



## Tips for Survivors:

### COPING WITH GRIEF AFTER COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

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 tip sheet 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 the following:

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

People experiencing grief may have nightmares, withdraw socially, and may 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 well-being. 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.

## Helpful Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Disaster Technical Assistance Center (SAMHSA DTAC)

Toll-Free: 1-800-308-3515

Website: <http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac>

SAMHSA Behavioral Health Disaster Response Mobile App

Website: <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/PEP13-DKAPP-1>

Administration for Children and Families\*

Website: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov>

### Treatment Locators

Mental Health Treatment Facility Locator

Toll-Free: 1-800-789-2647 (English and español)

TDD: 1-866-889-2647

Website: <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/MHTreatmentLocator>

MentalHealth.gov

Website: <http://www.mentalhealth.gov>

MentalHealth.gov provides U.S. government information and resources on mental health.

Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator

Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)

(24/7 English and español); TDD: 1-800-487-4889

Website: <http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov>

### Hotlines

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Toll-Free: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (1-800-799-4889)

Website: <http://www.samhsa.gov>

*This resource can be found by accessing the Suicide Prevention Lifeline box once on the SAMHSA website.*

National Domestic Violence Hotline\*

Toll-Free: 1-800-799-7233

TTY: 1-800-787-3224

Website: <http://www.thehotline.org>

*\*Note: Inclusion of a resource in this fact sheet does not imply endorsement by the Center for Mental Health Services, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*

## 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 the following:

- 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. But, if these feelings persist, access the resources on this page for more information on getting help.

**If you or someone you know is struggling after a disaster, you are not alone.**

# Disaster Distress Helpline

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PHONE: 1-800-985-5990  
 TEXT: "TalkWithUs" to 66746  
 WEB: <http://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>

**Call 1-800-985-5990 or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746 to get help and support 24/7.**



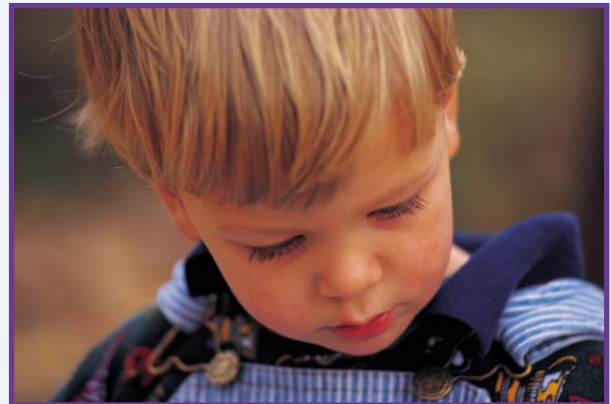
# Ayudando a Los Niños a Lidar Luego de un Tiroteo Masivo



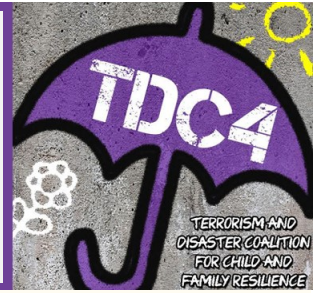
La mayoría de los niños lidan bien con el apoyo familiar, pero algunos pueden desarrollar problemas de comportamiento que indique angustia en curso. Si los niños conocen las víctimas, ellos probablemente necesitarán más ayuda para comprender lo que pasó y entender sus sentimientos.

## Señales de un posible trauma

- Problemas para dormir, pesadillas, temor a quedarse dormido
- Dolor de cabeza, dolor de estómago, dolores y malestares
- Aumento de comportamiento agresivo hacia otros y problemas de furia
- Imperactividad (un alto nivel de actividad)
- Altos Niveles de Vigilancia (constante preocupación acerca de un posible peligro)
- Preocupación acerca de la seguridad de las personas amadas
- Para los niños pequeños; pérdida de habilidades aprendidas anteriormente (como el entrenamiento para ir al baño, habilidades lingüísticas)
- Juego repetitivo o plática sobre el hecho violento
- Separación de los amigos y actividades
- No demostrar sentimientos acerca de algo o no poderse divertir
- Problemas para concentrarse



# Ayudando al Los Niños a Lidar Luego de un Tiroteo Masivo



## Señales de que un niño puede necesitar asesoramiento

- Estresantes mayores para niños, familias o comunidades como muertes, otras pérdidas, enfermedades graves, problemas financieros o problemas mentales
- Síntomas emocionales y de comportamiento que son muy desagradables para el niño o para los padres
- Problemas de salud mental que afectan la habilidad del niño para funcionar
- Grave interrupción en el aula
- Apartamiento severo/ conductas depresivas
- Problemas de comportamiento continuos o sentimientos agotadores que duran más de un mes

## Como Puedo Ayudar Ami Hijo?

- Dejarle saber al niño que está bien decir que “estoy asustado”)
- Permita que su hijo cuente su historia en sus propias palabras
- Asegure al niño que los adultos están ahí para ayudarlos a sentirse seguros y protegidos
- Hagale saber al niño que usted está interesado en lo que el niño tiene que decir
- No indague para obtener más información. Deje que su niño exprese sus sentimientos
- Hagale saber al niño que usted está interesado en lo que el niño tiene que decir
- Preguntar al niño que puede hacer usted para ayudarlo a sentirse mejor .
- Aceptar la necesidad de ellos de estar cerca de usted en este momento .





# Helping Children Cope After a Mass Shooting



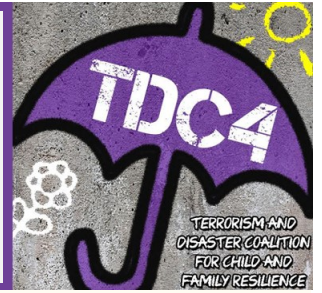
Most children will cope well with family support, but a few may develop problem behaviors that indicate ongoing distress. If the children know the victims, they are likely to need more help with understanding what happened and their feelings.

## Signs of Possible Trauma

- Sleep troubles, nightmares, fear of falling asleep
- Headaches, stomach aches, aches and pains
- Increased aggressive behavior toward others and angry feelings
- Hyperactivity  
(a very high activity level)
- Hypervigilance  
(constant worry about possible danger)
- Worrying about the safety of loved ones
- For younger children; loss of skills learned earlier (such as toilet training, language skills)
- Repetitive play or talk about the violent event
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Not showing feelings about anything or not having fun
- Trouble concentrating



# Helping Children Cope After a Mass Shooting



## Signs That A Child May Need Counseling

- Major child, family or community stressors like recent deaths or other losses, severe illness, financial instability or mental health issues
- Emotional and behavioral symptoms that are very upsetting to the child and/or parent
- Mental health issues that are affecting the child's ability to function
- Severe disruption in classroom
- Severe withdrawal/depressed behaviors
- Ongoing behavioral problems or overwhelming feelings that last for more than a month

## How Can I Help My Child?

- Let the child know it's all right to say "I'm scared"
- Permit your child to tell their story in their own words
- Reassure the child that adults are there to help them feel safe and secure
- Let the child know that you are interested in what she has to say
- Don't probe for more information. Let your child express his feelings
- Let the child know that you are available for more conversation and support
- Ask your child what you can do to help them feel better
- Accept their needing to be close to you at this time.



