

February 2010
E-newsletter

PUTTING ON MY PARENT EDUCATOR'S HAT: RESPONDING TO THE EARTHQUAKE IN HAITI IN OUR FAMILIES

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.

In this decade alone, parents have had to deal with 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, the tsunami that devastated the South Pacific, war in Iraq and Afghanistan., terrorism, plane crashes, school shootings, injustice, the death of a loved one, the end of a relationship, and the death of a dream.

Now, we face the horror of enormous magnitude in the aftermath of the earthquakes in Haiti - photos of desolation, stories of heartbreaking loss, the sheer scale of the devastation.

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. Adults must be their age-appropriate filters and their wise guides.

What better gift can you give your child than helping them learn to handle loss and tragedy: name it, grieve it, find hope in God's presence and promises, and respond with generosity and care. 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.
- Denying, diminishing, or demeaning the loss.
- Insulating 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.