Written by Kathleen Olson
Monday, 16 March 2009 15:16

When a job loss occurs, families face new issues, such as spending habits. However, it is also a crucial time to rethink family priorities and goals. People often create goals unconsciously, but at times of income loss it is important to discuss them as a family.

Inevitably, job loss equals more time spent at home. Parents may cut childcare costs by spending more time with children at home, but a parent staying at home with children will likely experience more changes than just those to the checkbook.

Avoiding isolation is critical. People experiencing tough times report they feel better if they have the support of family and friends. Your informal support networks with friends, relatives and others are a place to turn to for comfort and advice. Work out trades with family or friends so that you can get a break from staying home and also have some focused time to job hunt or do something for yourself.

The transition from work to home brings an unfamiliar and often unexpected emotion: loneliness. Now that you are no longer spending days with co-workers at the office or socializing outside of work, you may experience temporary drops in self-esteem. In the workplace, there was constant reinforcement, and success was measured in very tangible ways. This may be harder to measure at home. Look for ways to be with other people, such as volunteering or inexpensive activities.

In the current downturn, plenty of women have been losing jobs, but heavy job losses in certain male-dominated industries – such as construction and industry also means many parents may be undergoing unexpected role reversals.

Couples facing difficult times need to talk and, if necessary, try counseling to keep lines of communication open. Discuss how lifestyles have changed and demands are different, as people function differently in the workplace than they do at home.

Expectations about working inside the home versus outside will change and responsibilities may shift. One parent may take on more housework, grocery shopping, childcare or other things that would normally have been taken care of when there were two incomes.

Try to see the positive side of changes. You may be able to spend more time with children and plan fun, free activities in the community. Take time for yourself for education, volunteering, a new hobby, or to re-evaluate priorities and life goals.

Kathleen Olson has spent her career focusing on parenting issues and believes that most issues we face in life go back to parenting. She is an Extension Educator in Family Relations for the University of Minnesota and has two children of her own.