## Helping Youth after Community Trauma: Tips for Educators

Traumatic events such as a natural disaster; school violence; traumatic death of an educator or peer can impact students' learning, behavior, and relationships. Here are some reactions you might see and how you can help.

Keep in mind, not all students will feel the same way.

STUDENTS WANT YOU TO KNOW THEY MAY:	YOU CAN HELP WHEN YOU:
1. Feel sad, scared, empty, or numb. Younger students may be clingy. Older students may be embarrassed to show their distress, and may hide their feelings or share more on social media.	1. Provide support by listening to concerns and feelings. Educate students about different trauma reactions. Don't assume all students feel the same or need help but try to accommodate students' different responses.
2. Have behavior problems that are new or worse (e.g., have outbursts, be irritable, break rules). Some may engage in serious or harmful behaviors (e.g., drug or alcohol abuse, self-injury, or risky sexual behavior).	2. Have patience with minor behavior problems. Stay calm when setting limits. Return to predictable school routines and activities as soon as possible. <i>Refer students for professional help for any concerns about self-injury or dangerous behaviors.</i>
3. Have trouble concentrating, paying attention, participating, or getting work done on time.	3. Understand that attention and doing classroom activities may be affected. Focus on the present with gentle reminders about daily tasks. Consider modifying work or providing extra structure and instructions.
4. Appear sleepy or irritable due to having sleep problems.	4. Realize that sleep difficulties are common and can lead to fatigue and poor participation. Suggest healthy sleep habits (e.g. a break from screens before bed) and calming coping strategies. Consider adjusting deadlines until sleep is stabilized.
5. Have physical trauma reactions like stomach aches, headaches, a pounding heart, body aches, or fast, shallow breathing.	5. Recognize physical reactions may confuse or scare students, making them even more afraid. Encourage students to use relaxation strategies such as slow breathing, stretching, or physical activity.
6. Startle more easily in response to everyday noises (e.g. a pencil dropping, door slamming, the P.A. system crackling, kids yelling) and become scared.	6. Identify the sources of everyday noises and that these are not dangerous. Reassure students that they are safe. Explain that physical responses (e.g. feeling startled, tense muscles, fast breathing) are common after a trauma when they are on high alert. Suggest using calming strategies such as slow breathing.
7. Think life is meaningless, or withdraw from family and friends. Even students who are typically outgoing may become withdrawn. They may retreat to social media, gaming or online activities.	7. Suggest engaging in positive activities (e.g., volunteering, hobbies). Discuss ways to cope with sad feelings and the value of in-person support, talking with family or friends, rather than connecting via media. Discuss ways to support students with other adults they trust.
8. Believe that school isn't safe, that the trauma will recur, or have other negative trauma-related thoughts. Students who think their future will be cut short may react by not studying or skipping school.	8. Create a sense of safety by returning to normal, predictable routines as soon as possible. Remind them that such events are rare. Point out ways adults make school safe.
9. Feel responsible for not taking action before, during or after the event to prevent or minimize the outcome. They may feel guilty for not being harmed.	9. Discuss that people did the best they could at the time. Give honest, accurate, and age-appropriate information. Let students know you will tell them the truth.
10. Search the media for information about the event in an attempt to find answers.	10. Suggest they limit the use of media to maintain balance and perspective. Offer to help find answers to difficult questions.

If any of these problems interfere with student functioning, find out how to refer them for specialized help. Educators and professionals should also be aware of their own reactions and seek support as needed.



# For Teens: Coping after Mass Violence

Mass violence incidents, where several people are injured and killed, affect everyone in the community. Coping with mass violence can be very stressful. You or your friends might have been physically injured; you may have been worried about the safety of family and friends, or lost a loved one. You may have been interviewed by the police. It can be difficult to figure out where to begin when trying to understand what happened. Over time, most people begin to feel better and return to normal routines, but knowing about the impact of mass violence can help you take care of yourself and others. Here are some common reactions to mass violence:

## Feeling afraid or unsafe:

Mass violence is shocking and can make you fear for your safety. If the people at the event or those who were killed were doing things that you often do, in places you might have been, it can contribute to your fear, anxiety, and feelings of not being safe. You may believe that feeling afraid is childish, but fear and not feeling safe are common reactions after mass violence. Know that people in the community, including first responders, school staff, parents, and other caring adults are working to improve your safety and the safety of your community. As a teen, you can have an important voice in these efforts, too. For example, you can advocate for measures that you believe will make you and your community safer, or lend your voice to existing groups that have similar goals.

## Having trouble getting back to your normal routines and feelings:

After mass violence, many teens will experience some of these reactions even if they aren't talking about them:

- Not being able to fall or stay asleep, not getting restful sleep, having nightmares
- Having trouble concentrating and paying attention at school or work, not getting anything done, feeling in a fog or dazed
- Feeling sad, angry, confused, or afraid that the mass violence will happen again
- Feeling isolated, or numb, like friends and family don't understand, or feeling distant from them
- Being unable to get rid of thoughts, images, or visions of the mass violence event
- Not caring about things that used to matter or were important
- Experiencing headaches, stomachaches, a racing heart, or a change in appetite
- Having sights, sounds, people, places, or other things remind you of the violence
- Feeling jumpy, irritable, or on guard for danger all or nearly all of the time

If you or someone you know lost a loved one, you may experience additional grief reactions.  
Each person grieves differently, and there is no one "correct" way of grieving.

## Worrying about family and loved ones:

As a teen, you are becoming more independent and developing your own values and interests. After mass violence, you may find yourself worrying about your family in new ways, or your worries may have intensified. For example, you may suddenly be much more aware of the impact of these events on elderly relatives or younger siblings and be more protective or concerned for their well-being. If you sense that your parents or caregivers are very distressed about what happened, you might not talk to them about your own feelings because you do not want to further upset them. It can be very helpful to identify a trusted adult to talk to about your thoughts, feelings, and reactions related to the mass violence so that you are not alone with your experiences.



**Making everyday issues worse:**

Teens face many challenges, like adjusting to middle or high school, meeting academic expectations, balancing athletics or other activities or job responsibilities, planning for college, dealing with peer pressure, or managing problems at home or in your personal life. You may think that your problems are small compared to mass violence. However, going through this experience can magnify the daily issues that you were already dealing with, and make them feel much worse than before. This may be especially true if you experienced a trauma prior to the mass violence, if you had depression or anxiety in the past, or if you are currently involved in counseling services.

**Impacting identity issues:**

As a teen, you may be learning more about yourself and what it means to identify with a sexual orientation, gender, religion, ethnicity, race, or political affiliation. If the mass violence targeted a group that you identify with, this may cause you to have especially strong emotions. You may feel a heightened level of threat, fear, or lack of safety. This also may increase your sense of feeling isolated or cut off from your peers, family, or wider community. In many cases, communities respond to mass violence by coming together to support those involved and who died, as well as each other. Hopefully this will provide you with a sense of support, acceptance, and safety as you explore your identity.

