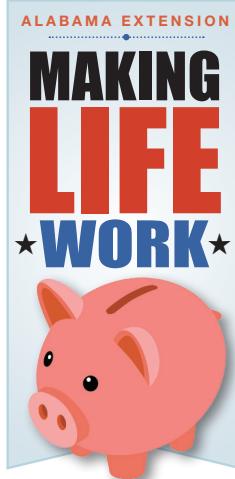


**Making Life Work.** That's what we try to do each day. But that effort can become challenging and often frustrating. Alabama Extension is here to help you overcome life's hurdles as you take care of yourself and your family, remain safe, obtain food and prepare meals, work, and pay your bills.



## Making **LIFE** Work

# Dealing with Stress

Stress associated with job loss and the many other challenges stemming from an economic downturn or disaster can spill over into family relationships. Family members, particularly parents, must face up to the challenge of resolving this stress.

The American Psychological Association reports that money and work are the top sources of stress for Americans.

Children are a special challenge. They often sense their parents' stress and may act out in frustration in one of several ways: mimicking their parents' stress, reacting to the stress in their own unique ways, or simply withdrawing from their parents.

Resolve these stresses and the situations they can cause as peacefully as possible.

Social distancing, when required, should not mean total isolation. For parents, the first step should involve communicating openly with and actively listening to your children or partner—something that requires practice. To be a responsive caregiver, follow these guidelines:

**Manage your emotions and practice mindfulness,** which means to calm down, focus, and be in the moment by yourself or with each other. Stay calm with calming routines, such as deep breathing exercises, meditation, or yoga.



**Treat your children and other family members with respect** as you resolve a conflict. Be honest with yourself as well as others. You may deserve at least part of the blame for the conflict. Demonstrate your willingness to change. Take turns talking and really listen to each other.

**Face up to your problems.** Don't hesitate to discuss the conflict with other family members. Stay calm and offer constructive solutions. Make a list of possible solutions.

**Focus clearly on the problems,** especially the behaviors and other factors associated with them. Don't play the blame game. Deal with the challenge as a problem rather than as a battle that involves settling scores and assigning blame. Help every family member understand the feelings of others while the solutions are being worked out.

## **Collateral Damage: Stress Affects Children Too**

Economic hardship often produces a vicious cycle. In too many cases, as marriages suffer from added financial stress, so does the quality of parenting. Children often react to these parenting lapses with increased irritability, trouble in school, and even delinquency. Parents and other caregivers, despite their challenges, should strive to lead by positive example and not to expose their children to the stress.



**Express things in “I” messages,** which can help you gain a better understanding of how you feel and what you need. For example: “I feel frustration when there is not enough money to pay bills, and I need you to help make a list of ways we can cut expenses. What can we cut back on or cut out?” Don’t start sentence with “you” and attack a person causing resentment and shuts down communication.



**Communicate with a clear understanding of goals.** Help each family member, especially the children, see the problem clearly. Restate as clearly as possible everything that was discussed.

**Identity one or more workable solutions,** carefully weighing the consequence of each. Don’t be judgmental of others’ ideas. Base these solutions on your personal and your family’s values.

**Build consensus** around solutions: Adopt only those solutions that are acceptable to all or most family members.

**Reevaluate.** Periodically, reconvene the family to determine if the solutions are still working or if new solutions are needed.