

Children Learn To Lasso That Money

In a faltering economy, many families are teaching kids the value of frugal living

By Marilyn Gardner

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Even before the stock market roller coaster and bailout crisis, Kim Maksymuk and her husband began trimming expenses and giving their 5-year-old twins gentle lessons in what is most important. "We understand that things in life change, and we need to be financially prepared for the worst situations," she says.

As part of their quiet belt-tightening, they eat out less frequently. They go to the library instead of the bookstore. "Many times this is better as there are many free activities at the library," says Mrs. Maksymuk of Tampa, Fla. The family sells old toys and clothes at garage sales or resale shops. Maksymuk also shops at resale stores, noting that clothes often carry the original tags.

In a faltering economy, many families are taking similar steps to shift their priorities and educate children. For some it is a necessity, resulting from a pink slip or foreclosure. For others it is a precaution, a way to save and an opportunity to talk about money — often a taboo subject in families.

"The big lesson both adults and children have to learn from the financial crisis is about values," says Dorothea Hover-Kramer, a family therapist in Port Angeles, Wash. "What really matters in a world of uncertainty?"

Children can do very well on less. It was an illusion with which parents fooled themselves to think every child needed designer-label clothes and fancy toys. Kids are much more flexible than most adults want to know."

How parents convey these messages can determine whether children feel deprived or content with what they have. "Take this time to assure your children that you are there to protect and take care of them," says Lori Mackey, a creator of financial education products for children. "My suggestion is to not create fear and insecurity around this situation, but look for solutions on how you can teach your children better habits."

Katherine Harms of Baltimore cautions against being too open. "Families who make speeches about all the cutting back and doing without make it a lot harder for their children than it has to be," she says. "We certainly need to be honest with children who are old enough to grasp the realities. Probably the most important thing children need to know, a lesson my parents urged on me, is to use every gift to its fullest. Children grow accustomed to replacing 'obsolete' and 'out-of-style' possessions."

For some children, lessons in economizing start early. "I just had a talk with my 9- and 4-year-olds about living on less," says Stephanie Ochoa of San Antonio. "At the supermarket, while they each left with two snacks, they did not get everything they hoped for. They started crying. I went home and told them that because the cost of gas went up, the cost of food went up, and we really needed to cut down on extras. Overall, they seemed to understand that it is not just us who have to plan our trips, watch our gas mileage, and cut back on extras. The whole country is having to do it."

In Austin, Texas, Michelle Hamilton's two young sons are also learning about money. "They watch Bloomberg with us in the morning, and we are teaching them about the stock and commodities markets," she says. "We strive to teach them about real as-

sets and explain needs versus wants."

Last month the Hamiltons even watched "The Grapes of Wrath." "We emphasized that a fancy home and stuff are not important," she says. "The family is what matters, and we need to be good to each other and support one another during these hard times."

For teenagers, cutting back is not always easy. Bill Horne of Sharon, Mass., the father of an 18-year-old son, says, "We are adamant about not buying designer clothes and shoes. Although this has caused a lot of friction, he has accepted it as he has grown, and now routinely looks for stylish clothes at yard sales and charity stores."

Linsey Knerl, a senior writer for Wise Bread, a personal finance and frugal-living forum, discusses money quite openly with her four children.

"Share your situation in a general way," she says. "It's OK to tell Tommy or Susie that there isn't enough money this month for a new pair of Heelys or for the latest Wii game."

Mrs. Knerl advises parents to enlist children's help. That includes letting them plan inexpensive meals, giving them coupons to cut, and taking them shopping. "Just like adults, children feel less anxiety over a situation when there is something they can do," she says.

Some parents emphasize the importance of reaching out to others. Last month, to help people displaced by hurricane Ike, each

member of Nettie Hartsock's family in San Marcos, Texas, contributed \$10, the price of a movie. They bought two bags of canned goods and took them to the food bank. "My husband and I told our children that it's always good to remember that



there are people in need, and we can help them out no matter what," Hartsock says. "Missing a movie is much less important in the scheme of things than missing a meal."

Maksymuk calls volunteering one of her children's favorite activities.

"We volunteer at the food bank, we pick up garbage to keep the earth beautiful and healthy, and we help out at the local humane society," she says.

In similar vein, Nicole Ravlin of Burlington, Vt., created Vermont Toy Share, a toy swap to be held the weekend before Thanksgiving.