**Searching for meaning:**

It is difficult to understand why a person would intentionally hurt and kill others. This can challenge your trust in other people, your religious beliefs, or the ways you think about or view the world. Searching for meaning in the face of hate is extremely challenging. Reading and talking to friends, family members, teachers, and faith leaders can help you formulate your own ideas about why terrible things happen.

## Taking Care of Yourself

**Limit Media and Social Media Exposure:**

After mass violence, media and social media coverage is constant. You may be tempted to stay glued to your phone, but this can cause even more distress. Try to disconnect from the news and social media at least for several hours every day. If watching TV or being on your phone helps you to cope, turn on a movie, watch a channel that doesn't have news alerts, or play a game.

**Practice Healthy Habits:**

This is a good time to establish a daily schedule that includes eating regular, healthy meals and snacks, exercising, and trying to get as close to a full night of sleep as possible. Turning off electronics at night will help you accomplish this.

**Have Fun:**

It's okay to disengage from tragedy. Give yourself permission to have fun. Consider doing something you really enjoy every day such as going for a walk, writing/journaling, creating art, listening to music, being with friends, spending time with your pets, or engaging in other relaxing activities.

**Connect with Others:**

Spend time with your family, friends, and other people who make you feel more relaxed. Don't cut yourself off from loved ones. Find a way to help others through volunteering, tutoring, or other community activities. Finding ways to connect with others often leads to feeling better. If you are worried about how a peer is coping, check in with them, and let a trusted adult know.

**Seek help:**

If you want to talk to someone, ask your parent or other caring adult, school counselor or nurse, or primary care provider for help. Your community may have drop-in centers specifically for this purpose. Most of these issues resolve with time, but if they continue, don't hesitate to seek additional or specialized counseling services.

## Parent Guidelines for Helping Youth after Mass Violence

The recent attack has been an extremely frightening experience, and the days, weeks, and months following can be very stressful. Your children and family will recover over time, especially with the support of relatives, friends, and community. Keep in mind that families and youth had different experiences during and after this violent incident, including those who experienced physical injury, were involved in police investigation, or worried about the safety of family members and friends. This attack might also act as a reminder to other violent events that family members have experienced in the past. How long it takes to recover will depend on what happened to you and your family during and after this event. Some adults and children have been seriously injured and will require medical treatment and long-term rehabilitation. Some are adjusting to the death of a loved one. Over time, some youth and adults will return to normal routines, while others may struggle. Children and teens may react differently to the attack depending on their age and prior experiences. Expect that youth may respond in different ways. Be supportive and understanding of different reactions, even when you are having your own reactions and difficulties.

Children's and teen's reactions are strongly influenced by how parents, relatives, teachers, and other caregivers respond to the attack. They often turn to these adults for information, comfort, and help. There are many reactions that are common after mass violence. These generally diminish with time, but knowing about them can help you to be supportive, both of yourself and your children.

### Common Reactions

- Feelings of anxiety, fear, and worry about the safety of self and others
- Fears that another violent incident may occur
- Changes in behavior:
  - Increase in activity level
  - Decrease in concentration and attention
  - Increase in irritability and anger
  - Sadness, grief, and/or withdrawal
  - Radical changes in attitudes and expectations for the future
  - Increases or decreases in sleep and appetite
  - Engaging in harmful habits like drinking, using drugs, or doing things that are harmful to self or others
  - Lack of interest in usual activities, including how they spend time with friends
- Physical complaints (headaches, stomachaches, aches and pains)
- Changes in school and work-related habits and behavior with peers and family
- Staying focused on the violent event (talking repeatedly about it)
- Strong reactions to reminders of the attack (seeing friends who were also present during the attack, media images, seeing a truck speeding, police)
- Increased sensitivity to sounds (screaming, tires screeching )

## Things I Can Do for Myself

- **Take time to reflect how this attack has impacted you.** Take a few moments for yourself so you can express your own emotions and also find the words you want to use to your children about what happened.
- **Take care of yourself.** Do your best to drink plenty of water, eat regularly, and get enough sleep and exercise.
- **Help each other.** Take time with other adult relatives, friends, or members of the community to talk or support each other.
- **Put off major decisions.** Avoid making any unnecessary life-altering decisions during this time.
- **Give yourself a break.** Take time to rest and do things that you like to do.

## Things I Can Do for My Children

- **Spend time talking with your children.** Let them know that they are welcome to ask questions and express their concerns and feelings. You should remain open to answering new questions and providing helpful information and support. You might not know all the answers and it is OK to say that. At the same time, don't push them to talk if they don't want to. Let them know you are available when they are ready.
- **Find time to have these conversations.** Use time such as when you eat together or sit together in the evening to talk about what is happening in the family as well as in the community. Try not to have these conversations close to bedtime, as this is the time for resting.
- **Promote your children's self-care.** Help children by encouraging them to drink enough water, eat regularly, and get enough rest and exercise. Let them know it is OK to take a break from talking with others about the recent event or from participating in any of the community events.
- **Help children feel safe.** Talk with children about their concerns over safety and discuss changes that are occurring at school and in the community to promote safety. Encourage your children to voice their concerns to you or to teachers at school. If they know the circumstances of the attack, encourage them to talk with you if they have continued worry so you can help to differentiate what happened during the attack and what they are worried about now.
- **Maintain expectations or "rules."** Stick with family rules, such as curfews, checking in with you while with friends, and keeping up with homework and chores. On a time-limited basis, keep a closer watch on where teens are going and what they are planning to do to monitor how they are doing. Assure them that the extra check-in is temporary, just until things stabilize.
- **Address acting out behaviors.** Help teens understand that "acting out" behaviors are a dangerous way to express strong feelings over what happened. Examples of "acting out" include intentionally cutting oneself, driving recklessly, engaging in unprotected sex, and abusing drugs or alcohol. You can say something like, "Many children and adults feel out of control and angry right now. They might even think drinking or taking drugs will help somehow. It's very normal to feel that way - but it's not a good idea to act on it." Talk with children about other ways of coping with these feelings (distraction, exercise, writing in a journal, spending time with others).
- **Limit media and social media exposure.** Protect your teen from too much media coverage and social media about the incident, including on the Internet, radio, television, or other technologies (e.g., texting, Facebook, Twitter). Explain to them that media coverage and social media technologies can

trigger fears of the violent event happening again and also spread rumors. Let them know they can distract themselves with another activity or that they can talk to you about how they are feeling. Also ask them to describe what they have seen online already so you can correct any misinformation or provide support.

