



After a Traumatic Event

Common Responses and Coping Strategies

It is very common and normal for people to have reactions after they have experienced a traumatic event, have witnessed a traumatic event, or are close to someone who has been the victim of a traumatic event. Traumatic events affect each person differently. Even though the event is over, you may be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional and physical reactions.

Sometimes reactions appear immediately after the event. Sometimes they appear a few hours or a few days later. In some cases, weeks or months may pass before reactions appear. Critical incident stress symptoms can last days, weeks, months and occasionally longer depending on the severity of the traumatic event.

Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance may be helpful. This does not imply weakness, but simply indicates that this particular event was too powerful to manage alone. You are welcome to contact CCA@YourService at **800-833-8707**.

CCA@YourService is a confidential counseling service, provided at no cost to employees and their family members.

Here is a list of some common signs of a critical incident stress reaction. **Remember - these are normal responses to an abnormal event:**

<p>Cognitive Reactions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion/Difficulty Concentrating • Difficulty Making Decisions • Decreased Alertness/Memory Lapses • Intrusive Images/Thoughts • Nightmares • Replaying the Event • Disbelief • Search for Meaning 	<p>Physical Reactions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue • Insomnia • Headaches • Nausea/Gastrointestinal Problems • Hunger or Loss of Appetite • Rapid Breathing • Chest Pain* • Dizziness*
<p>Emotional Reactions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Self-Blame • Loss of Emotional Control • Depression • Emotional Numbness • Helplessness • Apathy/Boredom • Anger 	<p>Behavioral Reactions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal from Others • Suspiciousness • Substance Abuse • Easily Startled • Changes in Normal Activities • Hypervigilance • Diminished Sexual Drive • Restlessness

* If you experience these symptoms, see a physician.



Practical Tips to Help You Cope With the Aftermath of a Traumatic Event

For Employees

Find someone you trust. Find supportive people (family members, friends, coworkers) and talk with them about your experience. Don't carry this burden alone - share it with those who care about you.

Give yourself permission to feel what you are feeling. Acknowledge your feelings as they arise. Remember you are having normal reactions and it takes time to heal.

Take care of yourself. Get enough rest and eat regularly. Keep up your exercise routine if you have one. Don't abuse drugs or alcohol - they can hinder and delay recovery. Make your environment as pleasant as possible.

Tune in to How Your Child is Doing. Be supportive and compassionate. If you notice a change in your son or daughter's usual activities, behaviors, or moods, discuss them.

Take a Media Break. Minimize your exposure to all types of media. While getting the news informs you, being overexposed can augment your distress, Instead, seek out things you enjoy to lift your spirits.

Know your limits. Avoid stressful situations for a while.

Practice relaxation. Meditate if you know how, if not, visualize a quiet scene. You can't always get away, but you can hold a vision in your mind - a quiet country scene for example, will temporarily take you out of the turmoil of a stressful situation.

Manage Anxiety. Ask yourself what specific worries are troubling you most and then seek information to address them. Having that information eliminates the fears created by anxiety.

Maintain as normal a schedule as possible. Make as many daily decisions as possible. This will give you a feeling of control over your life. However, delay making major life decisions until your symptoms decrease significantly.

Take one thing at a time. For people under tension, an ordinary workload may suddenly seem overwhelming. This is a temporary condition and you can work through it, taking it one step at a time. Allow time for a task. Do each job more deliberately and thoughtfully.

Avoid hazardous activities. There is an increased likelihood of accidents.



For Managers

Following a traumatic incident, everyone has some type of an emotional response.

Each person will recover at his/her own rate. Recovery can be a long and difficult process.

Tell your employees how you feel and that you are sorry they had to go through this difficult experience/event. Avoid statements like “I know how you feel” or “Everything will be all right”. These statements make some people think their feelings are not understood.

Be willing to say nothing. Just being there is often the most supportive thing you can do to help.

Remind people that their confusing emotions are normal.

Attempting to explain why the incident happened is not helpful. Your explanation may not be believed and may hurt your relationship.

Encourage people to ask for help including professional assistance from **CCA@YourService**.

As a manager, you are not immune to the effects of a traumatic event, regardless of whether or not you directly experienced it. Don't forget to address your own needs and responses to this incident.

REMEMBER YOU CAN ALWAYS SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP. You don't have to go through this experience alone. **CCA@YourService** is available for you and your family 24 hours a day. Just call **1-800-833-8707** or visit www.myccaonline.com.



Coping with Crime Victimization

Anyone can become a victim of a crime. If it happens to you or someone you love, here are some important points to remember.

Being a victim of a crime can be a very difficult and stressful experience. While most people are naturally resilient and over time will find ways to cope and adjust, there can be a wide range of aftereffects to a trauma. One person may experience many of the effects, a few, or none at all. Not everyone has the same reaction. In some people the reaction may be delayed days, weeks, or even months. Some victims may think they are "going crazy," when they are having a normal reaction to an abnormal event.