"Many Vermonters are concerned about how they will heat their homes and feed their families this winter," she says. "Holiday gifts may be smaller or non-existent. This event will allow them to get new 'gently used' toys for their children."

Explaining that she has asked her 4-year-old son to donate five toys, Mrs. Ravlin says, "He knows we will be swapping toys with others for Christmas this year."

Whatever approach parents take, Mackey says, "You are not depriving your child of anything if you stop spending money. You will actually be teaching your children valuable lessons. When you learn how to live with less, it teaches you the value of what you do have."

College Beauty Sentenced To 5 Years

By MARYCLAIRE DALE

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A jet-setting college beauty who, teamed with her Ivy League boyfriend, swindled more than \$100,000 from friends and neighbors through a complex identity theft scheme was sentenced Friday to five years in prison.

Jocelyn Kirsch, a former Drexel University student who attended high school in Winston-Salem, N.C., and University of Pennsylvania graduate Edward Anderton used the money for expensive salon visits, fancy dinners and lavish trips.

Federal guidelines called for a prison term of 70 months or more, but U.S. District Judge Eduardo C. Robreno credited Kirsch for her remorse and for her July 14 guilty plea to aggravated identity theft and other crimes. Besides prison, the judge also ordered full restitution to the 50 victims.

In court Friday, the defense painted Kirsch as a young woman desperate for a sense of identity after a dysfunctional childhood capped by her parents' bitter divorce and their near-abandonment the day she graduated high school.

"Neither her mother nor her father emerge as heroes in this case," Robreno said as the parents held their heads in their hands.

Kirsch, 23, and Anderton, 25, acknowledged stealing the identities of friends and neighbors in Philadelphia in 2006 and 2007 to glean more than \$116,000 in goods and services. They broke into their neighbors' apartments to steal mailbox keys; bought a machine to make their own fake drivers' licenses; and sold non-existent laptops and iPods on eBay.

Photos of the lovers enjoying ritzy escapades in Paris and Hawaii — released by police after their December arrest — quickly became tabloid and Internet fodder. A U.S. attorney called them "poster children" for identity fraud.

"I cannot pinpoint precisely when we veered off course," Kirsch wrote

in a four-page letter to the judge, in which she describes her recent prison stay as "the first period of real calm in ... a very long time."

"One small thing led to a number of larger indiscretions and before I knew it we were doing more and more dangerous things; spending our money recklessly, drinking, lying, stealing," wrote Kirsch, who said little in court Friday.

The scheme unraveled late last year after an upscale salon told police that a check for Kirsch's \$2,250 hair extension job had bounced. Police investigated and found dozens of identity-theft victims.

Kirsch now admits she acted out much earlier. She started shoplifting in middle school, stole her father's car at 14, was twice expelled from school for cheating, and, after starting college, had several minor shoplifting arrests, prosecutors said. There were few consequences.

"Jocelyn is a complex young woman who is sick and lost. And that is the hardest part of this whole thing for me to deal with — I didn't see or understand the depths of her despair," her mother, Jessica Eads, a nurse, wrote to the judge.

Eads moved to northern California, where she remarried, the week Kirsch graduated from high school in North Carolina.

Kirsch knew only the cell phone number and work address of her father — Winston-Salem, N.C., plastic surgeon Lee Kirsch. He performed a nose job and breast augmentation on his daughter but otherwise had little contact with her after the parents split in 2001, according to family letters submitted to the court.

Still, the judge noted, Kirsch had her share of advantages: intelligence, good looks and parents who were successful professionals.

Anderton's sentencing is set for Nov. 14. The Everett, Wash., resident pleaded guilty to the same six felonies as Kirsch, a list that includes money laundering and mail fraud. But he could get less time because of his clean record since his arrest.

Kirsch lost some credit because she stole the identity of a Starbucks co-worker in California — and rode off with a \$2,000 bicycle after a store let her take it for a spin — even after her arrest.

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The screenshot shows the website's layout with a top navigation bar, a main content area with several articles, and a sidebar with various links and advertisements. The main article is titled "Something For Everyone At Folk Festival" and includes a photo of a parade float. Other articles include "Doug Ray To Lead Festival Parade" and "Township Officials Gather For 86th Annual Convention". The sidebar contains sections for "Local & State", "Letters", "Correspondents' Notes", "Police Reports", "Sports", "Entertainment", "Community Bulletin Board", "Features", and "Family".

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