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In the face of loss and mourning on a national scale, it is not hard to come close to the reactions of children; in such circumstances we are all children. The question facing adults involves what children need from adults and how children face adults who feel like children.

Children need to be reassured on two planes, one of reality and one of fantasy. In the plane of reality, they need our reassurance that the basic fabric of their own personal lives will not disintegrate together with the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin. Small children need reassurance that parents will not leave them, older children that parents will not let anyone hurt parent or child. Adolescents need reassurance that their parents retain their sanity and capacity to face reality and to resist being drawn into the senseless violence of extremism.

In the plane of fantasy, children are particularly vulnerable. Their worst nightmares live in a proximity to reality too close for comfort. These fantasies are buffered by commonplace reality provided by adults. When the adult world crosses this boundary and enacts in real life a scene from common nightmarish fantasy, children may feel guilty about their fantasies and terrified that fantasies can become reality. (This is especially true in the current climate where mystical determinations create violent acts of extremism in our own Jewish midst.) Children need reassurance that fantasies are not dangerous, that angry or vengeful feelings towards parents will not come true. Four and five year olds may be especially vulnerable to fears of oedipal fantasies aroused by the murder of a father figure by a younger assassin.

Reassurances are an ongoing conversation. The realistic ones will come first and be more quickly addressed. Parents should be prepared to address the fantasy reassurances many times over several months.

And adults too need to be reassured, in part by their children. We naturally look to our children for some sign of hope. It is good to give them this role, not at the expense of their receiving our support, but in addition to it. Children of all ages need a role, need to be able contribute something of their own to a sense of recovery and rebuilding.

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