

# Parent pages



Resources for Christian parents in the 21st Century

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## Crisis Care For Children

**A** crisis is a time when circumstances create a change or loss. It can be a physical change, a family change, a job change, or a change in your emotional well-being due to a tragic event.

Change is upsetting for children because they count on stability in their lives while they are growing and learning new things. A tragic change, such as the loss of a family member to death, is devastating. However, even a relatively small change, like moving to a new house or starting at a new school, can affect a child's life or behavior. Dropping the stone of change into a child's day will cause a ripple effect that can spread into many areas of well-being.

In Rom. 12:15, God instructs us on ministering to those in crisis. We are told to "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."

The verse does not say to turn the mourning into rejoicing. As parents, we have a strong urge to make our children happy. This is tied up with our desire to care for them and raise them to be healthy adults.

Children need to be allowed to feel the feelings they have and to learn to identify and cope with those feelings. While we stand beside our children and minister to them, God steps in and accomplishes the healing that they desire and need.

If you are working with a child who is

going through a crisis, here are things to pay attention to:

■ **Pray for strength, wisdom, and peace.**

*Strength* that you will be available when your child needs you, *wisdom* to know what to say and do, and *peace* to know that God holds your child and this situation in the palm of His hand.

■ **Take care of yourself.**

If this is your crisis, too, then for the sake of your child be willing to ask for and receive help. Tend to your health and emotional needs. Feed yourself with the Word of God. Communicate your needs to Him in prayer.

■ **Look for people who can help you with your child.**

Check with your pastor or DCE. Seek advice from a relative or a congregation member who has been through a similar event. Talk with your child's teacher or child care provider. Each of you has a different perspective and a different

area of expertise.

■ **Avoid promises that you cannot guarantee.**

Like "everything is going to be all right." Instead, rely on Scripture to help you remind your child that God is in control, that He is powerful, that He brings good out of



anything, and that He loves us no matter what happens. Some helpful verses are listed at the end of this newsletter.

■ **Establish a safe environment for your child to talk.**

Do not be afraid of your child's sadness or anger. Avoid saying something that will dismiss these feelings. It is OK for your child to cry or to see you cry. Help him understand where these feelings come from. Let him know that you still love him when he feels sad or angry. You may need to teach him words about his feelings so he can identify them. He may be confused about what he is feeling and why.

■ **Evaluate your family schedule.**

During this time, everyone will need regular meals, a healthy diet, more sleep and more quiet time to be alone or with family members.

■ **Turn off the television.**

And set aside the computer and video games. Not only will this make it less likely that your child will be exposed to other disturbing information but it will allow for

**Pray for God's peace, knowing that God holds your child and the crisis situation in the palm of His hand.**

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more family time or quiet time to process change and grief.

■ **Do not overload your child with information.**

Particularly about the event that caused the crisis. Give information as your child asks, so he or she has time to process and understand what you are saying.

■ **Don't forget trust.**

When changes happen, it becomes more of a challenge for children to trust people around them. Take care to keep the little promises you make to help him to rebuild trust. Remind your child that everywhere he or she goes, there are people who love him.

■ **Give up the reins.**

Your child may feel out of control of things in her life. Allow more control over safe decisions such as what clothes to wear and bedtime routine. Remind her that God is in control.

■ **Watch for a delayed emotional reaction to the news of a crisis.**

Anger, anxiety, personality changes, or night time fears may show up later when the reality of the event has become understandable for your child. Help your child connect these reactions to the original event and reassure him that God will help.

■ **Expect guilt.**

Your child may feel guilty about the crisis in spite of the fact that he or she did nothing to cause it. Children have different ways of understanding the world and their sense of logic can assume that they are responsible for what happened.

Children may also develop a rationalization to explain what happened that does not make sense to us as adults but helps them process the event.

A former student of mine, the son of a pilot, began to tape his toy planes to his bedside table at night after the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, because he worried they would fly into a building by themselves. Knowing his father, he could not conceive

of a pilot committing such an act.

These rationalizations are usually temporary fixes that fade away when the child is capable of understanding the situation on a different level.

■ **Expect the good, old days.**

Children may revert back to an earlier stage of development. You may find yourself re-potty training, holding an older child in your lap, reinstating a nap time, handling tears about issues that didn't used to be a problem. This will pass as he or she adjusts.

Children long for what is familiar and to be assured that help is available. Your child may need more hugs, lap sits, and back rubs to survive this time.

■ **Encourage creative activities that suit your child's age level and interest.**

Children can express thoughts and fears in what they create. Art and music activities can be very helpful, but so can play.

One kindergarten class of mine, struggling to understand the death of a classmate's parent, spent the year building coffins out of plastic blocks. I came to realize that

they were absorbing the enormity of what happened through role-playing and building.

Writing back and forth to your child in a journal can be a valuable tool that gives your child an opportunity to write down a question when it occurs to him or her and gives you the ability to answer the question at your convenience.

■ **Read stories that deal with similar crisis situations.**

It is not unusual for children to want to hear a story over and over again if that story speaks to a particular need. Books that deal with unconditional love in the face of change ("Runaway Bunny" by Margaret

Wise Brown, "Love You Forever" by Robert Munsch, or "Charlotte's Web" by E.B. White) can be comforting during a time of grief or change.

■ **Plan an activity, as a family, that can help you heal.**

The simple act of making a scrapbook, planting a tree, or recording the story about what happened can do much to help a child to process and heal.



Crisis happens after an event that causes change. Change results in loss.

Loss leaves us with grief. Grief takes time. You will not be able to change this reality for yourself or your child. Only God can heal, and it is not His will for you to suffer. He loves you and promises to bring good out of your suffering. This same promise is extended to your children.

"May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you." Ps. 33:22

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**Resources:**

- "Psalms for Kids: 25 Short Devotions," ([www.cph.org](http://www.cph.org))

**Scripture passages for you and your child:**

- James 1:2-5, *God grants wisdom.*
- Rom. 5:1-5, *God loves during troubled times.*
- Ps. 126, *God brings joy out of sadness.*
- Is. 58:9, *God hears you when you cry to Him.*
- Rom. 8:28-39, *God work for good and protects.*
- Phil. 4:4-9, *God grants peace.*
- Ps. 4:8, *God takes away night time fears.*