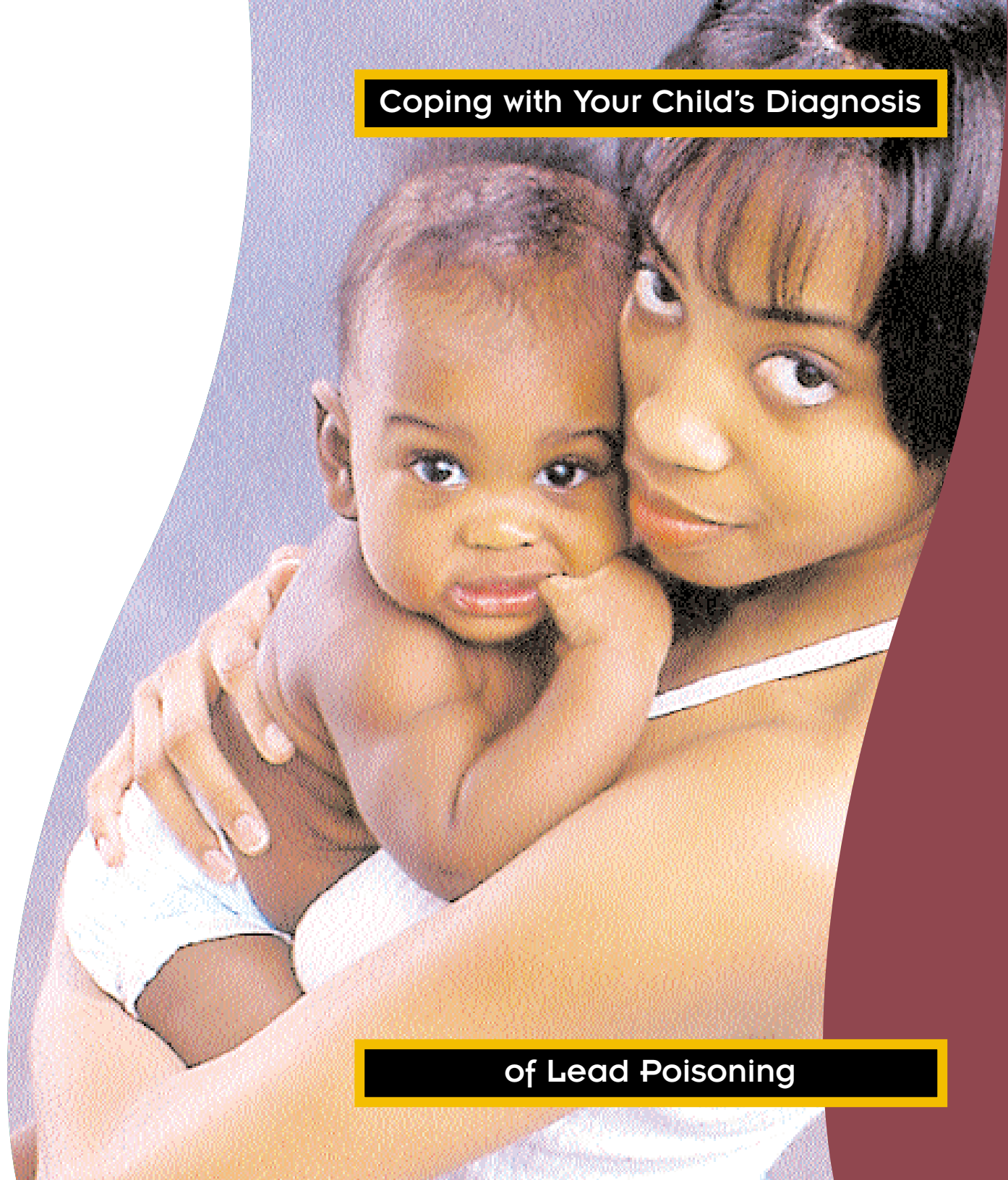


Coping with Your Child's Diagnosis



of Lead Poisoning



John Engler, Governor
James K. Haveman, Jr., Director

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I feel this booklet is long overdue!

I wish it would have been around six

years ago when all the emotions you've

mentioned were drowning me when

no one — not even family — could

understand my grief! I am so pleased

that you felt the need to create this

booklet. Many parents and children

will benefit from its insight.

