

**A collaboration among:**

**100 Black Men of America, Inc.**

**Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.**

**American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry**

**American Psychiatric Association**

**Congress of National Black Churches, Inc.**

**Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.**

**Jack and Jill of America, Inc.**

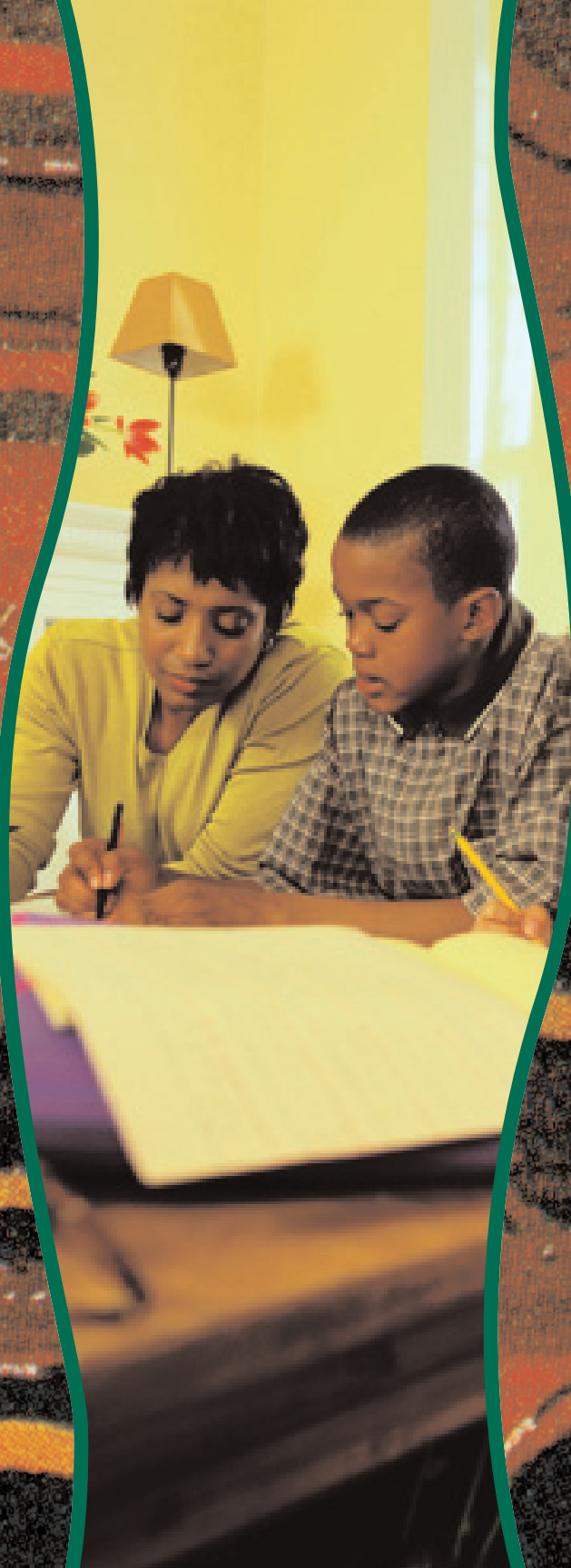
**National Association of Black Social Workers**

**National Black Child Development Institute**

**National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Inc.**

**National Institute of Child Health and Human Development**

**National Medical Association**



**About This Brochure**

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), part of the National Institutes of Health, and the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) are working together with parents, professionals, and leaders of national African American organizations to provide parents with the information and resources they need to inspire hope and provide comfort and a sense of safety for their children. Through this collaboration, these groups will develop an activity booklet that will expand upon the advice in this brochure and will provide parents with age-appropriate activities and ideas for enhancing communication with their children.

To order additional brochures, call the NICHD Information Resource Center at 1-800-370-2943, or visit the Web site at: <http://www.nichd.nih.gov>.