- **Be patient.** Children may be more distracted and need added help with homework or projects once school is in session. They may need temporarily extra time to complete their work or more frequent breaks. Make sure they are patient with themselves as well.
- **Manage reminders.** Help children identify different reminders (people, places, sounds, smells, feelings) and to clarify the difference between the event and the reminders that occur after it.
- **Monitor changes in relationships.** Explain to children that strains on relationships are expectable. Emphasize that everyone needs family and friends for support during this time. Spend more time talking as a family about how everyone is doing. Encourage tolerance for how your family and friends may be recovering or feeling differently. Accept responsibility for your own feelings, by saying “I want to apologize for being irritable with you yesterday. I was having a bad day.”
- **Address radical changes in attitudes and expectations for the future.** Explain to children that changes in people’s attitudes are common and tend to be temporary after a mass violent incident like this. These feelings can include feeling scared, angry, and sometimes revengeful. Find other ways to make them feel more in control and talk about their feelings.
- **Get adults in your children’s life involved.** If there has been a serious injury of your child or a death of a loved one, or if your child is having difficulties, let your child’s teacher or other caring adults know so that they can be of help.
- **Empower your child to get involved in their medical care.** For children with injuries and long-term medical needs, encourage them to participate in medical discussions and decisions as much as possible. Have them ask their own questions and give opinions about different procedures. Teens are especially concerned about their physical appearance, fitting in, and their privacy. Talk with them about their concerns, problem-solve ways to address them, and respect their privacy.
- **Seek professional help.** If children have continued difficulties for a couple of months after the attack, parents should consult a trusted helper—a doctor or mental health professional.



## Parent Guidelines for Helping Youth after the Recent Shooting

The recent shooting has been an extremely frightening experience, and the days, weeks, and months following can be very stressful. Your children and family will recover over time, especially with the support of relatives, friends, and community. But families and youth may have had different experiences during and after the shooting, including those who may experienced physical injury, involvement in police investigation, worry about the safety of family members and friends, and loss of loved ones. How long it takes to recover will depend on what happened to you and your family during and after this event. Some adults and children have been seriously injured and will require medical treatment and long-term rehabilitation. Over time, some youth and adults will return to normal routines, while others may struggle. Children and teens may react differently to the shooting depending on their age and prior experiences. Expect that youth may respond in different ways, and be supportive and understanding of different reactions, even when you are having your own reactions and difficulties.

Children's and teen's reactions to the shooting are strongly influenced by how parents, relatives, teachers, and other caregivers respond to the event. They often turn to these adults for information, comfort, and help. There are many reactions that are common after mass violence. These generally diminish with time, but knowing about them can help you to be supportive, both of yourself and your children.

### Common Reactions

- Feelings of anxiety, fear, and worry about the safety of self and others
- Fears that another shooting may occur
- Changes in behavior:
  - Increase in activity level
  - Decrease in concentration and attention
  - Increase in irritability and anger
  - Sadness, grief, and/or withdrawal
  - Radical changes in attitudes and expectations for the future
  - Increases or decreases in sleep and appetite
  - Engaging in harmful habits like drinking, using drugs, or doing things that are harmful to self or others
  - Lack of interest in usual activities, including how they spend time with friends
- Physical complaints (headaches, stomachaches, aches and pains)
- Changes in school and work-related habits and behavior with peers and family
- Staying focused on the shooting (talking repeatedly about it)
- Strong reactions to reminders of the shooting (seeing friends who were also present during shooting, media images, smoke, police, memorials)
- Increased sensitivity to sounds (loud noises, screaming)

## Things I Can Do for Myself

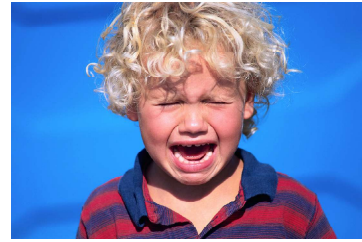
- **Take care of yourself.** Do your best to drink plenty of water, eat regularly, and get enough sleep and exercise.
- **Help each other.** Take time with other adult relatives, friends, or members of the community to talk or support each other.
- **Put off major decisions.** Avoid making any unnecessary life-altering decisions during this time.
- **Give yourself a break.** Take time to rest and do things that you like to do.

## Things I Can Do for My Child

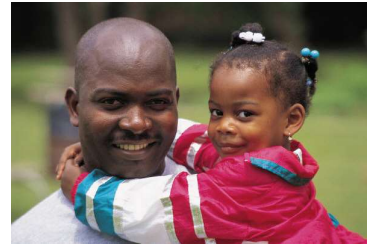
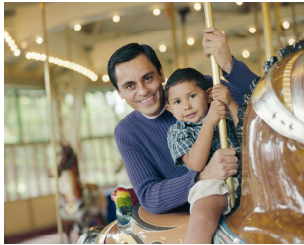
- **Spend time talking with your children.** Let them know that they are welcome to ask questions and express their concerns and feelings. You should remain open to answering new questions and providing helpful information and support. You might not know all the answers and it is OK to say that. At the same time, don't push them to talk if they don't want to. Let them know you are available when they are ready.
- **Find time to have these conversations.** Use time such as when you eat together or sit together in the evening to talk about what is happening in the family as well as in the community. Try not to have these conversations close to bedtime, as this is the time for resting.
- **Promote your children's self-care.** Help children by encouraging them to drink enough water, eat regularly, and get enough rest and exercise. Let them know it is OK to take a break from talking with others about the recent attacks or from participating in any of the memorial events.
- **Help children feel safe.** Talk with children about their concerns over safety and discuss changes that are occurring in the community to promote safety. Encourage your child to voice their concerns to you or to teachers at school.
- **Maintain expectations or "rules."** Stick with family rules, such as curfews, checking in with you while with friends, and keeping up with homework and chores. On a time-limited basis, keep a closer watch on where teens are going and what they are planning to do to monitor how they are doing. Assure them that the extra check-in is temporary, just until things stabilize.
- **Address acting out behaviors.** Help children/teens understand that "acting out" behaviors are a dangerous way to express strong feelings over what happened. Examples of "acting out" include intentionally cutting oneself, driving recklessly, engaging in unprotected sex, and abusing drugs or alcohol. You can say something like, "Many children and adults feel out of control and angry right now. They might even think drinking or taking drugs will help somehow. It's very normal to feel that way - but it's not a good idea to act on it." Talk with children about other ways of coping with these feelings (distraction, exercise, writing in a journal, spending time with others).
- **Limit media exposure.** Protect your child from too much media coverage about the attacks, including on the Internet, radio, television, or other technologies (e.g., texting, Facebook, Twitter). Explain to them that media coverage and social media technologies can trigger fears of the attacks happening again and also spread rumors. Let them know they can distract themselves with another activity or that they can talk to you about how they are feeling.

