



Dealing with Economic Uncertainty ~ The Kidpower Way



Co-Author Dmitri Nadot is the Center Director of Kidpower Teenpower Fullpower of New York City, and he also has a martial arts practice. Recently, he brought the first Kidpower programs to Russia, teaching a number of workshops for adults and children. In this article, he also draws from his background as a former financial business analyst.



Co-Author Irene van der Zande is the Founder and Executive Director of Kidpower Teenpower Fullpower International. Since 1989, she has led the creation of curriculum, training of instructors, establishment of centers, and development of the organization. Kidpower has brought "People Safety" education to over a million children, teenagers and adults, including those with special needs from many different cultures—close to home and around the world. For more information, please visit kidpower.org.

This article is about empowering yourself and others when facing economic challenges, using some "People Safety" ideas and skills from Kidpower.

Upset and worry are normal feelings when we are faced with the recent turmoil in the financial world. In the United States, for example, 75% of the people surveyed by the CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll reported feeling angry, scared, and stressed out about the economy. In many other countries, recent economic shocks have been felt even more sharply. Millions of people are afraid of losing their jobs or having their financial security threatened.

We don't want to be in denial, but we also do not have to let anxiety about financial losses destroy our emotional well-being. Instead, we can empower ourselves and others to deal with economic uncertainty in a positive way, just as we can take charge of our personal safety rather than being overwhelmed by potential danger. We have the right and the power to take care of ourselves and to enjoy our lives, even in an imperfect, constantly changing world.

Here are seven tips for dealing with uncertain economic times ~ the Kidpower way!

I. Get Centered. Most of us have certain triggers or "hot buttons" that cause us to explode with feelings and either go on automatic pilot or freeze, making it hard to think clearly or to make wise choices for ourselves and others. People often get triggered about money. Reacting out of fear about financial issues creates a big risk of making poor decisions and feeling a high level of unhealthy stress. If you or others around you feel anxiety or upset because of the economy, a good starting point is to take a moment to center yourself so that you can assess your personal situation with a calm, clear mind.

Here's a quick way to center yourself: Take a deep breath; straighten your back; feel where your hands and feet are; notice something wonderful in the world around you; and take another deep breath. Listen to the sound of your breath going in and going out. No matter how big a problem might be, you will be better equipped to handle the situation if you are calm and keep a sense of perspective.

A useful way to keep your perspective is to accept that life is uncertain and that things *will* go wrong sometimes. Part of the Kidpower philosophy is to see life as an adventure and ourselves as heroes, rather than believing that we are helpless victims of the unexpected.

As Dr. David Lieberman, author of *Instant Analysis*, put it, "The highest level of psychological security is attained the minute you accept the unknown as a part of life." While uncertainty is most often seen as a negative thing and certainty as positive, this can be turned around: it is the certainty that leaves no room for an unexpected opportunity and serendipity.

2. Use Your Awareness. Notice what is happening with the economy and pay attention to how changes might affect you personally. Assess whether you are making the best choices for your specific situation. Keep looking for new possibilities and be willing to adapt.

If you are looking for a job, see where and how your skills, values, and personal aspirations can be applied. Be creative and look for areas of demand. Not every avenue has been or will be affected by the economic downdraft. Exciting opportunities emerge with every shift, often right in your area of expertise or interest! Having a calm and aware mind makes it easier to see possibilities.

For every loss of job opportunities, there are also potential new gains. Right now the growth is in the areas of alternative energy, healthcare, counseling (including job counseling), security, and education (especially for adults). You don't have to be in those exact industries to take advantage of current economic trends. You can deliver services or products to companies and individuals that are in the areas of growth.

Even very upsetting changes are not always bad in the long run. Sometimes job loss provides a necessary jolt for a long-overdue career shift.

3. Act Confident. Your belief in yourself as being valuable, competent, and powerful is one of the most important tools you have for protecting your well-being, financially and in other parts of your life. Acting as if you believe in yourself even if you are nervous or doubtful inside can help you to start feeling more confident.

Of course, letting go of feelings of constant worry can be difficult, especially when no easy solution is currently in sight. However, worry will make you miserable without solving anything. Beating yourself up for financial decisions that you might have made is also emotionally destructive. You can remind yourself and others that mistakes are part of learning and that you don't have to be perfect to be great.

Instead of wasting energy on worry or regret for past mistakes, approaching potential problems with an attitude of confidence can help you to handle those problems more effectively. In addition, other people are more likely to listen to you and less likely to ignore or bother you if you act aware, calm, and confident when you talk with them.

