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## **Times of Crisis: What You And Your Child Can Do** by Lynn Cates, M.D., F.A.A.P.

An important way you can help your child cope with the senseless tragedy that has struck the United States is to set a good example by volunteering in some capacity--and to find a way for him to help as well. Even if you live far away from ground zero, there are a variety of things you and your family can do.

Volunteering and making donations can empower your child by teaching him that even if something bad happens, he can do things to make it better. This kind of empowerment will help him feel that he has some control over the situation. These activities are also wonderful ways for members of families and communities to strengthen their ties to each other by working together toward worthwhile common goals, and a way for you to emphasize unity instead of hatred or anger. Examples of what you and your child can do include:

### **Charitable donations**

Many organizations have rallied to help the victims and rescue workers. One of the most useful lessons you can teach your child is to get into the habit of pitching in and donating whenever tragedy strikes others, regardless of the scale. Please see our article on charitable donations for more information.

### **Special projects for children**

- **Writing letters to victims' families.** Sometimes children feel better about a tragedy if they can convey their sympathy. Encourage your child to write a letter or make a card to send to members of afflicted families. You may even want to invite some of your child's friends over so that they can sit around and discuss their concerns while creating cards and letters. Information should be available soon through the media as to where these letters can be sent.
- **Writing letters of thanks.** Tragedies create many heroes. Your child can extend his own personal thanks to some of the people who help keep the world safe, including firefighters, police officers, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and even President Bush. Try to follow your child's own natural sympathies here: For instance, if he mentions that it was very nice that the firefighters went in to help rescue people, let him know that he can write them a letter, create a special card, or draw them a picture to thank them for their efforts. These tokens of appreciation are *always* very much valued by the men and women who put their lives on the line for us.

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- **Mentoring younger children.** Sometimes talking with a younger child is an excellent way to cope with a tragedy and sort out one's own feelings. Teenagers, and even elementary school children, can find solace in leading groups of younger children in discussions of these events, or in just taking aside an individual younger child and listening to his fears and concerns. It is remarkable what good antennae children have for sensing--and relieving--other kids' fears. This kind of interaction can be therapeutic for the older child because it helps him focus on the anxieties of others and forces him to think about ways to provide comfort (which, in turn, serves to help comfort and reassure himself).
- **Crafts projects.** Creative parents are working with their children throughout the country on many kinds of thoughtful projects that help foster feelings of patriotism and a connection with those in distress. These projects include creating friendship bracelets, buttons, hats, and scarves that children can send to schools or churches in affected regions of the country. Even the making or hanging of American flags can serve as a symbol of unity and support.
- **Re-establish ties to loved ones.** This is a good time for your child to remember loved ones she hasn't communicated with recently, particularly if they live in regions near the tragedy. Your child can use phone calls, cards, letters, or email to let them know they haven't been forgotten.

### **What you can do**

- **Teach your children about the importance of tolerance and ethnic diversity.** This kind of tragedy can lead to unfounded feelings of hatred against entire groups of people when suspects are identified as being from a given race, religion, or ethnic group. It is important for children to learn that this tragedy was likely to have been caused by only a small, specific group of people--not an entire nation or religious sect. Talk to your child about these distinctions, and consider leading discussion groups with other children as well, or getting teachers in your schools to lead such groups.
- **Help fight vandalism rising out of bigotry.** As a demonstration of brotherhood and humanity, participate in clean-up efforts at Muslim mosques, homes, and businesses that have been attacked and defaced.

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- **Give blood.** One of the ways that Americans have rallied to help even from afar was to flock to donate blood. Even though your child usually can't donate until the age of 17, you can certainly educate him about giving blood and how important it is to make donating a lifelong habit. It is important to remember that blood products only last a few weeks, and it is anticipated that increased supplies of blood will be needed for a long time. You can call 1-800-GIVE-LIFE to make an appointment. (Please understand that the Red Cross phone lines are overwhelmed with calls from those who want to help. Be patient, and maybe consider waiting a day or two before you call.) You also can contact the Red Cross at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org).
- **Help stranded airline passengers.** Travelers have been stranded in cities throughout the country. Many do not have extra clothes or money, and some do not have adequate shelter. You can contact your local officials or local Red Cross Shelters to see if there is a way you can help.
- **Provide information to the FBI.** The FBI has established a toll-free telephone number, 1-866-483-5137, for anyone with information regarding the incidents on September 11 in New York City and the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. A form has also been placed on the Internet at [www.ifccfbi.gov/complaint/terrorist.asp](http://www.ifccfbi.gov/complaint/terrorist.asp) to report information.

### **Other ways to be helpful**

In the days and weeks following this tragedy, more opportunities will become available to help out, so please check back periodically for more things that you and your child can do.

### **Find more information online:**

<http://www.drspock.com/topic/0,1504,677,00.html>

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