Getting back to normal can be a difficult process after a personal experience of this kind, especially for victims of violent crime and families of murder victims. Learning to understand and feel more at ease with the intense feelings can help victims better cope with what happened. Victims may need to seek help from friends, family, a religious or spiritual leader, a counselor, or a victim-assistance professional.

Potential Effects of Trauma

Some people who have been victims of crime may experience some of these symptoms. Seek medical advice if the symptoms persist.

Physical

- Nausea
- Tremors
- Chills or sweating
- Lack of coordination
- Heart palpitations or chest pains
- High blood pressure
- Headaches
- Sleep disturbances
- Stomach upset
- Dizziness
- Loss of appetite
- Startled responses

Emotional

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Guilt
- Grief
- Depression
- Sadness
- Anger
- Irritability
- Numbness
- Feeling lost, abandoned, and isolated
- Wanting to withdraw or hide

Mental

- Slowed thinking
- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Memory problems
- Intrusive memories or flashbacks
- Nightmare
- Inability to concentrate
- Difficulty making decisions

Tips for Coping

These are some ideas that may help you cope with the trauma or loss:

- Find someone to talk with about how you feel and what you are going through. Keep the phone number of a good friend nearby to call when you feel overwhelmed or feel panicked.
- Allow yourself to feel the pain. It will not last forever.
- Keep a journal.
- Spend time with others, but make time to spend time alone.
- Take care of your mind and body. Rest, sleep, and eat regular, healthy meals.



- Reestablish a normal routine as soon as possible, but don't overdo it.
- Make daily decisions, which will help to bring back a feeling of control over your life.
- Exercise, though not excessively, and alternate with periods of relaxation.
- Undertake daily tasks with care. Accidents are more likely to happen after severe stress.
- Recall the things that helped you cope during trying times and loss in the past, and think about the things that give you hope. Turn to them on bad days.

These are things to avoid:

- Be careful about using alcohol or drugs to relieve emotional pain. Becoming addicted not only postpones healing but also creates new problems.
- Make daily decisions, but avoid making life-changing decisions in the immediate aftermath, since judgment may be temporarily impaired.
- Don't blame yourself; it wasn't your fault.
- Your emotions need to be expressed. Try not to bottle them up.

For some victims and families of victims, life is forever changed. Life may feel empty and hollow. Life doesn't "mean" what it used to. Part of coping and adjusting is redefining the future. What seemed important before may not be important now. Many victims find new meaning in their lives as a result of their experience. It is important to remember that emotional pain is not endless and that it will eventually ease. It is impossible to undo what has happened, but life can be good again in time.

Tips for Family and Friends of a Victim of Crime

- Listen carefully.
- Spend time with the victim.
- Offer your assistance, even if the person hasn't asked for help.
- Help with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, and minding the children.
- Give the person private time.
- Don't take the victim's anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell that victim that he or she is "lucky it wasn't worse." Traumatized people are not consoled by such statements.
- Tell the victim that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and help.

National Resources and Hotlines for Crime Victims

The website for the Office for Victims of Crime in the Department of Justice includes an online directory of victim assistance programs here: <https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/findvictimservices>.

U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Office for Victim Assistance. (n.d.). *Coping with crime victimization*. Retrieved August 20, 2019, from <https://www.fbi.gov>

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Coping with Grief After Community Violence

Common Responses and Coping Strategies

It is not uncommon for individuals and communities as a whole to experience grief reactions and anger after an incident of community violence. Grief is the normal response of sorrow, emotion, and confusion that comes from losing someone or something important to you. Most people will experience a natural occurrence of grief after the death of a loved one, but grief and anger can be the result of other types of losses. In situations of community violence, people may experience the loss of their sense of safety, their trust in those who live in their neighborhood, or their trust in local government. The trauma and grief of community violence can be experienced by all involved.

This article contains information about some of the signs of grief and anger and provides useful information about how to cope with grief. In addition, the "Helpful Resources" section provides hotline numbers and treatment locators for those who may want further help.

Grief Reactions to Violence

Often after a death or loss of some kind, many people express feeling empty and numb, or unable to feel. Some people complain that they become angry at others or at situations, or they just feel angry in general, even without a reason.

Some of the physical reactions to grief and anger may include

- Trembling or shakiness
- Muscle weakness
- Nausea, trouble eating
- Trouble sleeping, trouble breathing
- Dry mouth

People experiencing grief also may have nightmares. They may withdraw socially and have no desire to participate in their usual activities, work, or school.

How long do grief reactions last?

