

Managing your own distress in the aftermath of a shooting or other tragic event

You may be struggling to understand how a shooting or other violent act could occur and why such a terrible thing would happen. There may never be satisfactory answers to these questions. We do know, though, that **it is typical for people to experience a variety of emotions following traumatic events.**

These feelings can include: shock, sorrow, numbness, fear, anger, disillusionment, grief, and others.

You may find that you have trouble: sleeping, concentrating, eating, or remembering even simple tasks.

This is common and should pass after a while.

Over time, the caring support of family and friends can help to lessen the emotional impact and ultimately make the changes brought about by the tragedy more manageable. You may feel that the world is a more dangerous place today than you did yesterday. It will take some time to recover your sense of equilibrium.

Below are tips provided by the ACA and the APA:

- **Attend to self care.** As an educator or parent/caregiver, it may seem counterintuitive to think about taking care of yourself first, but it's difficult to care for others when you are in need of care yourself. Engage in healthy behaviors to enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress. Eat well-balanced meals, get plenty of rest and build physical activity into your day. Avoid alcohol and drugs because they can suppress your feelings rather than help you to manage and lessen your distress. In addition, alcohol and drugs may intensify your emotional or physical pain. Establish or re-establish routines such as eating meals at regular times and following an exercise program. If you are having trouble sleeping, try some relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation or yoga.
- **Talk about it.** Ask for support from people who care about you and who will listen to your concerns. Receiving support and care can be comforting and reassuring. It often helps to speak with others who have shared your experience so you do not feel so different or alone.
- **Honor your feelings and pay attention to your emotional health.** Remember that it is common to have a range of emotions after a traumatic incident. You may experience intense stress similar to the effects of a physical injury. For example, you may feel exhausted, sore or off balance. Know that others are also experiencing emotional reactions and may need your time and patience to put their feelings and thoughts in order.
- **Turn it off and take a break.** You may want to keep informed, but try to limit the amount of news you take in whether it's from the Internet, television, newspapers or magazines. While getting the news informs you, being overexposed to it can actually increase your stress. The images can be very powerful in reawakening your feeling of distress. Also, schedule some breaks to distract yourself from thinking about the incident and focus instead on something you enjoy. Try to do something that will lift your spirits.

- **Strive for balance.** When a tragedy occurs, it's easy to become overwhelmed and have a negative or pessimistic outlook. Balance that viewpoint by reminding yourself of people and events which are meaningful and comforting, even encouraging. Striving for balance empowers you and allows for a healthier perspective on yourself and the world around you.
- **Maintain contact with friends and family.** These individuals can provide you with emotional support to help deal with difficult times.
- **Focus on your strength base.** Maintain practices that you have found to provide emotional relief. Remind yourself of people and events which are meaningful and comforting.
- **Help others or do something productive.** Locate resources in your community or ways that you can help people who have been affected by this incident, or have other needs. Helping someone else often has the benefit of making you feel better, too.
- **Try to recognize when you or those around you may need extra support.** It is not uncommon for individuals of all ages to experience stress reactions when exposed (even through media) to shootings or mass violence. Changes in eating and sleeping habits, energy level, and mood are important signs of distress. Watch for regressed behaviors, such as clinging in children and intense emotional reactions, such as anxiety or a strong need for retribution in adults. When necessary, seek for yourself, or point others, to licensed professional counselors who can provide needed support.

For many people, using the tips and strategies mentioned above may be sufficient to get through the current crisis. At times, however, an individual can get stuck or have difficulty managing intense reactions. A licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can assist you in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward. It is important to [get professional help](#) if you feel like you are unable to function or perform basic activities of daily living.

Recovering from such a tragic event may seem difficult to imagine. **Persevere and trust in your ability to get through the challenging days ahead.**

Taking the steps in this guide can help you cope at this very difficult time.