- **Be patient.** Children may be more distracted and need added help with chores or homework once school is in session.
- **Address withdrawal/shame/guilt feelings.** Explain that these feelings are common and correct excessive self-blame with realistic explanations of what actually could have been done. Reassure them that they did not cause any of the deaths and that it was not a punishment for anything that anyone did “wrong.” You can say, “Many children, and even adults, feel like you do. They are angry and blame themselves, thinking they could have done more. You’re not at fault. There was nothing more you could have done.”
- **Manage reminders.** Help children identify different reminders (people, places, sounds, smells, feelings) and to clarify the difference between the event and the reminders that occur after it. When children experience a reminder, they can say to themselves, “I am upset because I am reminded of the shooting because the potato chip bag popped. But now there is no shooting and I am safe.” Some reminders may be related to the loss of friends and/or family (photos of the person, music listened to together, locations of time spent together). Help your child cope with these loss reminders and provide them extra comfort during these times.
- **Monitor changes in relationships.** Explain to children that strains on relationships are expectable. Emphasize that everyone needs family and friends for support during this time. Spend more time talking as a family about how everyone is doing. Encourage tolerance for how your family and friends may be recovering or feeling differently. Accept responsibility for your own feelings, by saying “I want to apologize for being irritable with you yesterday. I was having a bad day.”
- **Address radical changes in attitudes and expectations for the future.** Explain to children that changes in people’s attitudes are common and tend to be temporary after a tragedy like this. These feelings can include feeling scared, angry, and sometimes revengeful. Find other ways to make them feel more in control and talk about their feelings.
- **Get adults in your children’s life involved.** If there has been a serious injury, death in the family, death of a close friend, or if your child is having difficulties, let your child’s teacher or other caring adults know so that they can be of help.
- **Empower your child to get involved in their medical care.** For children or teens with injuries and long-term medical needs, encourage them to participate in medical discussions and decisions as much as possible. Have them ask their own questions and give opinions about different procedures. Teens are especially concerned about their physical appearance, fitting in, and their privacy. Talk with them about their concerns, problem-solve ways to address them, and respect their privacy.
- **Seek professional help.** If teens have continued difficulties for a couple of months after the attacks, parents should consult a trusted helper—a doctor or mental health professional.

# HELPING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



## COPE AFTER A DISASTER

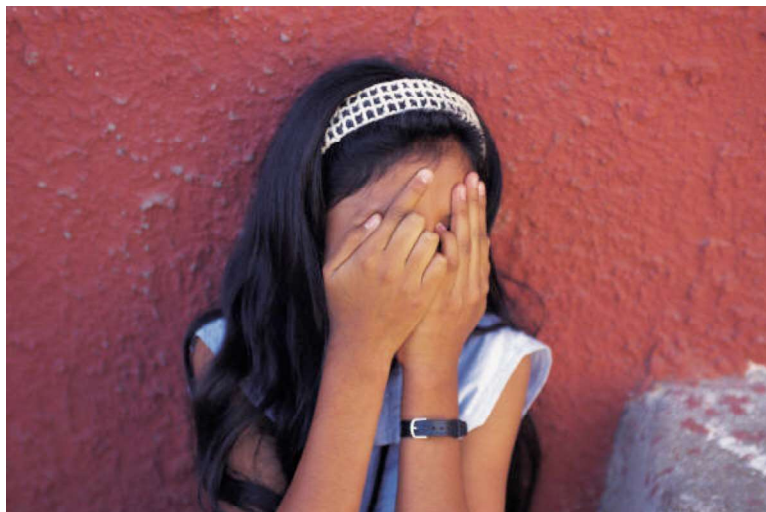


Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center  
Department of Psychiatry  
New Orleans



## Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress

- ❑ Re-experiencing and acting out the traumatic event
- ❑ Numbing of emotions and responsiveness (dazed expressions, showing little emotion)
- ❑ Avoidance (avoiding situations or reminders of the hurricane)
- ❑ Anxiety and hypervigilance (jumpy, scared)
- ❑ New fears unrelated to the event and being afraid of things that have been recently mastered
- ❑ Not wanting to leave a safe environment or trusting adult
- ❑ Interference with normal developmental tasks



## How Can Parents and Other Adults Help Traumatized Children?

- Indicate you are available to listen to the child
- Use a calm tone of voice
- Reassure children that they will be safe



Even if it is difficult for the adult who also may be traumatized, it is important for the child to be able to feel safe. Younger children tend to think that the world revolves around them. So they might be afraid that something they thought or did caused bad things to happen.

- Don't minimize the child's feelings, as in "*Stop being a baby, don't cry.*"
- Follow the child's lead
  - If the child wants to talk, listen
  - If the child wants to be held, do so
  - If the child is clingy, be patient
  - Allow children to show their fears; give support
  - Help children identify their feelings

**W**hen children are exposed to a traumatic event, they depend on adults, especially their parents, to protect them and to make sense of their world for them. However, loss of trust in adults and new fears are common after traumatic events. Parents need to be able to listen to their children and hear their concerns. They also need to help them feel safe. If parents are traumatized, it is important for them to find support for themselves and to reach out to others for support for their children.

**R**eactions to traumas are difficult to predict. They may occur immediately after the event or days and even weeks later. The disaster may remind children (or adults) about earlier traumas and can make the reactions more severe. Children's reactions to the traumatic event will be affected strongly by those of their parents.



**C**hildren's reactions to trauma vary at different ages. Some of the common reactions of children are listed on the next page. If any of the behaviors or symptoms do not lessen or go away over time, it is important to seek professional help. Interventions can be very helpful for traumatized children and allow them to get back on a normal developmental path. Without interventions, the symptoms are likely to worsen.

## Possible Outcomes For Children and Adolescents Who Have Experienced a Disaster or Who Have Suffered a Significant Loss as a Result of a Traumatic Event

### Children Ages Five Years and Younger:

- Fear of being separated from parent, clinging
- Crying, whimpering, screaming
- Trembling, immobility, aimless motion
- Frightened facial expressions
- Returning to behaviors shown at earlier ages like thumb sucking, bedwetting, no longer being toilet trained, fear of darkness

### Children Ages Six to Eleven Years:

- Withdrawal from family and friends, sadness, decreased activity
- Depression, anxiety, feelings of guilt
- Disruptive behavior, outbursts of anger and fighting
- Refusal to attend school, changes in school performance and inability to pay attention
- Changes in usual behaviors and/or regressive behaviors - returning to earlier behaviors
- Irrational fears, nightmares & other sleep problems
- Physical complaints (stomachaches, headaches) with no apparent physical cause
- Showing little emotion; feeling numb



## Adolescents Ages Twelve to Seventeen Years:

- ❑ Flashbacks, nightmares and other sleep disturbances
- ❑ Emotional numbing
- ❑ Avoidance of any reminders of the event
- ❑ Risk taking behaviors
- ❑ Substance abuse
- ❑ Problems with peers/antisocial behaviors
- ❑ Changes in usual behaviors
- ❑ Changes in school performance, academic decline
- ❑ Physical/psychosomatic complaints (stomachaches, headaches) with no apparent physical cause
- ❑ Depression
- ❑ Suicidal avoidance
- ❑ School avoidance
- ❑ Confusion, dissociation
- ❑ Showing little emotion; feeling numb





## How Can Parents and Other Traumatized Adults Help Themselves?

It is very important that adults help themselves when they are traumatized and engage in self care. If they are also parents, getting support and assistance will be particularly important as they will be better able to listen to their children and give them the understanding and support that they need to heal.