Grief lasts as long as it takes you to accept and learn to live with the changes that have occurred in your community due to the violence and its aftermath. For some people, grief lasts a few months; for others, it may take more than a year. It's different for each person depending on his or her health, coping styles, culture, family supports, and other life experiences. How long people grieve may also depend on the resilience of the community and the ability of its members to take on roles and responsibilities that will help restore the basic needs of the community, such as getting children back to school and businesses back to working again.

Reactions to Community Violence in Children

Witnessing community violence and death can be traumatic experiences that cause negative mental health outcomes, particularly for children. Close relationships are important to children's development, and the loss of family or a community member can represent the loss of social capital—the emotional support that enhances their wellbeing. Children may experience depression, posttraumatic stress, anxiety, aggression, poor academic achievement, hopelessness, and risky behavior. These losses can even affect their capacity for relationships and diminish future expectations.



Tips for Helping Children Cope with Grief

- Allow children to talk about their feelings and to express their grief (e.g. crying, being sad).
- Try to follow the same routines as usual.
- Encourage them to play and laugh.
- Limit exposure to violence on TV news.
- Encourage them to get adequate rest and to eat healthy meals.

What can communities do to cope with their grief?

Often the community needs to come together to honor those who died and find meaning in their deaths in a way that will help everyone in the community recover. People may create a memorial and decide together that this will remind them never to allow such violence in their community again. It may help them be determined to work out their differences in other ways in the future—for example, by forming a community advisory group or identifying a local leader to be their liaison with law enforcement and other government entities.

What can individuals do to cope with their grief?

Talking to others who understand and respect how you feel—family members, faith leaders, people you trust—is a helpful way to ease your grief. Recognize that although you might still have these feelings over a long period, they will likely be less and less intense over time. Make sure to exercise and eat healthy meals. Do the things that you used to enjoy doing, even if you don't always feel like it. This will help you get back into your routines. Allow yourself to feel joy at times and to cry when you need to.

Even though they may be experiencing grief, some individuals also exhibit positive changes from their experience of loss, such as

- Becoming more understanding and tolerant
- Having increased appreciation for relationships and loved ones
- Being grateful for what they have and for those in their community who are loving and caring
- Experiencing enhanced spiritual connection
- Becoming more socially active

If you have experienced the death of a friend or loved one—or if you have been exposed to community violence—feelings of grief and anger are a normal reaction. However, if these feelings persist, access the resources below for more information on getting help. If you or someone you know is struggling after a disaster, you are not alone.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2014, November). *Tips for survivors: Coping with grief after community violence* (Pub. No. SMA-14-4888). Retrieved August 22, 2019, from <https://store.samhsa.gov>

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How to Listen to Someone Who is Hurting

Whenever people face bereavement, injury, or other kinds of trauma, they need to talk about it in order to heal. To talk, they need willing listeners.

Unfortunately, many people shrink from listening to people in pain. They may feel like they have enough troubles of their own, or be afraid of making matters worse by saying the wrong thing.

Sometimes people excuse themselves by assuming that listening to people who are hurting is strictly a matter for professionals such as psychotherapists or members of religious organizations. It is true that professional people can help in special ways and provide the suffering individual with insights that most people aren't able to offer. However, their assistance, although valuable, is no substitute for the caring interest of supervisors, coworkers, friends, and others from the person's normal daily life.

It is natural to feel reluctant or even afraid of facing another person's painful feelings, but it is important not to let this fear prevent you from doing what you can to help someone who is suffering.

General Guidelines

Though each situation is unique, some guidelines can help make the process easier:

- The most important thing to do is simply to be there, listen, and show you care.
- Find a private setting where you won't be overheard or interrupted. Arrange things so that there are no large objects, such as a desk, between you and the person.
- Keep your comments brief and simple so that you don't get the person off track.
- Ask questions that show your interest and encourage the person to keep talking, for example
 - "What happened next?"
 - "What was that like?"
- Give verbal and nonverbal messages of caring and support. Facial expressions and body posture go a long way toward showing your interest. Don't hesitate to interject your own feelings as appropriate, for example
 - "How terrible."
 - "I'm so sorry."
- Let people know that it's OK to cry. Some people are embarrassed if they cry in front of others. Handing over a box of tissues in a matter-of-fact way can help show that tears are normal and appropriate. It's also OK if you get a bit teary yourself.
- Don't be distressed by differences in the way people respond. One person may react very calmly, while another may express strong feelings. One person may have an immediate emotional response; another may feel numb at first and respond emotionally later. Emotions are rarely simple; people who are suffering loss often feel anger along with grief. Unless you see signs of actual danger, simply accept the feelings as that person's natural response at the moment. If a person usually is rational and sensible, those qualities will return once his or her painful feelings are expressed.
- Don't offer unsolicited advice. People usually will ask for advice later if they need it; initially it just gets in the way of talking things out.