Margaret Sauser
President
United Parents Against Lead

introduction

Learning that your child is lead poisoned can be a very painful

experience. You may have many

different emotions and thoughts

when you are told that your child

has lead poisoning. About 900,000

young children have lead poisoning

in the U.S. You are not alone —

many parents are experiencing

similar emotions to yours.

How you handle these emotions depends on having the knowledge and awareness of the choices you can make. These choices can be either helpful or harmful in dealing with your child's diagnosis.



This booklet can help you identify such negative emotions, manage these emotions, and take positive steps to get help. As a result of your efforts, you can help your child and make a great difference in the lives of your family, friends and community.

Most people know very little about the hazards of lead poisoning. The small lead paint chips that lie on the window sills or on the woodwork are often not thought of as a threat to a child's health. Yet children like the sweet taste of paint chips. The fine dust on the floors or on our children's toys is almost invisible. Children are often putting their fingers into their mouths or chewing on toys that are lying on the floor. They may be



drinking water from old or lead-soldered pipes in the home. Children play outside the house where years of old flaking lead paint chips and dust have settled into the soil. Through this contact, children are eating and breathing lead paint dust.

Some of the signs of lead poisoning can include: irritability, hyperactivity, headaches, stomach upset, fatigue, poor appetite and sleeping problems. Other children may not show signs of lead poisoning. The only way to know if a child has lead poisoning is to have the child's blood tested.

awareness

When you become aware of your child's diagnosis of lead poisoning, you may be unsure what the words lead poisoning mean. You may ask: *Where do I go for help? What about my other children? What can be done to help my child?* You need to find the answers to these questions.



A parent may not see signs of illness and therefore ignore the problem. However, it is very important to learn what causes lead poisoning and what you can do to decrease the risk of permanent learning, behavior and growth problems for your child.

Awareness includes learning about the emotions felt when told your child is lead poisoned. These emotions can include denial, anger, guilt, grief and then acceptance. Our feelings are helpful when properly understood and addressed. Awareness and coping skills are necessary when working through these emotions.



denial

You may say your child's diagnosis is not true and that the lab report was wrong. Or you may tell yourself it really is not that bad and do nothing for your child.

This emotional process is called denial. However, this emotion can be worked through with time. Do not let denial keep you from dealing with problems quickly and from getting the help you and your child need.

anger

Anger often follows denial. Parents may become angry with almost anyone who they thought should have warned them about lead poisoning. Sometimes this anger is directed at ourselves for not knowing more about preventing lead poisoning. But this anger can be used positively to get the necessary help our children need.

guilt

Guilt is an emotion that can be both helpful and harmful. Guilt can prevent you from moving ahead and doing what is needed, or it can move you to take action.

Most parents I have dealt with...when they truly understand lead and begin the process of dealing with helping their child, go through a tremendous amount of guilt. This too is normal, but you can't let it consume you!

Margaret Sauser, President, United Parents Against Lead

grief

The sorrow you feel toward your child is called grief. This is a necessary, healing emotion that can give you strength. Dealing with your emotions can empower you to make a change in your child's life, as well as that of your family's and your own well-being.

acceptance

Acceptance means feeling at peace, having the energy to face the future, and not continuing to ask *Why my child?* You must make a choice and reach out for the support and help of others. It may be a parents' group, a public health nurse, a counselor, religious program, a teacher or a combination of these support systems.

learning to cope

Coping skills involve learning new ways to deal with problems and changes in our lives. Healthy coping skills allow you to act in a useful manner when facing crises. Successful coping involves learning to think positively and taking action.




By using healthy coping skills and learning to understand your emotions, you can pass through the stages of denial, anger, guilt and grief. You can learn to use your positive thoughts and energy and become empowered to help yourself and your child.

