



C A L I F O R N I A   D E P A R T M E N T   O F

# Mental Health

## HELPING YOUR CHILD AFTER THE DISASTER

Children may be especially upset and show feelings about the disaster. These reactions are normal and usually will not last long. Listed below are some problems you may see in your children:

- ❖ Excessive fear of darkness, separation, or being alone
- ❖ Clinging to parents, fear of strangers
- ❖ Worry
- ❖ Increase in immature behaviors
- ❖ Not wanting to go to school
- ❖ Changes in eating/sleeping behaviors
- ❖ Increase in either aggressive behavior or shyness
- ❖ Bedwetting or thumbsucking
- ❖ Persistent nightmares
- ❖ Headaches or other physical complaints

Some things that will help your child are:

- ❖ Talk with your child about his/her feelings about the disaster. Share your feelings too.
- ❖ Talk about what happened. Give your child information he/she can understand.
- ❖ Reassure your child that you are safe and together. You may need to repeat this reassurance often.
- ❖ Hold and touch your child often.
- ❖ Spend extra time with your child at bedtime.
- ❖ Allow your child to mourn or grieve over a lost toy, a lost blanket, a lost home.
- ❖ If you feel your child is having problems at school, talk to his/her teacher so you can work together to help your child.

Please reread this sheet from time to time in the coming months. Usually a child's emotional response to disaster will not last long, but some problems may be present or recur for many months afterward. Your local mental health disaster recovery program is staffed with counselors skilled in talking with people experiencing disaster-related problems.