall: 1890 907 265

T: 01 272 3427

E: iacp@iacp.ie

www.irish-counselling.ie

MABS (Money Advice and Budgeting Service)

T: 0761 07 2000

www.mabs.ie

New Beginning

New Beginning is a 'Not for Profit' organisation who offer help and advice on mortgage related issues.

Suite 123, The Capel Building, Mary's

Abbey, Dublin 7

T: 01 871 9499

E: info@newbeginning.ie

www.newbeginning.ie

Parentline

Parentline offers support, guidance and information on all aspects of being a parent Carmichael House, North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7

T: 01 873 3500 E: info@parentline.ie

LoCall: 1890 927277

Relationships Ireland

Counselling for marriage and relationship problems.

T: 1890 380 380

E: info@relationshipsireland.com

www.relationshipsireland.com

Samaritans

Samaritans provides 24 hour emotional support to anyone who is struggling to cope.

4-5 Usher's Court, Usher's Quay, Dublin 8

T: 01 6710071 / 1850 60 90 90

Society of St Vincent de Paul

St Vincent de Paul provides practical assistance to those in financial hardship.

Council of Ireland National Office, SVP

House, 91-92 Sean McDermott Street,

Dublin 1

T: 01 838 6990

E: info@svp.ie

www.svp.ie

You can also contact your family doctor.

Listings for GPs in Ireland can be found on www.doctorsireland.com

This booklet is one in a series on Parenting Positively. Parenting is a very rewarding job but one which can be difficult at times, especially when parents are faced with challenging situations. The aim of this series is to provide information and guidance to you, as a parent, to help create a positive, loving and supportive relationship between you and your child or teenager.

The series covers general parenting skills for younger children and teenage wellbeing as well as the complex life issues of death, separation, bullying, a parent's problem drug or alcohol use, the recession and domestic abuse. The booklets outline a child's understanding of the particular issue and how you can support them through this difficult time. Each booklet also gives further resources that you can follow up for more information and help on the issue covered.

There are booklets in this series for children between the ages of 6 and 12.

There is also information for teenagers on these issues on www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp



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