Once you have learned to cope with your child's lead poisoning, you can begin to work on helping your child. **It is the educated parent who can best help their child. The more you know about lead poisoning, the better your child's chances for a healthy future.**

becoming empowered

- Reach out for emotional support from others who can listen.
- Give yourself time to grieve and work through feelings. Discuss those feelings and do not blame yourself. Go to a counselor if possible.
- Find out all you can about your child's needs and lead poisoning. Get booklets from local and state health departments, libraries and federal programs. Share these with other family members and neighbors.
- Become your child's best advocate. Ask questions about the medical treatment for lead poisoning, including nutrition and education programs. Find the best treatment available.
- Ask questions of nurses, doctors, public health workers and other educated parents. Ask again if you do not fully understand the answers.
- Bring other family members to medical and counseling appointments, when possible, as it can help reduce the stress of trying to explain to family members what is going on and what will happen in the future.
- Learn what steps you can take to reduce the risks of lead poisoning such as thorough cleaning of windows, floors and porches (contact your local health department for help).
- Call 1-800-424-LEAD to receive your free copy of *Lead in your Home: A Parent's Reference Guide*.
- Tell friends, neighbors and relatives about the hazards of lead, how to provide a lead-safe home for their children, and about testing their home for lead (call your local health department).

Remember that by not giving in to emotions you can learn how to help yourself and your child. As a parent, you can positively affect your child's treatment and progress. As an individual, you can feel yourself growing as a person, and feel good knowing you did not give up, ignore the problem or be controlled by emotions. Your life can take on new meaning as you do all you can to mold your child's future.

A photograph of a woman with glasses and a young girl smiling together. The woman is in the background, wearing glasses and a dark top. The girl is in the foreground, wearing a pink top and smiling. The image is partially obscured by a dark red curved shape on the left side of the page.

The choice is yours. You can reach out for the support you need, become educated and empowered by positive emotions. You can help your children, your neighbors' children, and others who may be affected by lead poisoning.

helping YOU

- Get all the support you can to help deal with your grief. Talk about how you feel with others who have experienced what you have and are willing to listen.
- Call your health care provider about counseling.
- Call your local health department and ask for the public health nurse or worker involved in the lead poisoning prevention program.
- Seek support from your church or other community organizations.
- Become involved in parent support groups such as United Parents Against Lead.
- Make sure to eat healthy and get proper rest and exercise to increase your energy and lower your stress level.

helping your CHILD

- Ask the health care provider or clinic about your child's blood lead test results.
- Ask your health care provider for a second opinion when necessary. You may want to ask the nurse or doctor about a hearing test and behavior evaluations for hyperactivity or learning problems.
- Nutrition — provide iron and calcium enriched foods such as milk, 100% fruit juices, lean meat and dark green vegetables.
- Sleep — allow a minimum of eight hours each day.

- Ensure hand washing with soap throughout the day and before meals, bedtime, and naps.
- Health care — expect to have follow-up blood tests for lead every one to three months, and don't miss your child's medical appointments.
- Check your children's actions to make sure they are not eating lead from paint, dust, water, soil, toys, or other sources.
- Make sure your child has regular well-child check-ups.
- Remember to enjoy time with your children by playing and being involved in their activities. This will promote learning, reduce stress, and give your children the support they need to overcome any problems they may face.

National Resources

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
National Lead Information Center
(800) 424-LEAD • www.epa.gov/lead/nlic.htm

Environmental Health Center
(202) 293-2270 • www.nsc.org/ehc/lead.htm

United Parents Against Lead
(877) 623-2688 • www.home.earthlink.net/~shabazzaupal/wsn7E8E.html

Alliance to End Childhood Lead Poisoning
(202) 543-1147 • www.aeclp.org

National Center for Lead-Safe Housing
(800) 624-4298 • www.lead safehousing.org

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Lead Hazard Control
www.hud.gov/lea

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Hotline
(800) 638-2772 • www.cpsc.gov

Professional Help In Michigan

Michigan Department of Community Health
Lead Hazard Remediation Program
Toll free (866) 691-LEAD
www.mdch.state.mi.us/dch/lead

Michigan Department of Community Health
Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Project
(517) 335-8885

City of Detroit Health Department Lead Poisoning
Prevention and Control Program
(313) 876-4200

Children's Hospital of Detroit, Lead Clinic
(313) 745-4000

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Head Start of Michigan
Toll free (800) 585-9997

Michigan Department of Community Health
WIC Program
Toll free (800) 26-BIRTH

United Parents Against Lead of Michigan
Toll free (877) 623-2688

Michigan Family Independence Agency
Weatherization Program
(517) 335-4285