



Girl Connection

For those who serve adolescent females

February 2010

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Iowa Task Force for Young Women

Anxiety and Economic Uncertainty

Economic downturn. Foreclosure. Recession. It seems not long passes before one hears those words each day. Our stress level rises. We become short-tempered. We are tired of worrying about our personal finances but as soon as we go to the office, we worry about work finances. In the midst of all this stress, we may fail to notice the impact on the young people in our lives. But, kids pick up on and respond to adults' emotional stress whether we notice it or not.

Unfortunately for females, they have a higher prevalence of anxiety and mood disorders in the first place. In general, when a stressful situation presents itself, females of any age are more prone to negative stress reactions.

Oddly, there is a strength that can work against females in this situation as well. Females are much more adept at reading nonverbal cues. Adult stress need not be verbalized for young women to feel it.

The warning signs of substantial disruption due to stress include - changes in sleep patterns, eating habits, irritability, grades dropping off, etc. These may indicate an increase in a young woman's stress that could have negative and lasting repercussions.

What to do!

Don't burden them with your worries. This is one of those times where adults must be especially careful to avoid a discussion about her stress turning into a discussion about their stress.

Don't expect them to make adult decisions. If she wants to get a paper route to help out that's great! Something appropriate can give her a feeling of control and empowerment. However, including her in adult decision-making about selling the house, for example, is an undue burden.

Have a positive attitude. Though it may be difficult, speak with her in optimistic terms. Being practical is fine, but a strength-based approach here is best. Challenges are there to be learned from and overcome!

Take care of yourself. Adults can only help girls deal with stress when they deal with their own.

Exercise! You do it. Make sure she does it. Not much beats exercise as an antidote to stress.

Avoid jumping to conclusions. Stress will exacerbate any existing conditions, but there is no need to rush to find a diagnosis for her. Her anxiety about what "all this economic stuff" means for her family is not necessarily abnormal.

Avoid labelling. Telling her she's overreacting or being hysterical won't help and can, in fact, make matters worse. Take her concerns seriously.

Reassure her. Hearing that she is safe and will be cared for no matter what she hears on the news is an appropriate reassurance. Promising her everything will be just like it was before, on the other hand, is a risk you don't want to take.

Above all, be honest. While she shouldn't be saddled with responsibilities adults must shoulder, deception will do more harm in the long run. Answer her questions truthfully and with a minimum of detail and drama.



We are happy to announce that after 15 years of work on behalf of young women, the Iowa Gender Specific Services Task Force will now be known as the Iowa Task Force for Young Women.

Gender-specific services have developed and changed over the years and we are doing the same! You will see some shift in language from 'gender specific' to the more accurate 'female responsive', especially when you check out the changes to our website.

We will continue to provide the same advocacy for young women involved in or at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system and we will expand our training (including the upcoming 14th annual Whispers & Screams conference) and materials available to those interested in providing the best possible female responsive services to the populations they serve.

And of course we will continue to publish the GIRL CONNECTION!

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The Girl Connection

newsletter is provided as a service of the Iowa Task Force for Young Women.

For back issues of *The Girl Connection*, more information about the Task Force for Young Women, or if you are willing to receive future issues via e-mail to save mailing costs, please contact us:

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