**Additional Resources:**

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
<http://www.aacap.org>

American Psychiatric Association  
<http://www.psych.org>

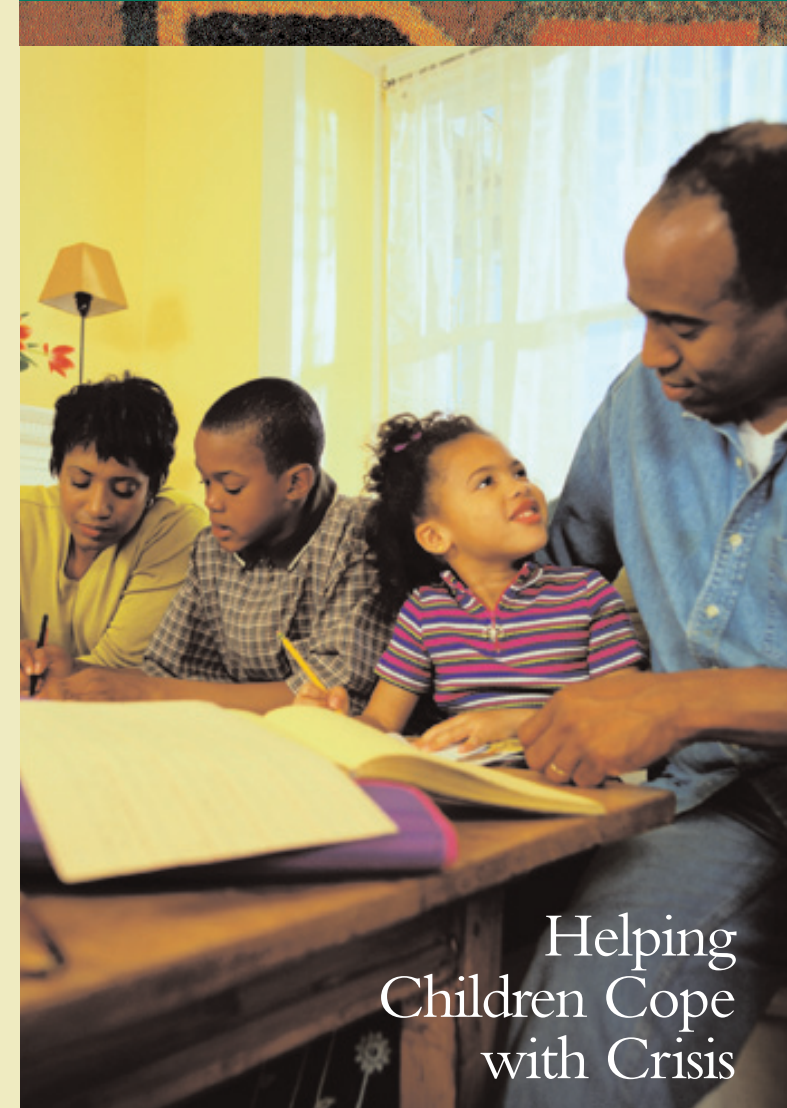
National Black Child Development Institute  
<http://www.nbcdi.org>

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development  
“Adventures in Parenting”  
<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/parenting/index.cfm>

National Institute of Mental Health  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

National Medical Association  
*To locate African American physicians nationwide in all medical fields*  
1-888-662-7497  
<http://www.nmanet.org>

# A Guide for African American Parents



Helping  
Children Cope  
with Crisis



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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Public Health Service  
National Institutes of Health



# Helping Children Cope with Crisis

*“Parents have the most important job in the world. We know how influential they and other caregivers are in the lives of our children, especially in times of stress. Through this collaboration we have translated our research into materials that African American parents can use to ensure the well-being of their children.”*

DUANE ALEXANDER, M.D.  
DIRECTOR, NICHD

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 have affected us all in many different ways. Sometimes we don't even realize how we have changed after watching the media images of the World Trade Towers falling to the ground and the Pentagon burning. In the best of times, African American families experience more than their share of violence, insecurity, and unemployment. The attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, the sustained media coverage of the violence and devastation, and the mobilization of the war on terrorism place an additional burden on our families.

