

Managing Your Distress in the Aftermath of a Shooting

You may be struggling to understand how a shooting could occur and why such a terrible thing would happen. There may never be satisfactory answers to these questions. It is known, though, that it is typical for people to experience a variety of emotions following such a traumatic event. 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.

Meanwhile, you may wonder how to go on living your daily life. You can strengthen your resilience—the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity—in the days and weeks ahead. *Here are some helpful tips:*

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.

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.

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.

Honor your feelings

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.

Take care of 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 reestablish 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.

Help others or do something productive

Locate resources in your community on 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.

Contact your Employee Assistance Program for support

If your own efforts to move through and resolve your feelings of depression, anger and/or sadness do not seem to be successful, an EAP counselor can help. If you need assistance in addressing any aspect of your reactions, contact us at 1-800-255-5255 –

Providence EAP –

We're here for you.

This tip sheet was made possible with help from the following American Psychological Association (APA) members: Dewey Cornell, PhD, Richard A. Heaps, PhD, Jana Martin, PhD, H. Katherine O'Neill, PhD, Karen Settle, PhD, Peter Sheras, PhD, Phyllis Koch-Sheras, PhD, and members of Division 17. The American Psychological Association (APA). (n.d.). Managing your distress in the aftermath of a mass shooting. Retrieved June 8, 2012, from the APA Help Center: <http://www.apahelpcenter.org>