

Crisis Management Information – Coping with Stress

Coping with Stress Reactions after a Mass Violence Event

This is a difficult time for everyone affected and it's important for people to connect with and support each other. The Red Cross offers the following tips to help people stay strong:

- Events like this can cause feelings of uncertainty and anxiety since no one knows for sure what will happen next. Remember that it's okay to feel nervous.
- Be patient with yourself and others. It's common to have any number of temporary stress reactions such as anger, frustration and anxiety.
- Spend more time with family and friends, and offer your support. Hug one another and listen.
- Stay informed but limit media exposure of the events, especially for children. Children are often more vulnerable to stress reactions related to media than adults.
- Parents should let children talk about their fears and then reassure them about their safety. Talk with them in ways that they can easily understand. Let them guide the conversation; share details only when they ask about them.
- Watch for signs of stress in your family, friends and children. Get help from others if needed.
- Take care of yourself. Eat healthy, drink plenty of water and get enough rest.
- To reach out for free 24/7 counseling or support, contact the Disaster Distress Helpline at 800- 985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746.

Practice Psychological First Aid with each other:

The following practices do not need to be performed in order but should be considered as helpful strategies and tools to help your family and friends.

Make a connection with your friends and family	Encourage good coping strategies
Help people be safe	Help people connect with their support systems
Be kind, calm and compassionate with each other	Provide accurate and timely information (no rumors!)
Help people meet their basic needs (food, water, etc.)	Make referrals to other resources (as needed)
Listen to their stories	End the conversation (ask if there's anything else you can do to help before you leave)
Give realistic reassurance	Take care of yourself

Getting ourselves and our lives back in a routine that is comfortable for us takes time. Each positive action you take can help you feel better and more in control. While we each have our own unique ways of reacting to stress, our resilience nonetheless helps us navigate our way through it, regardless of our many individual differences. In addition, there are ways we can help each other with our stress reactions.

See the table below for the most common signs of stress. Most people who experience these reactions will recover and return to previous functioning within a short period of time and will not experience long-term reactions.

Feelings	Thoughts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability, anger, rage • Disinterest • Resentment • Numbness • Anxiety, fear • Helplessness, loss of control • Terror • Feeling overwhelmed • Guilt • Despair, hopelessness • Sadness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-blame • Difficulty making decisions • Forgetfulness • Confusion • Distortion of sense of time • Lowered self-esteem • Difficulty concentrating and thinking • Intrusive thoughts, memories, flashbacks • Worry • A sense of being cut off from reality • Thoughts of self-harm
Behaviors	Physical Conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crying spells • Angry outbursts • Alcohol/drug/prescription abuse • Avoiding people, places, situations • Argumentative • School and work problems • Decreased interest in once enjoyable activities • Risky behaviors (driving dangerously, multiple sexual partners, unsafe sex, keeping/carrying firearms) • Inattention to appearance, personal hygiene, self-care • Irritability with family, friends and others • Withdrawal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue • Agitation • Physical complaints (e.g., headaches, stomach problems) • Decreased or increased sex drive • Decreased or increased appetite • Easily startled • Increased cravings for and use of caffeine, nicotine, sweets, alcohol, illicit substances • Weakness • Sleep difficulties and nightmares
Spiritual Life	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in relationship with or belief about God/higher power • Abandonment of prayer, ritual, scripture, devotions, sacraments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning the beliefs of faith providers • Struggle with questions about of life, justice, fairness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of faith • Rejection of spiritual care 	

Suggestions for caregivers: Most people exposed to a mass violence event will have reactions as listed above. During the immediate aftermath of the event, the most effective intervention is to provide psychological first aid and to help people cope with what they're experiencing. Listening to their stories and helping them problem solve the next steps in their recovery will often prevent long-term psychological consequences. Let people talk about what happened in their own words and in their own time. Be a shoulder and a comfort. Therapeutic interventions are not useful in the immediate aftermath but should be considered for those who are not able to function adequately after a month or so.

Source:



Coping in Today's World: Psychological First Aid for Friends and Neighbors

