

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Relationship Restructuring: Love, Family and Finances

During a downturn, there's a lot more in flux than the stock markets and your bank account. Cutbacks, job loss and belt-tightening can have a major effect on relationships, putting added strain on kids and parents and changing the dynamics of a romance. Read on to uncover the impact financial challenges can have on relationships and discover ways to ensure these bonds are made stronger through restructuring times of flux.

Money and Your Mate

In the best of times, money is one of the most common sources of conflict in a relationship. In the reality of today's cash-strapped climate, however, it can really cause things to take a turn for the worse if it's not discussed openly and maturely.

Set out a scheduled time every week to sit down and talk about your financial situation. Creating an "appointment" gives this important part of your relationship legitimacy, and encourages both of you to think more deeply about your finances, where you're at, where you want to go and how you're feeling. Booking a time allows you both to prepare and helps avoid defensive arguments that can arise when one of you feels ambushed.

If your partner has recently lost his or her job, try to stay calm. While you may be upset, fearful, or angry about the situation, chances are your partner is doubly so. A strong reaction on your part will only put greater pressure on an already highly-stressful situation. Focus on staying positive and supporting your partner through the grieving process of job loss. After all, for many people, a job is not just how they make money, but a part of their identity. Though the days of the male as "breadwinner" may be in the past, many men still impose this responsibility on themselves, making a downsizing or layoff even harder.

If you're the one who's recently been downsized, you may find it difficult to lean on your partner to cover the bills when you're used to being financially self-sufficient. In both cases, it's vital to remain flexible: roles, responsibilities and who pays for what may need to change for a limited period of time as you work together to handle a job loss. While you may not be able to control a job cut, the two of you can work together to create an action plan to get you through, and beyond, this challenge—from budgeting, to scaling back, to job hunting.

Romance in a Recession

When the pressure is on, it can be pretty easy for romance to fall by the wayside as each person becomes more and more preoccupied with bills, extra work and job hunts.

Since stress and anxiety are well-known mood-killers when it comes to sex, it's not surprising that couples are finding that the crumbling economy is also leaving their bedrooms "bankrupt." Sex may not change the world or make your problems go away, but it can enhance intimacy within your relationship and is also a proven stress-buster and mood enhancer.

Instead of getting swept up in financial and job stress, why not re-focus that energy on sweeping your mate off his or her feet? Re-connecting as a couple will help your relationship remain stable during
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turbulent times—and it doesn't have to empty your wallet either. Staying in to cook a meal together, snuggling up to a movie at home or even going for a post-dinner stroll are all low-cost ways to keep "we time" on track.

Kids and Cutbacks

During better times, your children may have been used to asking for, and receiving the hottest toys, gadgets or clothing without much thought or debate. In fact, it's a main reason why in recent years, advertisers have put a lot more money into marketing products to kids.

But if your fortunes have recently changed, or financial uncertainty is swirling around, cutbacks on the kids' expenses—be their extra activities, designer clothing or video games—may be a reality you're facing.

While telling your kids why you have to cut back may feel challenging (even embarrassing for some parents), remind yourself that this is a great opportunity to teach your kids a few financial lessons about the "value" of a hard-earned dollar and about the notion of spending within your means. This is also a perfect opportunity to help kids appreciate that there are people less fortunate out there (and potentially a good bridge to a discussion about helping others) who survive on much less than they do.

Ensure the level of conversation you have is geared to the child's age. If you have teenagers, for example, you can be more candid about the financial challenges you're facing and the need for everyone to pitch in—either by cutting back or perhaps seeking out part-time work to pay for the "extras." While you can let young children know you aren't able to afford certain luxuries, avoid unloading your stress—and potentially scaring your kids—with too many details on young children.

The most critical lesson kids can take from this downturn is the difference between "want" and "need." Remember, the happiness that comes from receiving a material object is usually short-lived. What makes kids well-adjusted, positive individuals is your attention, love and support—luxuries every parent can afford to give.

While the tanking economy can put extra stress on relationships and family bonds, it's not all bad news: by taking an open, honest and flexible approach, you can re-focus your energy away from material possessions and back on what really matters—the people you care about most.