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Protecting your Family from Times of Economic Stress

PT&A Suggests Making Relationships a Priority

ANNOUNCEMENT:

By Barbara Harvey

Today's tough economic times can bring stress to many relationships; protecting yourself, your marriage and your children is paramount during these days. As the Executive Director of Parents, Teachers and Advocates (PT&A) a 501©3 agency committed to helping parents relive the stress of parenting; I have worked for 5 years in Fulton County. I can tell you that stress and frustration can ruin the best of relationships very quickly. However, economic stress does not have to ruin your relationships. Here are some strategies for overcoming stress and staying sane in crazy times.

The first objective is making sure you are caring for yourself. Adults, especially women, tend to sacrifice their own interests for others. This can be a big mistake in stressful times. One of the key things we teach children in life is self-care. If during stressful times parents spend more time worrying and being frustrated then children learn to handle stress in the same way. Here are some tips on taking care of you in these times:

Take one-half hour each day to yourself. Make it quiet time for the family. Let each person pick a spot for quiet time. Bedrooms, porches, couches, bean bags are all great quiet places. Then everyone gets to do what relaxes them quietly. That is different for everyone. So, try not to dictate; it could be music, puzzles, coloring, reading, I recommend it not be video games or TV. Make sure that music is on headphones and not disturbing others. A great tip for little ones is a book on tape/CD.

Do one activity each week that recharges your own batteries. This could be everything from taking a bath, walking, or having friends in for coffee.

Once a month spend the money to do something just for you. It could be as simple as getting a manicure or pedicure, a half hour massage, or lunch with a friend.

These activities will help you to better deal with stress. Giving yourself permission to protect

your peace of mind will keep you and your family less stressed. The less stress you have the less likely it will produce meltdowns between you and your spouse. Protecting your relationship from the pressure of these economic times is another way to protect the family.

It is a fact that disagreements about money and how to handle it is the number one issue between couples. Therefore, the stress economic times can definitely pose a threat to your relationship. During these tough times it can help to set some perimeters in your discussions. Sit down and decide on a budget. Plan what to spend and spend what you plan. Agree that when you are stressed you will not discuss money issues. If a conflict arises agree to hash it out with a neutral party as a mediator. After any disagreement come back together as a couple and re-establish your relationship. There is an old adage: never go to bed angry with your spouse. Always hash out an issue, make up and start fresh the next morning. My mentors who have been married more than 50 years tell me it works. Here are some strategies to keeping your relationship going in these hard times:

Take time each day to say something positive to your mate about your relationship, them as a person, about your children and kiss each other passionately for one minute.

Find another couple with children and make a pact to keep each others kids once a week. During that time to do something fun as a couple. Go home and play a board game, watch a movie (Hold Hands!), take a long walk, gaze into each others eyes over a bottle of wine and talk. Just be together as a couple!!

Every other month get someone to take your kids for the week-end and spend it together. Stay at home and snuggle up, re-enact your first date, take time to remember what brought you to realize you loved each other, watch your wedding video, do things that you loved doing together before the kids came along. Make this time count!

Remember that you are doing this not just for yourselves. It is for your children. Dr. Phil says on his show kids would rather be from a broken home than live in one. But, truthfully kids would much rather be in a happy home. Taking time to put your marriage as a priority teaches your kids to do the same. Kids are an important part of our lives. However, the goal of being a parent is to raise kids to lead their own lives. The price of parenting them well should not be the end of your own life.

These economic times can also take a toll on the relationship we have with our kids. When parents are frustrated kids can receive the displeasure of that frustration. Parents can push the stress of their lives off onto their kids without meaning to do so. This is why it is so important to take care of yourself and your relationship with your spouse. When these things are in place it is much less likely that children will bear the brunt of a frustrated and stressed out parent. Make time to spend with your kids. So, many are concerned about the self esteem of children; but children who receive attention from their parents have fewer problems with esteem. When the most important adult in their world takes time to give them their undivided attention children feel important and valued. This is a large component of self-esteem. Here are some ideas for supporting your children and giving them your attention:

Each day give each one of your kids 15 minutes of undivided attention. Read a story. Talk about your day. Make dinner together. Play a game of pick up (basketball), color, play dolls, have a tea party. Anything just give them your undivided attention.

Eat dinner together as a family at least three times a week. Even if it means meeting Mom or Dad at work and eating in the break room. This shows children that family is family no matter where we are. It also shows them that family is important enough to inconvenience yourself.

Talk with your kids and pick a day to do something together. Be creative and don't spend money. Also, stay in your neighborhood. Play a board game, play basketball, walk to the park, bake cookies, color. It should be something void of television or video games. Just hang out. Do this once a week for six months. You will be surprised at the relationship that develops.

Every month take one of your kids out for a day together. If you have two kids and two parents great swap a kid each month. Let this day be about the two of you and your relationship. Make it fun. Plan what you are going to do, one of the best playgrounds in the area is at Centennial Olympic Park and the Chattahoochee Nature Center is also a great place to take a picnic and a nature walk. Take pictures and share your time with the other members of your family.

Gratitude is an important part of keeping your family on track. It will help all of you to better appreciate the lives you have. Try this:

Volunteer as a family. Pick an activity once every three or four months to give back to the community. This will help everyone to remember to be grateful for what you have at home.

Trying to build relationships with your kids can sometimes cause parental stress. It can sometimes stem from not understanding where your child is coming from. Or it can also come from not understanding the developmental expectations of someone their age. There has been no manual written on how to raise children.

However, there is help. Parents, Teachers and Advocates (PT&A) helps adults develop tools to foster better relationships with their kids. There are several classes coming up in the next few weeks presented by PT&A:

March 21, 2009, 6-8 pm - **Multiple Intelligence: Helping Children Succeed**

March 28, 2009, 10am-Noon - **Parenting and Mentoring Teens for parents with children ages 11-19**

The agency will also host a support group called **Parenting Teens Well** beginning April 2009. Also on April 21, from 6-8 pm **Dealing with Stress in Parenting** will be conducted. These classes and the support group are designed to help relieve adults the stress of parenting. **All of the classes and support groups will be held at the Human Services Center in Roswell.**

PT&A Seeking Support

These economic times are hard on everyone. Parents, Teachers and Advocates is looking for support from the community. We need on-going support to run our operations. In addition, we need corporate sponsorships, in-kind support and volunteers to put on a parent education weekend called The Straight Arrow Parenting Workshop.

PT&A wants to say thanks to Alpharetta City Building and Zoning and Economic Development departments for all their help and encouragement.

It is clear that these economic times are going to be here for some time. Focusing our time on building relationships is going to be a key to coming out better. Finding ways to de-stress ourselves, our marriages and setting good examples for our children is the plan for navigating these tricky waters. Taking the time to have fun and concentrating on not how much money we have, but how we can help others who are struggling in our community is the way we can make it through. The times are tough but using these ideas and supports will see families and ultimately our community comes out stronger.