

**The Counseling Team International**  
1881 Business Center Drive, Suite 11  
San Bernardino, CA 92408  
(909) 884-0133  
[www.thecounselingteam.com](http://www.thecounselingteam.com)

## **Helping Your Children**

When Your Children Have Been Directly  
Involved or are Deeply Affected by a Traumatic Incident

1. **Reaffirm and Reassure** – Your children will need the assurance of ongoing family love and care. Spend extra time with them. They will need demonstrations of your love and assurance that you are going to be there. Touching and holding is important.

Returning to the rules and discipline that are normal for the family is reassuring and conveys security, control and love.

2. **Talking, Sharing, Playing** – As with adults, it is essential that children have opportunities to talk and share their perceptions and feelings. They need to know their feelings are okay. Listen – even if it is being repeated often – listen to your children.

Some may experience “psychological distancing” after trauma and be reluctant to talk. Sharing may be induced by asking the child what “other kids” are thinking.

Younger children may best share by re-enactment through drawing pictures of what they remember or in play or games that relive the event. Try and help them find solutions or good endings to draw or to play-out.

3. **Regression** – Parents must understand that regression is a normal childhood response to traumatic stress. Thumb sucking, soiling themselves, crawling, baby talk, etc., are evidences of a “return” to a safer, former time. Parents should be patient. This behavior will change as the child finds assurances and works through the trauma.
4. **Nighttime** – Night is difficult: your child may need to sleep with you for a few days. Let them know this is okay for now. Make the transition back to their own room easy - perhaps with a night-light for a time. Nightmares and even daytime screaming are not uncommon. Be patient and understanding. Don't scold them -hold them.
5. **Reaffirm the Future** - In discussing the past event, focus on things the child did or said that indicated mastery of the situation. Emphasize such actions, no matter how trivial. Even as feelings of fear and helplessness are discussed, you can find and focus on areas of competence, mastery and control. Loving praise will help your children start feeling good about themselves again.

Your children need to hear, and believe, hopeful and trusting things about the future. The more hope you can demonstrate and share, the sooner they will rebuild their broken sense of faith and trust in their world and in their future.