Our children, too, have been affected. Even if they don't say it, they may be afraid that something else “bad” will happen. They may fear for your safety and worry more when you go to work or leave them at school. But there are ways we can help our children feel hopeful, safe, secure, and loved. The following are some ways we can help our children, particularly those age 12 and under, cope with crisis:

- **Inspire hope in your child**
- **Be still and listen to your child**
- **Comfort your child**
- **Give your child information that is appropriate for her/his age**
- **Help your child feel safe**
- **Make plans with your child for emergencies**
- **Help your child feel good about him or herself**
- **Pay attention to what your child watches on TV**
- **Share your faith with your child**
- **Identify signs of stress in your child**

## Inspire hope in your child.

Parents have an important impact on children's response to crisis. Your reactions will guide your child's response. If you are hopeful, look for solutions and take positive steps in response to a crisis or traumatic event—your child will benefit by your example.

## Be still and listen to your child.

Take a quiet moment to talk to your child and then really listen to what he or she says. Turn off the television or radio and ignore the phone. Give your child your complete attention. Ask him about his day and how he's feeling. Let your child know you are listening by responding with brief comments, asking for more details, or re-stating something she has said to be sure you understood. Tell him it's o.k. to be afraid or angry; we all feel that way sometimes. Tell your child you will protect her and love her. If your child prefers not to talk, just play with him and spend time doing things he likes to do. Spending time with your child will give him more opportunities to talk to you when he feels like it.

## Comfort your child.

We could all use a few extra hugs. Even a hand on the shoulder, pat on the head, or a kind word can help reassure your child. Tell your child you love her and that you will be there for her. Remind her that other people love her and care about her, such as relatives, friends, or caregivers. Tell her what time you will pick her up from school, or when you'll be home from work. Schedules can be helpful in comforting a child. Children also worry about their parents. Let your child know that you are okay.

## Give your child information that is appropriate for his or her age.

Do not let your young children watch the replaying of a crisis or other acts of violence on television. Explain what is happening in your own words and from your point of view. Tell them only as much as you think they can understand. Answer any questions your child might have, and remember to be calm and talk at the child's level. If you need advice about what information is appropriate to share with your child, ask your child's health care provider, or look on the back of this brochure to find other resources.

## Help your child feel safe.

Tell your child that you will take care of her and protect her. Remind him that other people can also help him: friends, family, teachers, neighbors, and religious leaders. Make sure your child knows how to reach you, or someone she trusts, at all times. Help your child memorize phone numbers or put a card with phone numbers in his backpack.

## Make plans with your child for emergencies.

Help your child know what to do in different emergency situations. Together, make a written plan that includes emergency information appropriate for your child. Identify safe meeting places near your home or your child's school. This plan should help your child be prepared and reassure her that you are also prepared.

## Help your child feel good about him or herself.

Praise your child for what he does well; and tell him how proud you are of him. Tell your child that she's good, smart, strong, and beautiful. Point out the things she does well, whether it's school work, helping around the house, being nice to others, playing sports, creating art, or telling jokes. Focus on the good things as much as possible. Smile, laugh, and play with your child.

## Pay attention to what your child watches on TV.

Know what your child is watching on TV, not only the shows, but the news and commercials as well. Don't allow children to watch violent and disturbing events, repeatedly. Make sure television programs are appropriate to your child's age. Watch TV with your child so that you can help him to understand what he is seeing. Interactive viewing, or talking back to the images on TV helps your child form opinions about what she is seeing. For example, if you think a character on TV is doing something you don't want your child to do, say so.

## Share your faith with your child.

Sharing your spirituality and beliefs with your child can be a source of comfort. If you are a religious person, your faith tradition and practices can be a source of strength and security. Share a prayer, a hymn, or verses from scripture with your child.

## Identify signs of stress in your child.

Pay attention to changes in the way your child looks and acts. If you notice one or more of the following changes in your child, talk to your child's health care provider, teacher, school counselor, or a mental health professional.

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