



School Psychology Services

NEWSLETTER FROM YOUR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

Volume 1, Back-To-School Secondary Parent/Guardian Edition: November 2009

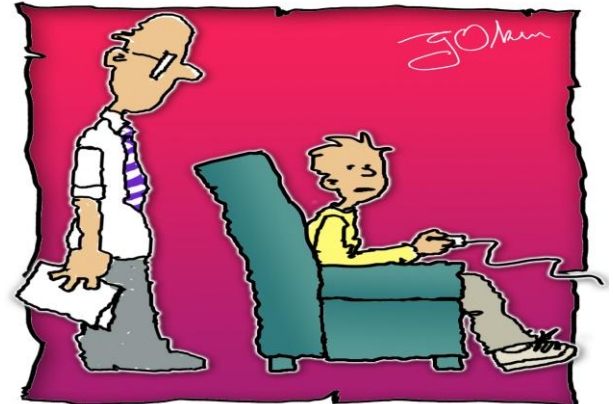
Clinical Corner **Helping Children and Families Cope with the Economic Crisis**

As a new school year begins, parents, educators, and children are full of anticipation for new learning experiences and the opportunity to develop new relationships. Unfortunately, this year will be especially stressful for many because of changes in our economy. Over recent months when we have turned on the car radio, watched television, or read newspapers, we have been flooded with news of the financial crisis in our country. Fairfax County is no exception as our communities have been impacted by soaring unemployment rates and home foreclosures. When we think about these issues, we tend to focus on adults. If job loss, losing a home, and not being able to pay utility bills are stressful for adults, imagine the confusion and feelings of uncertainty that children are experiencing.

The manner in which parents cope with their financial challenges will have a direct impact on their children. Monitoring your own level of stress is very important. If children ask questions about your situation, be honest, but limit how much information you share depending on the age level. Only state what is factual. Worrying about something that may not actually happen can increase a child's anxieties. Even though your financial situation has changed, remind yourself and your children that the most important things in their lives are still there; your love and support. Reassure them that you are still a family and will get through this together as a family.

Signs of stress in children may include changes in physical, behavioral, and emotional functioning. Changes in eating and sleeping patterns, as well as physical complaints such as headaches and stomachaches may occur. Children may have difficulty focusing and paying attention because they are preoccupied with stressful issues. Changes in behavior such as becoming withdrawn and irritable may occur. These problems may contribute to a decline in academic performance in school.

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"Video game tester is MY dream. Why can't you accept that?"

Gary Olsen, Dubuque Schools, www.dubuque.k12.ia.us

What is a School Psychologist?

School psychologists are mental health professionals who help children and adolescents overcome barriers to success in school, at home, and in life. We collaborate with school staff, parents, and other professionals to develop strategies that enhance learning environments and promote success for all students.

School psychologists provide a range of services including the following:

- Consultation with school staff and parents to provide effective interventions for learning and behavior problems.
- Individual and group counseling to help resolve student problems that interfere with school performance.
- Direct training to students in social skills, anger management, and other essential life skills.
- Identification of learning strengths and areas in need of intervention, and assessment of social-emotional development and school related adjustment.
- Behavior assessment leading to an intervention plan.
- Training to school staff and parents on a variety of educational and mental health issues.
- Assistance to families in accessing community resources.
- Implementation of programs that improve our schools and promote safe, effective learning environments.

My School Psychologist

Please let us know if we can help!