What adults can do:

- ❑ Return to day-to-day structure (routines) as soon as possible
- ❑ Spend time with others
- ❑ Seek out support from friends and colleagues
- ❑ Keep a journal
- ❑ Participate in activities that may distract you or feel good to you
- ❑ Try to be patient with others who are also under stress
- ❑ Give yourself permission to feel moody, nervous, or blue
- ❑ Try not to make any major life changes during a stressful time
- ❑ Make as many daily decisions as possible to have a feeling of control over your life
- ❑ Try to rest and eat balanced and regular meals

# Helping Children and Families Cope with a Disaster

Written by Joy D. Osofsky, PhD and  
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Louisiana State Department of Education

Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals,  
Office of Mental Health

# Helping Children After a Traumatic Experience: A Caregiver Guide



Children respond to traumatic events in different ways. This factsheet can help you understand some of the common responses children have to trauma, and how caregivers can help kids of all ages.

## Common Reactions in Children

- Easily distracted or spacing out.
- Emotional outbursts including anger and aggression.
- Increase in clingy or needy behavior
- Sensitive to loud noises, jumpy or anxious.
- Physical complaints (stomach aches, headaches, change in appetite.)
- Being withdrawn, avoiding interactions.
- Lack of interest in normal activities.



- Children at this age look to adults for how to respond.
- Ask them how they are feeling.
- Talk to them about how you're feeling.

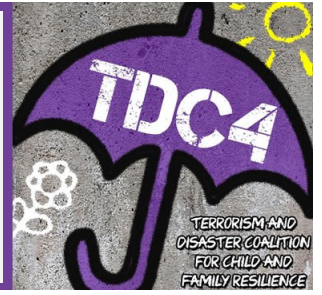


- It's okay to set limits on bad behavior – these limits might help them feel safe and secure.
- Routine is also really important – schedule and stick to a time for school, meals, bathing and bed.
- Show them affection through hugging and telling them you love them. Sometimes you just need to be there with them.
- Limit how much news and potentially violent television and movies they see.

- Give them time for play, both alone and with others.

Young Children

# Helping Children After a Traumatic Experience: A Caregiver Guide



- Talk with them about feelings – you may need to help them find words for what they are feeling. A word like ‘worry’ can be hard for children to understand.
- Listen to them and validate their feelings, but remember to set limits on aggressive or destructive behaviors.
- Work with them to find healthy ways to let out these feelings – like punching a pillow, tearing up paper, or drawing.
- Remember they might feel distracted – give them short tasks they can do to help improve their concentration.
- Be honest about how things might change, and give them time to talk about it.



School Aged Children

- Encourage teens to do soothing activities like reading, listening to music, or writing.
- Talk to them about their feelings and listen to their concerns. They might have worries you haven’t thought of.
- Set limits if their behaviors are aggressive or self-destructive.
- Allow them to spend extra time with close friends.
- Be patient, they may not be ready to talk about anything immediately.



Teens

- Show them affection in a way that’s comfortable for them.





# Tips for Survivors of a Disaster or Other Traumatic Event: MANAGING STRESS

## Important Things To Know About Disasters and Other Traumatic Events

If you were involved in a disaster such as a hurricane, flood, or even terrorism, or another traumatic event like a car crash, you may be affected personally regardless of whether you were hurt or lost a loved one. You can be affected just by witnessing a disaster or other traumatic event. It is common to show signs of stress after exposure to a disaster or other traumatic event, and it is important to monitor your physical and emotional health.

## Possible Reactions to a Disaster or Other Traumatic Event

Try to identify your early warning signs of stress. Stress usually shows up in the four areas shown below, but everyone should check for ANY unusual stress responses after a disaster or other traumatic event. Below are some of the most common reactions.

### YOU MAY FEEL EMOTIONALLY:

- Anxious or fearful
- Overwhelmed by sadness
- Angry, especially if the event involved violence
- Guilty, even when you had no control over the traumatic event
- Heroic, like you can do anything
- Like you have too much energy or no energy at all
- Disconnected, not caring about anything or anyone
- Numb, unable to feel either joy or sadness

### YOU MAY HAVE PHYSICAL REACTIONS, SUCH AS:

- Having stomachaches or diarrhea
- Having headaches or other physical pains for no clear reason
- Eating too much or too little
- Sweating or having chills
- Getting tremors (shaking) or muscle twitches
- Being jumpy or easily startled



## After the Event

### Managing Your Tasks

If you've been involved in a disaster or other traumatic event, a number of tasks likely require your attention fairly urgently. First, make sure you are not injured, as sometimes survivors don't realize they've been physically hurt until many hours later. If you realize you've been injured, seek medical treatment before you do anything else. If you need to find a safe place to stay, work on that task next. Make sure to let a family member or friend know where you are and how to reach you. Secure your identification and any other papers you may need, such as insurance, bank, property, and medical records. Completing one task at a time may help you feel like you are gaining back some control, so make a list of the most important things you need to do. Remember to be patient with yourself. Take deep breaths or gently stretch to calm yourself before you tackle each task. Plan to do something relaxing after working for a while.

### YOU MAY HAVE BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS, SUCH AS:

- Having trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, sleeping too much, or trouble relaxing
- Noticing an increase or decrease in your energy and activity levels
- Feeling sad or crying frequently
- Using alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs or even prescription medication in an attempt to reduce distressing feelings or to forget
- Having outbursts of anger, feeling really irritated and blaming other people for everything
- Having difficulty accepting help or helping others
- Wanting to be alone most of the time and isolating yourself

### YOU MAY EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS IN YOUR THINKING, SUCH AS:

- Having trouble remembering things
- Having trouble thinking clearly and concentrating
- Feeling confused
- Worrying a lot
- Having difficulty making decisions
- Having difficulty talking about what happened or listening to others

## Practical Tips for Relieving Stress

These stress management activities seem to work well for most people. Use the ones that work for you.

**Talk with others** who understand and accept how you feel. Reach out to a trusted friend, family member, or faith-based leader to explore what meaning the event may have for you. Connect with other survivors of the disaster or other traumatic events and share your experience.

**Body movement** helps to get rid of the buildup of extra stress hormones. Exercise once daily or in smaller amounts throughout the day. Be careful not to lift heavy weights. You can damage your muscles if you have too much adrenaline in your system. If you don't like exercise, do something simple, like taking a walk, gently stretching, or meditating.

**Take deep breaths.** Most people can benefit from taking several deep breaths often throughout the day. Deep breathing can move stress out of your body and help you to calm yourself. It can even help stop a panic attack.

**Listen to music.** Music is a way to help your body relax naturally. Play music timed to the breath or to your heartbeat. Create a relaxing playlist for yourself and listen to it often.

**Pay attention to your physical self.** Make sure to get enough sleep and rest each day. Don't leave resting for the weekend. Eat healthy meals and snacks and make sure to drink plenty of water. Avoid caffeine, tobacco, and alcohol, especially in large amounts. Their effects are multiplied under stress and can be harmful, just making things worse.



**Use known coping skills.** How did you handle past traumatic events like a car crash or the death of a loved one? What helped then (e.g., spent time with family, went to a support group meeting)? Try using those coping skills now.

