

The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

Sometimes The Kids Need To Know

from the American Counseling Association

As parents we want to protect our children not only from physical danger but also from the emotional pain that life can bring. While we accept that small hurts will happen -- a disagreement with a sibling or friend, the loss of a toy -- we usually believe we're helping our children by sheltering them from the bigger problems.

Unfortunately, being overly protective can do harm. Kids are usually more aware of bad news than we suspect but often get the details wrong and may even feel responsible for the problem.

Most children know when a family is having problems, even if nothing is said directly to them. But kids frequently get the news in bits and pieces that add up to an incomplete, confusing and even frightening picture.

The solution is to share information with your children. No child needs all the gory details of a job loss or a troubled marriage, but he or she should have enough age-appropriate information to feel included and part of something important to the family.

Start by reassuring your children that what is happening is not their fault. Kids are used to being blamed for messing up and often assume that when trouble happens, whether it's work woes or marital strife, it's usually because of something they did.

Reassure your children that you, their parents, are on top of things and are working to fix the problem. Let the kids know it's okay to ask about what's going on, especially if they see you upset, worried, angry or crying. Children feel reassured when they know they can ask questions, get information and feel included.

Of course, how much information you share depends on your children's ages. A young child doesn't understand economic issues associated with a job loss, but will know that you're upset, worried, and acting differently. Older children may need more details, both to keep them from blaming themselves for the problem and to help them prepare for changes that may be coming.

Communicating with your children about family problems or possible changes should always be one of your first priorities. A child left in the dark is a frightened child.

If you need help, look for books at your library or bookstore on family communications. Your school counselor can also offer advice on possible approaches to difficult issues. Or seek out a professional counselor in your area specializing in family

issues.

Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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