4. Take Charge. We can't always control what happens, but we can take charge of our own actions and feelings and take responsibility for our financial well-being. Look for solutions instead of blame. Although it may be tempting to blame the government, employers, Wall Street, or mortgage companies, this is a waste of energy and time. It is far more productive to focus on what we can do to make the best of our economic situation and to take full responsibility for our own choices.

We can take charge by learning from the past and focusing on the present. For some people, financial solutions are easy to see. For others, their situation might seem completely out of control. It may be helpful to break things down into smaller, more achievable steps. If something is not working, try tackling a task differently, as opposed to just trying harder and harder to do the same thing. Think of as many alternatives as possible, assess the pros and cons of your different choices, and take the actions that seem best for your specific situation.

5. Make Wise Choices. Be mindful about how you are using your money. Money is a very useful tool, but how much or little you have or are able to spend is not a measure of your worth as a person. When it comes to money, the most common sayings have a lot of truth.

- Waste not, want not.
- Save for a rainy day.
- Don't risk more than you can afford to lose.
- Look before you leap.
- If something seems too good to be true, it probably is.
- Don't spend beyond your means.
- You can't take it with you.
- The best things in life are free. (Or at least can't be bought with money.)

We all need to remind ourselves that there is a big difference between what we might want and what we truly need. Food, shelter, caring relationships, health, education, believing that you make a difference in the world, and safety are all important human needs. A big house, new clothes, a fancy car, and a cappuccino every day might be nice to have, but are not truly necessary to our well-being.

Children are harmed by instant gratification of all their wishes, because they do not learn how to deal with disappointment or to find ways of getting what they want for themselves. If something is important enough for them to have, young people develop character when their adults support them in setting priorities and working towards a goal rather than giving them everything they ask for immediately.

In evaluating the wisdom of different courses of action, we must remember our core values and do our best to act with integrity by staying true to these values. The way we manage financial challenges can make a huge difference in our relationships and credibility – and in how good we will feel about ourselves in the future.

6. Have a Safety Plan. Preparing a Financial Safety Plan starts with having a clear picture about what your assets are, how your assets are being managed, what your income is, and what your basic expenditures are. You can then identify potential risks and make a plan of action to address them.

Be creative and look at the pros and cons of a wide range of different options. Focus on what you can do: a) to prevent or minimize the risks, and b) to respond if they happen. In Kidpower, we teach our students how to handle potential safety problems without worrying about all the bad things that might happen. You can do the same thing by focusing on possible solutions rather than worrying about the risks themselves.

Having a Safety Plan requires that you be honest with yourself about your current situation and risks. It may be tempting to deny problems under the guise of “positive thinking.” Thinking positively is not the same as ignoring problems. Our goal is to think positively while addressing potential problems in a pro-active positive way.

7. Get Help. If you are not sure what to do or feel overwhelmed, get help. You are not alone even if you feel that way. No matter how big your problems might be, many others have faced worse problems and ended up believing that the changes they made were of huge benefit in their lives. Some of these changes are very painful but provide tremendous personal growth that can lead to much greater happiness.

If possible, get help *before* you are in a crisis. Remember to Think First. Avoid the temptation to look for quick-fixes such as new loans that have a high risk of making your problems worse. Instead, look for long-term solutions that will help you determine what went wrong, where you want to go, and a reasonable plan for getting there. When you are getting advice from experts, don't give up your power. Instead, seek different points of view from lots of people and figure out the best choices for your particular situation.

There are many support services that are available for people facing economic hardship, including help with financial planning, job hunting, food, counseling, and shelter. If you don't know where to turn, ask people in your community who have experience helping others. Remember that your economic safety is more important than *anyone's* embarrassment, inconvenience, or offense, including your own. Don't let misplaced pride stop you from letting others know that you have problems and asking them for ideas on where to go to find solutions.

The Internet and telephone directory can also be useful tools for finding information about resources that are near you. In some areas of the United States, phoning 211 or 311 can direct you to local resources for needs that are not a 911-level of emergency. Visit the website to <http://www.211.org>, which gives the right numbers to call based on the US state specified.

The bottom line is to be persistent and keep asking until you get the help you need.

Above all, remember what's *really* important. Kidpower Senior Program Leader, Erika Leonard, tells this poignant story about her father, Dawson, that has an essential message for all of us. "My father suddenly found out he had a brain tumor and only a few months left to live. His biggest regret was that he wasted so much time worrying about things that never happened. He desperately wanted all that lost time and energy back to enjoy and to use more wisely. He would be pleased if his experience could benefit others."

Kidpower is an educational charitable organization that, since 1989, has brought "People Safety" skills to over a million children, teenagers, and adults, including those with special needs, from many different cultures - close to home and around the world. For publications, free articles and e-newsletter, and service information, visit kidpower.org.

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