



LINCOLN Medical Education Partnership
Strengthening Families through Health Education

SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES

March 2010

Recent economic trends are not only affecting families with increased stress, but educators are seeing increases in student and classroom issues that interfere with learning. Additionally, schools are faced with decisions about programs and staffing with budget cuts. Students who are hungry, disengaged, preoccupied, or disruptive will not respond as well to instruction, even by the best teachers. Knowing that teachers alone cannot meet the needs of all students, SCIP can assist with its process of identification, documentation and referral for mental health and substance abuse issues to qualified community agencies. Following are lists of suggestions for educators and parents to help youth.

INFORMATION FOR EDUCATORS

- Create and maintain a positive school climate: recognize, but do not dwell on economic realities
- Be available to students: let them know you care and are concerned
- Make effective mental health support available: using the resources of the SCIP Team can benefit families
- Help address basic needs: connect with parents to become aware of clothing, food, homelessness needs
- Determine the most effective use of support staff: sometimes the only mental health support a youth receives is at school; school counselors, psychologists and social workers have diverse skills to work with students
- Train school staff: professional development could help school staff learn about “red flags,” resources available, effective outreach, and communication. Post information on the school website
- Engage parents: offer information sessions or develop handouts that provide guidance on how to talk to their children and how to help manage stress.
- Employ prevention strategies: prevention programs supporting positive behavior and student resilience; and develop interventions that help all student cope
- Incorporate social-emotional learning into curriculum: integrate relevant lessons and helpful information into health education, social studies and other classes.

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

As more and more families are coping with the harsh reality of economic crisis, many parents ask how they can support their children in the face of stress.

- Maintain as much of a normal family routine as possible
- Be available and open to talk when your child is ready
- Answer questions honestly and calmly while staying optimistic
- Be aware of changes in your child’s behaviors and emotions
- Encourage your child to tell you if he or she feels overwhelmed
- Encourage healthy and diverse friendships and involvement in extracurricular activities
- Encourage physical activity, good nutrition, and rest
- Keep your child aware of anticipated family changes. Acknowledge that change can feel uncomfortable but reassure him/her that the family will be okay
- Do not hide the truth from your child. Children sense parents’ worry and the unknown can be scarier than the truth. However, avoid unnecessary discussions in front of your child that might increase his/her stress or anxiety
- Help your child be part of decision making when appropriate
- Some adolescents will feel better if they can help; identify tasks that are reasonable and don’t overburden them
- Reassure your child that it is not his/her job to fix the problem and that you will take care of the family
- Emphasize the family’s ability to get through tough times, particularly with the love and support of family and friends
- Find time to relax and have fun together. Family dinner time may be especially important
- Discourage an excessive focus on the news
- Explain the dangers of unhealthy coping strategies, such as use of drugs and alcohol
- Monitor your own stress level. Take care of yourself
- Communicate with school. They need to know if your child is struggling. They have resources to help

(Source: National Association of School Psychologists, March/April 2009)

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