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### **Talking to children and teenagers when money is tight.**

When it comes to financial stress, it's often appropriate to talk about what you're doing with your money, rather than what you can't do. For example, telling your children that you're saving your money to pay the electric bill—rather than telling them you can't afford new runners.

### **Explain family priorities.**

Share with children what steps you're taking to address the situation, such as, "I'm working extra so we'll have a little more money," or "I'm meeting with some people who are going to help us pay the rent this month."

Or you might say something like, "We're not going to spend money on things we don't need this month. But we can still have fun by doing things that don't cost money, like going to the park or playing games."

### **Reassure**

Although it's OK to be straightforward and share that you're curbing some expenses and re-prioritising spending, try your best to comfort your child's concerns.

A healthy message involves a simple explanation of what children can expect and some reassurance that the adults have it under control.

We suggest that some conversation-starters could be: "We're working hard to pay our bills. But for the next few weeks, we won't be buying any extra clothes or eating out." Children feel safe when you acknowledge the stress but reassure them that the adults are handling the situation.

### **Try to shield kids from adult implications.**

Refrain from allowing them to experience or witness upsetting exchanges. Children and teenagers can be listening when you don't expect it.

You don't want them overhearing an argument about money or hearing a voicemail from an angry landlord threatening eviction without any type of explanation. Children will often form their own conclusions based on what they see and hear. So, if you don't give them a simple explanation, they may fear the worst.

### **Consider age-appropriate action.**

Address your conversations delicately, and consider the age of your child. Below are some suggestions on age-dependent ways to approach your children with money troubles.

#### **Preschool age:**

Keep everything positive. It's helpful to remember children at this age don't yet understand the concept of money and how it's earned or spent.

#### **Primary school age:**

Children at this age can handle simple explanations about how you're saving to pay certain bills, or how you're using your money to buy the most important things only right now.

**10 -12 years:**

Tweens can tolerate more detailed conversations about the financial situation. You might tell them that you're not able to afford certain brands of clothing or trips to restaurants because you need to pay for the necessities first. If you wish you can also be open with them if you get assistance from others.

**Teenagers:**

Teenagers are the easier ones to talk with about money troubles. Teens can learn the value of money by having conversations that teach them what things cost. You might turn it into hours worked, for example; explain how many hours you work to buy groceries or how many hours you work to pay the electric bill. Or roughly, what percentage of your social welfare goes towards food or electricity.

While you don't want to make your teenager feel guilty for how much they eat or how much electricity they use, it can be helpful for them to realise that it takes a lot of effort to cover the basic expenses. This may help them see that you're not saying no to things because you don't want them to have those things; rather, you just don't have the money as a family right now.

You can also explain things they can do to help, such as keeping an eye on the amount of time they spend in the shower, switching sockets off at the wall.

**Avoid worst-case scenarios at all costs.**

Don't overshare with your children the worst possible outcome for your family's money troubles. By this we mean telling children or teenagers how things could potentially get worse. Try and stick to the facts as they currently are. Children and teenagers are usually only worried about how changes will impact them and how their needs will be met. It is usually best to only address finances when the child will be directly impacted in some way by the financial change or situation.

**Seek support for yourself:**

If you are experiencing financial difficulties don't forget you can always contact the St. Vincent de Paul, 021-4270444 (Tuckey Street Office – let them know they area you live in with contact details and someone will phone you back), Youghal social welfare office(024) 25020if you are in receipt of social welfare or MABS the money and budgeting advise service0818 07 2090. These services are free of charge and are skilled at supporting families experiencing financial difficulties. Find a supportive adult to talk to so that you can manage your own stress about the situation you find yourself in.