## When Your Stress Is Getting the Best of You

Know that distressing feelings about a disaster or traumatic event usually fade over time (2–4 weeks after the event) as you get back to routines—and especially if you have engaged in some ways to help yourself. Try to use some of these tips several times a week.

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If you or someone you care about continues to show signs of stress and you are becoming concerned about him or her, you may want to reach out for some extra help. Contact one of the **Helpful Resources** listed on the next page.

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## Helpful Resources

### Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Disaster Technical Assistance Center (SAMHSA DTAC)

Toll-Free: 1-800-308-3515

Website: <http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac>

### Treatment Locators

#### Mental Health Treatment Facility Locator

Toll-Free: 1-800-789-2647 (English and español)

TDD: 1-866-889-2647

Website: <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/MHTreatmentLocator>

#### MentalHealth.gov

Website: <http://www.mentalhealth.gov>

*MentalHealth.gov provides U.S. government information and resources on mental health.*

#### Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator

Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)

(24/7 English and español); TDD: 1-800-487-4889

Website: <http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov>

### Hotlines

#### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Toll-Free: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (1-800-799-4889)

Website: <http://www.samhsa.gov>

*This resource can be found by accessing the Suicide Prevention Lifeline box once on the SAMHSA website.*

#### Workplace Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-WORKPLACE (1-800-967-5752)

Website: <http://workplace.samhsa.gov>

#### Office for Victims of Crime\*

Toll-Free: 1-800-851-3420, or 301-519-5500

TTY: 301-947-8374

Website: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ovcres/welcome.html>

*\*Note: Inclusion of a resource in this fact sheet does not imply endorsement by the Center for Mental Health Services, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*

## Disaster Distress Helpline

PHONE: 1-800-985-5990 TEXT: "TalkWithUs" to 66746

WEB: <http://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>



HHS Publication No. SMA-13-4776  
(Revised 2013)



# Age-Related Reactions to a Traumatic Event



A fundamental goal of parenting is to help children grow and thrive to the best of their potential. Parents anticipate protecting their children from danger whenever possible, but sometimes serious danger threatens, whether it is manmade, such as a school shooting or domestic violence, or natural, such as a flood or earthquake. And when a danger is life-threatening or poses a threat of serious injury, it becomes a potentially traumatic event for children.

By understanding how children experience traumatic events and how these children express their lingering distress over the experience, parents, physicians, communities, and schools can respond to their children and help them through this challenging time. The goal is to restore balance to these children's lives and the lives of their families.

## HOW CHILDREN MAY REACT

How children experience traumatic events and how they express their lingering distress depends, in large part, on the children's age and level of development.

**Preschool and young school-age children** exposed to a traumatic event may experience a feeling of helplessness, uncertainty about whether there is continued danger, a general fear that extends beyond the traumatic event and into other aspects of their lives, and difficulty describing in words what is bothering them or what they are experiencing emotionally.

This feeling of helplessness and anxiety is often expressed as a loss of previously acquired developmental skills. Children who experience traumatic events might not be able to fall asleep on their own or might not be able to separate from parents at school. Children who might have ventured out to play in the yard prior to a traumatic event now might not be willing to play in the absence of a family member. Often, children lose some speech and toileting skills, or their sleep is disturbed by nightmares, night terrors, or fear of going to sleep. In many cases, children may engage in traumatic play—a repetitive and less imaginative form of play that may represent children's continued focus on the traumatic event or an attempt to change a negative outcome of a traumatic event.

**For school-age children**, a traumatic experience may elicit feelings of persistent concern over their own safety and the safety of others in their school or family. These children may be preoccupied with their own actions during the event. Often they experience guilt or shame over what they did or did not do during a traumatic event. School-age children might engage in constant retelling of the traumatic event, or they may describe being overwhelmed by their feelings of fear or sadness.



A traumatic experience may compromise the developmental tasks of school-age children as well. Children of this age may display sleep disturbances, which might include difficulty falling asleep, fear of sleeping alone, or frequent nightmares. Teachers often comment that these children are having greater difficulties concentrating and learning at school. Children of this age, following a traumatic event, may complain of headaches and stomach aches without obvious cause, and some children engage in unusually reckless or aggressive behavior.



**Adolescents** exposed to a traumatic event feel self-conscious about their emotional responses to the event. Feelings of fear, vulnerability, and concern over being labeled “abnormal” or different from their peers may cause adolescents to withdraw from family and friends. Adolescents often experience feelings of shame and guilt about the traumatic event and may express fantasies about revenge and retribution. A traumatic event for adolescents may foster a radical shift in the way these children think about the world. Some adolescents engage in self-destructive or accident-prone behaviors.

*Some adolescents engage in self-destructive or accident-prone behaviors.*

## HOW TO HELP

The involvement of family, physicians, school, and community is critical in supporting children through the emotional and physical challenges they face after exposure to a traumatic event.

**For young children**, parents can offer invaluable support, by providing comfort, rest, and an opportunity to play or draw. Parents can be available to provide reassurance that the traumatic event is over and that the children are safe. It is helpful for parents, family, and teachers to help children verbalize their feelings so that they don't feel alone with their emotions. Providing consistent caretaking by ensuring that children are picked up from school at the anticipated time and by informing children of parents' whereabouts can provide a sense of security for children who have recently experienced a traumatic event. Parents, family, caregivers, and teachers may need to tolerate regression in developmental tasks for a period of time following a traumatic event.

**Older children** will also need encouragement to express fears, sadness, and anger in the supportive environment of the family. These school-age children may need to be encouraged to discuss their worries with family members. It is important to acknowledge the normality of their feelings and to correct any distortions of the traumatic events that they express. Parents can be invaluable in supporting their children in reporting to teachers when their thoughts and feelings are getting in the way of their concentrating and learning.

**For adolescents** who have experienced a traumatic event, the family can encourage discussion of the event and feelings about it and expectations of what could have been done to prevent the event. Parents can discuss the expectable strain on relationships with family and peers, and offer support in these challenges. It may be important to help adolescents understand “acting out” behavior as an effort to voice anger about traumatic events. It may also be important to discuss thoughts of revenge following an act of violence, address realistic consequences of actions, and help formulate constructive alternatives that lessen the sense of helplessness the adolescents may be experiencing.

When children experience a traumatic event, the entire family is affected. Often, family members have different experiences around the event and different emotional responses to the traumatic event. Recognizing each others' experience of the event, and helping each other cope with possible feelings of fear, helplessness, anger, or even guilt in not being able to protect children from a traumatic experience, is an important component of a family's emotional recovery.



# Assisting Parents/Caregivers in Coping with Collective Traumas

In the past year there have been a multitude of traumas that each of us have experienced or witnessed through media exposure. These include the ongoing pandemic, economic hardship, violence and abuse, racism and discrimination, policy changes that negatively impact specific groups (e.g., LGBTQ+ people, immigrants) and system failures (e.g., health disparities, police brutality). There have also been numerous stressors including balancing work and parenting demands and managing other obligations at home and/or in our personal life. This combination of traumas and stressors may feel overwhelming right now. This may be especially true if you have experienced prior traumas and are being reminded of those past experiences.

