**Why These Activities Are Important**
All of the handouts and activities featured in this book take a family support approach to coping with trauma and crisis (see the Principles of Family Support Practice, on the inside back cover). They promote community and parent leadership; build upon the existing strengths of families, communities, and workplaces; and can be facilitated by all those who work with and care about children and families. They can be adapted and modified to be continually responsive to any emerging family or community need, and they empower participants to care for themselves, their families, and their communities during times of trauma and crisis. And by supporting and training facilitators, who will, in turn, support and train others, they instill self-reliance and self-sufficiency in families and communities.

The activities are fun and engaging—yet they also serve the vital role of helping families heal in times of stress and crisis. They:

- **Help participants process and integrate traumatic memory.** Engaging people who have experienced trauma in appropriate activities—such as those that involve art, music, and movement—helps them access, integrate, and label their memories so they have more conscious control over them. Karen Drucker, a trauma specialist and school-based therapist at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, reports that “creative activities, such as art or dance, can tap into the right brain, where traumatic memories often stay stored as images and sensations, and help shuttle them to the language-dominating left hemisphere. This way people can put memories down on paper and maybe make sense of them and talk about them” (New York Newsday, Jan. 3, 2002).

- **Help participants identify and build on their strengths.** Recognizing one’s strengths is the starting point for emerging from a trauma. Helping individuals identify and build on their strengths shows them the resources they already possess to cope with stressful situations. Through recognition of their personal strengths, individuals feel empowered and gain more control over their feelings and their environment. This outcome is important not only in trauma situations, but in all efforts to strengthen families, as the Principles of Family Support Practice, listed on the inside back cover, describe. (For guidance integrating these principles into your program, see Guidelines for Family Support Practice, Second Edition, 2000, Chicago: Family Support America).

- **Help participants establish or re-establish safety and a sense of control.** Those who experience trauma need to regain a sense of safety and control—at home, at work, and in their community. The activities in this book provide a structure through which survivors of trauma begin to feel safe in their environments and with one another.

- **Build connections between participants.** Reconnecting with others is an essential step in the process of moving beyond trauma. Group activities that encourage participants to express their thoughts and feelings—which is not always encouraged at work or in the classroom—help them build connections with one another and understand that they are not alone. Part of the power of healing is realizing the commonality of pain.

- **Help participants focus and perform better.** Following the shootings at Columbine High School, teachers were trained in how to lead relaxation techniques in their classrooms. Research has shown that relaxation activities—such as deep breathing and guided imagery— increase attention, help individuals perform better, and make learning easier. Such activities, notes Maureen Murdock in Spinning Inward: Using Guided Imagery with Children for Learning, Creativity & Relaxation, help participants of all ages “relax into learning, focus attention and increase concentration, stimulate creativity, and cultivate inner peace and group harmony” (1988, Boston: Shambhala Publications).
**Who Can Lead the Activities?**

If you are a family worker, parent, youth practitioner, or community leader, this activity book offers you the tools you need to engage people in the workplace, at home, and in social environments. You do not need a master’s degree in social work to lead these activities—but you do need the ability to reflect on your own reactions to traumatic events and to believe in people’s ability to create a safe, strong future for themselves and their communities.

To instill hope in others, you must also first take care of yourself. You can use the handouts and activities in this book to help you do just that. Says one family worker who participated in the activities during a workshop held after September 11: “This workshop helped me to care again and realize that I can make a change.”

You will also need to decide how, when, and with whom to use these activities. For example, you may choose to lead some or all of the activities in individual sessions—within a family, in a classroom, or in the community at large. Each activity can stand alone as a tool to help people with particular needs. A mother who notices her son is extremely anxious about an upcoming test can lead a creative visualization with him to help alleviate the stress. Or, a teacher who notices his students are avoiding engaging in discussions of difference might choose to facilitate some of the tolerance activities. (If you choose to lead Activity 3: Storybooks during an individual session, we recommend following it with a strength-building activity—such intense engagement with traumatic memories may leave some participants feeling emotionally depleted.)

**Facilitating a Trauma and Recovery Workshop**

The activities in this book fall into the following categories:

1. Introductory
2. Reflection
3. Strength Building
4. Hope and Movement
5. Tolerance
6. Stress Management
7. Closing

The sequence above is the order in which we recommend facilitating the activities in a formal workshop on trauma and recovery. Such a workshop would take between three and four hours.

If you intend to facilitate a full workshop based on the activities in this book, we encourage you to follow the following structure:

**Part One**

1. State the purpose of the workshop: to help participants process their thoughts and feelings stemming from a traumatic event and to provide concrete skills and methods for building strengths, instilling hope and tolerance, and managing stress during times of trauma and crisis.

2. Lead a few non-threatening, engaging introductory activities, to help participants begin to get to know one another (Activities 1 and 2, pages 29–31).

3. Lead Activity 3: Storybooks (page 32). This reflection activity provides a safe, structured environment in which participants can express and process their feelings about the traumatic event. Always undertake this activity with extreme sensitivity to the nature of the trauma, and never force participants to share information.

4. Lead the strength-building and hope activities (Activities 4 through 6, pages 34–39)

5. Provide a short break of at least 20 minutes to give participants time to reflect on their experiences and to discuss them with one another.

**Part Two**

6. Lead the tolerance activities, which discuss differences and promote intercultural unity (Activities 7 through 9, pages 40–47).

7. Lead the stress-management activities to help participants build their capacity to take care of themselves during times of crisis or stress (Activities 10 through 14, pages 48–57).

8. Bring closure to the workshop by leading Activity 15: The Talking Stick (page 58), which gives everyone an opportunity to speak and reflect upon his or her unique experience.