

COPING WITH CRISIS

Big changes in everyday family life can be difficult—for both adults and children. Natural disasters, layoffs, serious accidents and other conditions beyond our control can leave us feeling powerless. Don't lose hope. Other people have overcome these challenges and you can too.

How to stay strong and flexible during times of crisis

Two tools that help people bounce back:

1. Knowing and using their internal strengths.
2. Allowing people, organizations and agencies to help them build on their strengths and learn new skills.

Using all the resources available to you will help you move toward a strong, stable future for you and your family.

Personal Strengths

You have what it takes to get through this! We all learn ways of overcoming challenges in life. Experiences like traffic jams, arguments with neighbors or coworkers, or making the necessary arrangements to take care of a suddenly sick child have helped us learn healthy ways to cope with the unexpected. Our children are learning these skills too when they struggle through a difficult math lesson, figure out a way to get home when they miss the bus, or receive bad news from a friend or parent. When a major life crisis hits, people draw upon their coping skills in a much bigger way.

Think about challenges you and your family have faced in the past and ask yourself, “How have we done as well as we have? What resources or skills did we use then? How can what we’ve learned from those experiences help us now?”

Research shows we all have at least some of the following personal strengths that we can use to overcome challenges. Which ones do you have?

1. **Relationships** – being a friend and forming positive relationships.
2. **Service** – helping others or supporting a cause.
3. **Life Skills** – making good decisions, speaking up for yourself and others and using self-control.
4. **Humor** – being able to share a laugh, sometimes at your own expense, to lighten your own mood as well as the mood of others.
5. **Inner Direction** – making choices based on your own values.
6. **Perceptiveness** – seeing past the surface of people and situations to understand what they are really about.
7. **Independence** – distancing yourself from unhealthy people and situations.
8. **Positive View of Personal Future** – believing that no matter how things look today, you will pull through and get to where you want to be.
9. **Flexibility** – accepting and adjusting to change in a positive way.
10. **Love of Learning** – asking questions and gathering information to help you solve problems as well as learn more about things that interest you.
11. **Self-motivation** – setting goals and working toward them because you want to accomplish them, not because of what someone else expects or demands of you.
12. **Competence** – knowing what you are good at doing and using your own unique knowledge, talents or abilities.
13. **Self-Worth** – knowing that you are a valuable member of your family or community and being confident that you can make a positive difference in the lives of others.
14. **Spirituality** – having faith in something greater than you.
15. **Perseverance** – looking for new ways to solve problems and overcome challenges, even if you have been unsuccessful in the past.
16. **Creativity** – expressing yourself through art, or thinking of creative ways to solve problems and achieve goals.



Asking for and Accepting Help

Everyone needs a helping hand at some point. Don't wait until you are exhausted and desperate before seeking help. Asking for and accepting help as soon as you realize you are in need means you will get back on your feet sooner and need less help over the long haul.

Family, friends, neighbors and coworkers may be able to help with meals, childcare, transportation or other needs, but if they don't know your situation, they can't help. If you are under financial stress and can't seem to make ends meet:

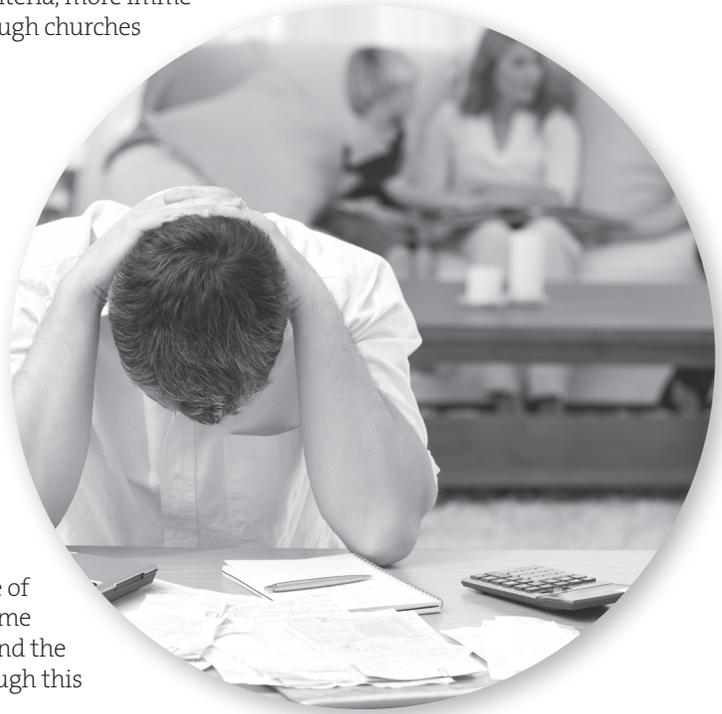
- 1. Call your mortgage lender.** Ask for a lower interest rate, a reduced payment plan, or other considerations until you can get back on your feet. Delayed or reduced payments are better than no payment, so they may be willing to help. If you rent, before your rent is due, ask your landlord if he can lower the payment for a few months and let you make up the difference once your situation improves. If you are able to take care of some maintenance or repairs, your landlord may let you work off part of your rent.
- 2. Contact your utility providers** (gas, electric, phone, water) and ask if they have any programs to help people in need keep their services turned on. Find out how to apply.
- 3. Call your church or community food banks.** While government funded programs can offer help to those who meet eligibility criteria, more immediate help for families in crisis is often available through churches and local nonprofit organizations.

A variety of services are also available to help address specific needs including healthcare, food, childcare and counseling services for suicide prevention, addiction recovery, and domestic violence. See specific listings in the Family Resources section of this guide.

Parenting Tips for Families in Crisis

Uncertain and chaotic environments place children at increased risk for developmental delays affecting their reasoning, speech, movement and social skills.

Children watch adults to see how we respond to crisis. If parents stay positive and hopeful, the crisis will have less of an impact on child development. In order to keep your cool during crisis, you must take care of yourself. Listening to uplifting music, spending some time in nature, or reading and inspiring book can help you find the peace and strength you need to guide your family through this challenging time.



5 C's for Coping with Family Crisis

- 1. Communication.** Talking to your children about what is happening is the first step to helping them find healthy ways to adjust to changes. Encourage them to talk about their feelings and express their opinions respectfully. Listen to what they have to say and make sure they know what has happened is NOT their fault. Children may have a lot of questions you can't answer right now, and that's okay. Be honest and assure them that some things, like your love for each other, will never change. Be patient with younger children who will ask the same questions over and over; try to answer them consistently. Older children may know more about what is going on. Tell them what they need to know to understand the situation and allow them to ask questions, but be careful not to burden them with too much information. Help them understand that you are still working to support and protect them and that you do not expect them to solve adult problems.
- 2. Consistency.** Setting clear and consistent boundaries and family rules is always a good idea, but it is especially important for families in crisis. Structure and limits help children feel safe because they know what to expect. Continue existing routines as much as possible and create new ones as needed. For example, if you are no longer able to tuck your children in at night due to your new work schedule, try to talk with them over breakfast every morning instead.

- 3. Connection.** People who are connected to others through a network of family, friends, clubs or organizations are healthier and happier. Taking time to play together as a family helps raise everyone's spirits and relieves some of the stress of daily life. It doesn't take a lot of time or money to connect. As little as 10 minutes of family play a day can make a big difference in how you and your children cope with challenges. Try playing a game, singing a song, or taking a walk together.
- 4. Celebration.** Set realistic goals and celebrate progress rather than perfection. For example, if you need to find a job, filling out an application or creating a resume is a big step in the right direction. If your child is struggling at school, turning in all her homework on time or improving a letter grade in a difficult class is a big accomplishment. Recognizing that you are making progress can help you stay focused on achieving your goals.
- 5. Contribution.** One of the best ways to bounce back from your own problems is to find a way to help someone else with theirs. Adults and children alike can experience healing and empowerment by becoming a source of help to others.

Stress, anxiety, and other depression-like symptoms are common after natural disasters or other traumatic events. If you have any of these symptoms, call the **Disaster Distress Helpline** at 800-985-5990 or TTY 800-846-8517 for information, support and counseling. It's free and confidential.

Resources: www.resiliency.com

HERE'S HELP



Use the **Family Resources** on **pages 91–95** to learn about a variety of family support services available in your community.