



## DEALING WITH TRAGEDY AND LOSS

*By Marilyn Sharpe*

They sound incompatible: dealing with loss and positive parenting. But they're not!

None of us want our children to know loss or pain, suffering or tragedy. We'd like to insulate them from illness, injury, death, terrorism, and natural disaster. We'd love to preserve their innocence. But that isn't possible.

Five weeks ago, Hurricane Katrina, a natural disaster of staggering and mind numbing proportions, struck the Gulf Coast. Pictures, stories, concern for family and friends became all absorbing.

And what about all of the other tragedies? The tsunami that devastated the South Pacific the day after Christmas. War in Iraq. Terrorism. Plane crashes. School shootings. Injustice. Death of a loved one. End of a relationship. Death of a dream.

And, what about the children?

As parents, we have no control over the losses our children will experience, but we can be present with children in times of loss and sorrow, teaching them how to live in and through the hardest times.

What better gift can you give your child than helping them learn to handle loss and tragedy: name it, look it full in the face, grieve it, find hope in God's presence and promises, and move on. But, how? Here are a few suggestions:

### AVOID

- Telling them that this is God's plan. (God does not cause death and destruction, but promises to be with us in the midst of loss. God brings hope and a future.)
- Watching televised accounts, hour after hour. Young children, not understanding replays, assume that the tragedy happens over and over again.
- Talking about it obsessively within earshot of children.
- Assuming kids won't hear, see, or understand the tragedy.
- Deny, diminish, or demean the loss.
- Insulate them from the loss.

### POSITIVE WAYS TO HELP CHILDREN

- Tell children, simply, in age-appropriate language, what has happened. Let them hear it from you.
- Name the loss.
- Be present with them.
- Listen to them.
- Answer questions honestly. Sometimes, that answer is "I don't know."
- Name their feelings and give them permission to feel what they feel.
- Grieve it together.
- Imbed them in a community of love, hope and faith.
- Tell and model for them the hope we have in Jesus Christ, who has promised to be with us always, that this life isn't the end of the story.
- Pray.
- Do service that makes a difference to others.

### FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. When a tragedy occurs, gather as a family and pray for all effected. Plan one concrete thing that you can do.
2. For a public loss or tragedy, gather names and stories of specific people and pray for one each day.
3. Select or make a special Christmas tree ornament to commemorate a loss, a concern, or a sorrow your family has experienced this year.



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4. As a family, donate whatever you can afford to a charity or cause that is making a difference in healing a tragedy the world has experienced this year.