MVHS

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Lea Gaffen – School Social Worker.....703-619-3208

MVHS Comprehensive Services Site

Christeen Allen – School Psychologist.....703-619-3306

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Resource on the Web

FCPS School
Psychology Services
[www.fcps.edu/dss/ips/
psychologists/index.htm](http://www.fcps.edu/dss/ips/psychologists/index.htm)

(Coping with the Economic Crisis continued)

Suggestions for Parents

- Monitor your own stress level and take care of yourself.
- Watch for any regression in behavior or social relations.
- Look for changes in emotions such as irritability, anger, and sadness.
- Stick with the normal routine of your family as much as possible; make your child aware of anticipated changes.
- Be available to listen to your child's concerns and answer questions honestly in a calm and optimistic manner.
- Make sure your child is eating healthy and getting proper exercise and rest.
- Participate in activities that do not cost money (e.g., exercising, going to the library, reading together).
- Limit television viewing about the negative economy.
- Remember that children may overhear tense discussions about money.
- Some children feel better by helping out; offer them tasks that are reasonable and don't overburden them.
- Talk to your child's teacher and make him/her aware that your child is feeling stressed.

Resources are available to families to help children cope with these issues. Contact your school psychologist for strategies and interventions to assist with academic, behavioral, and mental health issues. School psychologists are also helpful in accessing community resources that offer support to families. In addition, free information is available on this topic from the website of the National Association of School Psychologists:

<http://www.nasponline.org/educators/economic.aspx>

Prepared by Debrah B. Martin, FCPS school psychologist at Hayfield Secondary School.

Parent Tips Strategies for Internet Safety

Due to the potential dangers of an adolescent's Internet usage, parents/guardians need to take an active role in monitoring their child's online activities to ensure their safety. Here's what parents/guardians need to know:

"Parents must understand potential Internet dangers and prepare their children, just as they prepared them at one time for going to the playground or crossing the street."

- The Internet contains many risks including viruses, hidden spyware, pornography, violent images, aggressive advertising, cyberbullying, sexual predators, and identity theft. Teach this to your children.

(Strategies for Internet Safety continued)

"Parents can provide the best protection for their children and help reinforce the principles of Internet safety learned in the classroom. Families should reach agreements about acceptable Internet activity and content."

- Establish a parent-child Internet use contract. Create clear expectations/rules on what are acceptable and not acceptable websites to visit and activities to do while using the Internet. Keep this posted near the computer.
- Explain to adolescents the potential hazards of online sexual solicitation and the risks associated with Internet communication with strangers.
- Discuss the dangers of face-to-face contact with someone met online.
- Teach your child to avoid sending personally identifying information (e.g., real name, address, school, telephone number, photos, and family member names) via the Internet.
- Encourage your child to report anything that makes him/her feel uncomfortable or uneasy; refrain from over-reacting.

"Monitoring is crucial. Parents should know where their children go online."

- Place the computer in a public location such as the family room as opposed to a child's bedroom. Remember however, there are many other communication devices that allow access to the Internet (e.g., cell phones).
- Monitor the amount of time your child spends online and frequently check the computer's Web browsers or bookmarks/favorites, which provide information on the websites that have been accessed.
- Supervise/monitor Internet friends in a fashion similar to how neighborhood and school friends are monitored.
- Discourage your child from downloading games and other media which could contain Trojan and worm programs that enable remote access to computers by unauthorized users.
- Encrypt your wireless home network and install software to promote Internet safety (e.g., firewall, privacy filtration program, anti-adware/spyware, and an antivirus program).
- Bookmark sites that are OK for your child to visit and set the Internet browser (e.g., Explorer) security feature to "high."
- Understand and approve children's screen names—predators target sexually suggestive screen names.
- Contact the *Cyber Tip Line* at (800)-843-5678 or www.cybertipline.com if you suspect an online predator has contacted your child.
- The Internet is constantly changing; keep informed by checking out FCPS resources on Internet Safety at:

<http://www.fcps.edu/DIS/OIT/InternetSafety/>

Keeping Children Safe on the Internet: Guidelines for Parents by Stefan C. Dombrowski and Karen L. Gischlar of Rider University. Find this article on the website of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) at http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/cq342internetsafety_ho.aspx

Guidelines and Resources for Internet Safety in Schools by the Virginia Department of Education. Find this resource at <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/Technology/OET/internet-safety-guidelines-resources.pdf>