

## Helping Our Children by Helping Ourselves

Becky Sansbury, creator of *After the Shock*

**We have heard the word “shock” used repeatedly since the Newtown shooting. What are some of the immediate and longer term responses to emotional shock?**

As we move from reeling, to standing on wobbly emotional legs, to moving forward in our lives, we pool our collective wisdom to help both our children and ourselves. No words will make things normal. No guidance will leave us unscarred. But growth, strength, and eventually healing are possible.

One safe place to begin is with understanding a little bit about shock. Equipped with practical information, we can temporarily set aside the unanswerable “why” of this senseless tragedy, and focus on how to be leaders through this confusing time.

Immediate responses:

- Feeling dazed or confused
- Sense that what is happening is not real
- Trouble concentrating or focusing
- Grief reactions ranging from overwhelming to absent
- Response reactions ranging from frozen in place to take charge mode

Longer term responses:

- Ongoing difficulty with concentration or focus
- Variations in sleep, eating, or work habits
- Reliving prior shocking experiences
- New or renewed commitment to protect family, friends, and community

**It’s been suggested that we protect our children from constantly watching reports of the shooting. Do adults need to follow the same advice?**

This is a personal choice, much like our dietary choices. We each have a different taste and tolerance for what we consume. Be aware of the signs of “tragedy saturation”:

- Inability or disinterest in talking or thinking about anything other than the tragedy
- Inability to participate in regular activities of daily life
- Negative feelings toward anyone who does not share some level of focus on the news reports or commentary

**While we grieve deeply for the people in Newtown, CT, what are some ways we can begin the process of healing in our lives?**

- Examine this experience and how it relates to you. Have you gone through other times of loss or tragedy, or is this a completely new experience? Have you or someone close to you experienced trauma? This will help you understand why you may have some of the reactions you are experiencing to someone else's situation.
- Explore your beliefs and assumptions about life. Are these thoughts bringing you strength and comfort or are they confusing and hurtful? Reflect on other times of sorrow or challenge and remember what was most helpful then.
- Evaluate your resources. Consider those you have, those you need, and the ways you can be a resource to others. We feel stronger when we feel equipped.

**We are struck by the cruel irony of this tragedy occurring while we celebrate Christmas and Hanukah. Is it wrong to celebrate while others are grieving?**

This response is a natural part of survivor's guilt, increased by the emotions that are part of these holidays. It is important to honor all of our feelings right now. Some will be temporary and some will be permanent. Consider these ideas honor the sadness while remembering that there is still joy in the world.

- Add a symbol, remembrance, or ritual to your holiday gatherings in memory of those killed and in honor of those who have demonstrated bravery and love
- Talk about blessings, reasons to rejoice, and good things people are doing
- Focus on offering kindness to family, friends, and everyone you see
- Find ways to be a ray of light and example of goodness in the world
- Consider that your excluding all the joy of the holidays will not comfort the grieving people of Newtown, but may prevent you from living your life to the fullest