



The Institute of Family Living

MORE ON TAKING CARE OF CHILDREN'S SPECIAL NEEDS

The intense anxiety and fear that often follow a disaster or other traumatic event can be especially troubling for children. Some may regress and demonstrate “younger” behaviours such as thumb-sucking or bed-wetting.

Children may be more prone to nightmares and fear of sleeping alone. Performance in school may suffer. Other changes in behaviour patterns may include throwing tantrums more frequently or withdrawing and becoming more solitary.

There are several things parents, and others who care for children, can do to help alleviate the emotional consequences of trauma, including the following:

- **Spend more time with children and let them be more dependent on you.** During the months following the trauma allow your child, for example, to cling to you more often than usual. Physical affection is very comforting to children who have experienced trauma.
- **Provide play experiences to help relieve tension.** Younger children in particular may find it easier to share their ideas and feelings about the event through non-verbal activities such as drawing.
- **Encourage older children to speak.** Encouraging them to talk with you, and with one another about their thoughts and feelings helps reduce their confusion and anxiety related to the trauma. Respond to questions in terms they can comprehend. Reassure them repeatedly that you care about them and that you understand their fears and concerns.
- **Keep regular schedules.** Creating a routine for activities such as eating, playing, and going to bed helps restore a sense of security and normalcy.



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