

Economic Issues and How They Affect Young Adolescents

Every day we hear on news shows or read in the paper about the impact of the current economic situation on our local communities, our states, our country, and many other countries. Most of us know someone who has experienced a home foreclosure, a job loss, or the failure of a family business. We know the economic downturn also affects school budgets, educators, and the young adolescents they teach.

Young adolescents are highly aware of their surroundings. They watch the news on TV and video clips on the Internet; they talk to, text, and IM each other; and they listen to the conversations of the adults around them. So, how are young adolescents reacting to the constant focus on the economic crisis and its effects, and what support do they need?

Young adolescents may be receiving inaccurate or incomplete information from unreliable sources. And even if they are receiving accurate information, many of the terms used may be foreign to them, leading to confusion and misinterpretation. What can we do in our homes and schools to help young adolescents during this difficult time?

Before we can put a plan into place, we must understand that each adolescent will react to the situation differently. Some may choose to ignore the issue until it has a direct impact on their own lives. Although it may seem superficial and self-centered, this is a normal reaction for 10- to 15-year-olds. Others may want to know what they can do to help their families and friends. This is normal too.

Adolescents may feel things are spinning out of control. Eventually internalizing what is happening around them, they could even feel their family's economic problems are partly their fault. Some may need to express their anger and frustration, especially those whose families have been directly affected.

Young adolescents need time to process all the information they are receiving. Once they have had time to think about things on a deeper level, they may ask more specific questions like "How will this affect my family?" "Are we going to move?" "Will I still be near my friends?" and "Do I have to cut back on doing things I like to do?" These are all valid concerns.

Now is the time for parents and educators to talk to young adolescents about what is happening in our world. Explain how the economy affects everyone. Be honest and talk about the impact on our schools and families. Don't incite panic, but be realistic. And when they are ready to talk, be patient and listen.

Steps educators and parents can take to help adolescents cope are

1. Be honest with adolescents. Make sure they know the facts. Share possible scenarios and discuss various solutions.
2. Set aside time for young adolescents to talk about economic issues. Listen and do not judge their emotions or take their reactions personally.
3. Invite adolescents to take part in family budget discussions and seek their input.
4. Encourage students to do good deeds for others. Schools can help with outreach projects and related events. There are teachable moments in every situation!
5. Above all, reassure young adolescents that you are there to support them.

Jack Berckemeyer
Assistant Executive Director

Call 1-800-528-NMSA or
visit www.nmsa.org

