**Tips for Helping Your Kids Survive Tragedy**
*by Jim Burns, Ph.D.*

The horror of September 11. Columbine. A friend critically injured in an auto accident. A parent faces a life-threatening illness. Regardless of the nature of the crisis, when tragedy strikes, children respond in a variety of different ways.

Whether the "crisis" is real or merely felt, kids have a way of processing pain and trauma that is often quite different than adults.

So what's a parent to do?

Well, if your child has experienced any sort of loss, it's important to help that child through the grieving process. True, there's a big difference between being jilted by a boyfriend or girlfriend and sorting out feelings after an attack like Columbine or 9-11. But the process itself remains fairly consistent.

1. **Allow your children to acknowledge the crisis.** This may not take very long – or it may go on for weeks, depending on the event. But the first step in helping a child work through the grieving process is to encourage them to admit there's a reason for grieving. This may be a bit unsettling to some kids. They like a sense of consistency and order in their lives. Help them to take ownership of the change.
2. **Give them the opportunity to respond to how they feel about the situation.** Kids are very creative in finding ways to express pain and grief. Encourage the use of the arts and music in particular. A poem about the event or how they feel about the aftermath can let the healing begin to flow in the live of a young person who can't really put into words what's happening in the hearts at that moment.
3. **Don't underestimate your kids' spiritual depth.** If you've ever wondered about what your children think about God or faith in Christ, you'll probably find out in the wake of a crisis or trauma. Be prepared for questions about life and beyond you may never had heard from your child before. Kids really do want to talk about theological issues. Sometimes it takes a crisis to bring those questions to the forefront. Be ready – and don't be surprised!
4. ***Do* get the help *they* need.** If you don't have the answers to their questions, find someone who does. Be the grown-up and get the information. Put your pride on the shelf if you have to. Your own self-esteem won't be worth too much if it costs you credibility with your own child.
5. **Give your kids something tangible to hold on to.** My good friends John and Becky Hart serve a church in Upper Montclair, New Jersey. Their church is literally within eyeshot of what used to be the Twin Towers. They saw and heard the 9-11 attacks

from their neighborhood, and lost a couple of church members in the attacks. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, Becky noticed the comfort her own daughter found in a small anchor she had given her. It served as a symbol that her faith in Jesus Christ was her anchor in the midst of the storm that resulted because of the terrorist actions. Crosses, doves, anchors and eagles all serve to remind us that we have a Friend like no other who will never leave us in times of trouble.

Remember the hope that lies in each one of us who believe in Jesus Christ and trust in His Name. Your kids will feel better about surviving a crisis when the see the confidence of God in *you*!