

Just for Parents

Identify signs of stress in your child.

The activities in this book are designed to encourage communication and help you to make your child feel safe in challenging times. Even when parents are protective, caring, and sensitive, children may need extra help to cope with a crisis. Different children have different needs. Children with the same experience may respond in different ways. Pay attention to changes in the way your child looks or behaves. There are times when changes in behavior mean your child needs extra help from a health care professional.

Create healthy ways for your child to express emotions, such as the activities described in this book. Let your child see you using healthy ways to express emotions.





The following changes or behaviors may be signs of a problem:

- ✓ Clinging behavior
- ✓ Fears that won't go away
- ✓ Nightmares
- ✓ Bedwetting
- ✓ Difficulty paying attention
- ✓ Jumpy, edgy
- ✓ Behavior problems in school
- ✓ Headaches, stomachaches, or dizziness for no known reason
- ✓ Sad or less active
- ✓ Always talking about or acting out a disaster
- ✓ Irritability
- ✓ Changes in eating behavior
- ✓ Decrease in academic performance

Children may show one of these behaviors, or many of them; they may do them just a little, or all the time. It's important that you talk to a health care provider, teacher, school counselor, or mental health professional if you see any of these behaviors. These people can help figure out whether your child's reactions are nothing to worry about, or if your child needs some special attention or care.

Prevent problems before they arise.

Prevention is more than just saying "no" or "stop." Prevention has two parts: 1) Spotting trouble before it becomes a problem; and 2) Knowing how to work through a problem once it happens. To learn more, look at each one a little closer.

Spotting Trouble

Consider these ways to spot trouble before it turns into a full-blown problem:

✔ **Be active in your child's life.** This is important for all parents, even if your child only lives with you part of the time. By knowing how your child usually thinks, feels, and acts, you can see when things start to change. Some changes are part of your child's growing up, but others could be signs of trouble.

✔ **Set limits that everyone can live with and follow up with them consistently.** Put limits only on things that are most important to you. Make sure you and your child can “see” a limit clearly. If your child goes beyond the limit, deal with her in the same way when the situation is the same. If you decide to punish her, use the most effective methods, like restriction or time-outs. You could also make your child make up for or fix the result of her actions. Make sure the punishment fits your child's “crime.” As your child learns how limits work and what happens when she goes over the limit, she'll trust you to be fair.

✔ **Create healthy ways for your child to express emotions.** Many children act out when they don't know how to handle their emotions. Feelings can be so strong that normal ways of letting them out don't work. Or, because feelings like anger or sadness are sometimes seen as “bad,” your child may not want to be angry or sad in front of others. Help your child learn that it's OK to say or show how she feels in healthy, positive ways, like the activities outlined in this book. Do these things yourself to deal with your own feelings. When the strong feelings have passed or are less powerful, talk to your child about how she feels and why she feels that way. Make sure your child knows that *all* her feelings are part of who she is, even the “bad” ones. Once your child knows her range of feelings, she can start to learn how to handle them.



Where can I go for parenting help?

- ◆ Other parents
- ◆ Family members and relatives
- ◆ Friends
- ◆ Pediatricians and health care providers
- ◆ School nurses and counselors
- ◆ Social workers and agencies
- ◆ Psychologists and psychiatrists
- ◆ Pastors, priests, imams, and ministers
- ◆ Community groups
- ◆ Support and self-help groups

Knowing How to Work Through a Problem When It Happens

Different problems need different solutions. To solve tough problems, you may need more complex methods. Keep these things in mind when trying to work through a problem:

✔ **Know that you are not alone.** Talk to other parents, trusted friends, or relatives. Some of them might be dealing with similar situations, or they may have already worked through these situations. They may have ideas on how to solve a problem in a way you haven't thought of. Or, they just might share your feelings.

✔ **Admit when a problem is bigger than you can handle alone or requires special expertise.** No one expects you to solve every problem your family has by yourself. Some problems are just too big to handle alone, not because you're a "bad" parent, but just because it's a tough problem. Be realistic about what you can and can't do by yourself.

✔ **Get help.** Sometimes, you just won't know how to help your child. Other times, you just won't be able to help. That's OK because someone else may know how to help. Use all the resources you have to solve a problem, including getting help when you need it. Remember that it's not important how a problem is solved, just that it is.

The above text was adapted from ***Adventures in Parenting: How Responding, Preventing, Monitoring, Mentoring, and Modeling can help you be a successful parent***, NICHD, NIH Pub. No. 00-0482. For more information on Adventures in Parenting, contact the NICHD Information Resource Center at 1-800-370-2943.

What can I do to help my child during a major crisis?

Most of the activities in this book focus on building skills to cope with an “everyday crisis”—that is, a situation that many families face every day that can be hard or stressful. These everyday coping skills can also be helpful during a big crisis, such as the events of September 11, 2001, the war in Iraq, or famine and conflict in Africa. By working together to handle an everyday crisis, you and your child will set up good patterns for dealing with bigger, more extreme events.

During a big crisis, you may want to change some of the activities in the book to focus on the major event. For instance, you could do **Activity 2: A picture is worth a thousand words** (Page 35) using an image from a big crisis, instead of one from an everyday crisis. In this case, be sure to use an image that isn't too violent or too scary for your child's age.

If you have questions about how to change activities to deal with a big crisis, or you want to know more about helping your child handle these situations, talk to a health care provider, teacher, school counselor, or mental health professional. Or contact one of the additional resources listed in the **Where can I get more information?** section of this book, on page 88.





Where can I get more information?

For more information about helping your child cope with crisis, or for other health-related information and resources, you can contact the following organizations.

- ✓ **American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry**—Offers fact sheets and informational materials about the mental health and behavior of children and teens. Visit the Academy’s Web site at <http://www.aacap.org> or call **202-966-7300** for more information.

- ✓ **American Psychiatric Association**—Offers informational materials and other resources for families about mental health topics through its Mental Health Resource Center. Visit the Association’s Web site at <http://www.psych.org> or call **703-907-7300** for more information.

- ✓ **National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI)**—Offers informational materials and community-related resources for parents and families. Visit the NBCDI Web site at <http://www.nbcdi.org> or call **202-833-2220** for more information.

- ✓ **National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)**—Offers information and free materials for parents and families, as well as for health care professionals, about topics related to the health of children, adults, families, and communities. Visit the NICHD Web site at <http://www.nichd.nih.gov> or call **1-800-370-2943** for more information.

✓ **National Institute Mental Health (NIMH)**—Offers information and materials for parents, families, and health care professionals about mental health topics. Visit the NIMH Web site at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov> or call **1-866-615-NIMH (6464)** for more information.

✓ **National Medical Association (NMA)**—Helps individuals locate African American physicians and other health care providers throughout the United States. Visit the NMA Web site at <http://www.nmanet.org> or call **1-888-662-7497** for more information.

The **NICHD Information Resource Center** provides additional copies of this booklet, of *A Guide for African American Parents: Helping Children Cope with Crisis* brochure, and other materials. To order more free copies, contact us at:

Phone: 1-800-370-2943
Internet: <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications>
Mail: P.O. Box 3006, Rockville, MD 20847
E-mail: NICHDInformationResourceCenter@mail.nih.gov
Fax: 301-984-1473





References

Spirit of Excellence: Parent Empowerment Project Successful Parenting, African American Culture and My Vision for the Future
National Black Child Development Institute

Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disasters
National Institute of Mental Health, NIH Pub. No. 01-3518, September 2001

“Psychological Sequelae of the September 11 Terrorist Attacks in New York City,” Galea, Ahern, Resnick, et al. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 346(13): 982-987, March 28, 2002

“Post 9-11 Pain Found to Linger in Young Minds,” Abby Goodnough, *New York Times*, May 2, 2002

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