Below are strategies to help you cope right now.

- **Have compassion for yourself and others.**

Acknowledge that you are experiencing a lot right now. You may not be able to show up in the same ways you could before. That is okay. You are doing your best. Assume the same for your family, co-workers, and friends. Be flexible when considering what you can do. Consider the perspective of others to help you connect to their emotions and empathize with their experiences.

- **Acknowledge how your identities are being impacted.**

You may feel a heightened level of threat, fear, or lack of safety when aspects of your identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, and religion) are being targeted by violence, policy changes, hate speech and/or other actions. This also may increase your sense of feeling isolated or cut-off from your loved ones, co-workers, or wider community. Find ways to get support from those who share your identities or are allies who understand how these traumas and stresses are impacting you.

- **Self-reflect before reacting.**

Take a moment to consider how a situation is impacting you before reacting to others. Your emotions are valid. Your feelings of anger, bitterness, grief, and fears about the future need to be acknowledged before deciding how to respond. You may have to take care of yourself before assisting someone else. Know these feelings may persist. Sometimes, just taking a moment for a few slow breaths can help as you gather your thoughts.

- Reflect on your potential implicit biases (i.e., attitudes or stereotypes about others you may hold without being truly aware of these views or beliefs) and adjust your response to reflect understanding, caring, and support.

- **Search for meaning.**

You may be observing that systems and institutions are failing to protect those they are meant to serve. This can challenge your trust in other people, your religious beliefs, spiritual beliefs, or the ways you think about or view the world. Searching for meaning in the face of discrimination and hate is extremely challenging, only adding to your existing feelings of distress. Reading relevant resources and talking to trusted friends, family members, co-workers, and faith leaders can help you develop or discuss your ideas about why stressful and traumatic things happen and how you can cope with them.

- **Limit media and social media exposure.**

Media and social media coverage are constant. At times we feel obligated to “witness” the pain of others, however, you can pace yourself by limiting access to news during blocks of the day to connect to people, pets, nature, or activities that restore and heal. Be cognizant of how you react to news alerts and either disable them or put your devices aside during important tasks that require your focus.

- **Take time to care for yourself.**

All of us need to take time for ourselves. It is not selfish, but rather, it allows us to be better able to cope and to support others to the best of our abilities. The [Pause, Reset, Nourish \(PRN\) Framework](#), a model for wellness, provides tips which may prove helpful throughout the day. Pause means taking a moment to scan how your body is feeling and to acknowledge your emotions. Reset is helping you to get balanced, steadier, calmer or focused on your next task, and Nourish helps you replenish your mind-body-heart and helps you to see how you can get through difficult times. Give yourself permission to do these things.

- **Connect with others.**

Finding opportunities to connect with others often leads to feeling better even when you are distressed. Engage with family and friends to bring a sense of joy, light-heartedness, and meaningful connections with others. If you are worried about how others are coping, check in with them, and let them know you care. The simple act of noticing can offer healing for others. Conversely, it is also okay for you to let others know how they may support you. For example, ask for support in parenting if you need a break.

- **Seek help.**

Sometimes, the layers of stress and trauma become overwhelming and interfere with our ability to complete our daily activities. Remember you are not alone; we all could use extra support navigating these difficult times. Reach out to 211 or your local library to find out about what local community supports are available. You can also speak to a mental health provider, health provider, or a trusted friend, or call a helpline such as those listed below:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, Call (800) 273-8255, [Chat with Lifeline](#)
- Disaster Distress Helpline, Call or text (800) 985-5990 (For Spanish, press “2”) to be connected to a trained counselor 24/7/365

- Consider how media events may impact your staff/students. Take time to acknowledge this news, perhaps offering added breaks as needed or taking class/meeting time to discuss.

- Acknowledge that their feelings are valid, will continue, and how these incidents may be impacting their performance (e.g., worried about future, distractible, angry at system failures). Join in on how you have been impacted and discuss ways of coping together.

- Adjust expectations (e.g., review work demands/school assignments, adjust time needed to get work done, encourage healing) and avoid using punitive actions.

- Create opportunities for staff/students to come together to get support and give support to others.

- Make sure staff and students know how to access supports and resources.

By acknowledging these traumas and stressors and making some adjustments, you may improve morale and outcomes.

## Things You Can Do for Your Children

- **Spend time talking with your children.**

Have regular conversations with your children about what they are hearing, how these events are impacting them, and their reactions. Knowing that you are willing to have these conversations lets your children know they can rely on you and that they are not alone with all of these intense emotions. As a family, share situations that are impacting your family or a particular family member, including if one feels threatened because of aspects of their identities. Validate that their feelings are normal and encourage discussion and questions. These are not always easy conversations but are worth having even though they may be hard. Consider what you want to communicate and what values and beliefs you hope to share.

- Use age-appropriate language to talk about what your children have seen or heard, as well as what they have heard others saying.
- Monitor their media exposure and discuss what they have seen, heard, or read. Preschool children should not be exposed to coverage, if possible.

- **Identify other people your children may find supportive.**

Children may want to discuss their concerns with you as well as with others who share their identities or with whom they have been talking about current events. Help them find ways of connecting with these people so they can have additional supports during this time.

- **Help children feel safe.**

Talk with your children about their concerns over safety and problem-solve ways to address their concerns. This may include getting support from other trusted individuals, alerting school officials about what is happening, or seeking guidance from cultural or religious leaders.

- **Enhance your child’s coping.**

Reinforce that your children should be kind to themselves and that there are reasons why they aren’t feeling the same as before. They too can use the PRN framework and learn to pause, reset, and nourish themselves. Find family activities, including cultural and religious practices, that can be done together (e.g., dance night, try new recipes, walking, game night, spending time with out-of-town relatives virtually). Help create a routine for everyone in the family, which includes time for self-care and quiet.

- **Seek change.**

Discuss ideas for ways your children want to get involved in creating change against injustices. This could include participating in a community group event, creating a group at school, or showing support to peers who may be feeling an increased sense of vulnerability. These can be small steps as well as larger ones. Be a positive role model for change in actions as well as words. Making a contribution of your time and talent is one way to create meaning or help them cope.

- **Check-in on a regular basis.**

Unfortunately, many stressors are likely to continue in the immediate future. Check-in with your children on a regular basis. This reinforces that you are there to support them always, especially during these challenging times.

- **Ask for help.**

Reach out when you need help or support as there is no manual for parenting at any time, but particularly during these incredibly stressful times. Your pediatrician, faith leader, and local mental health agencies can be resources for support and guidance. Teen and young adult focused helplines include:

- The JED Foundation (for emotional health and suicide prevention), Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or text “START” to 741-741
- Trevor Project (for LGBTQ+ youth), Call 1-866-488-7386 or text “START” to 678-678
- Love is Respect (for dating abuse and healthy relationships), Call 1-866-331-9474 or text “LOVEIS” to 22522



## Additional Resources

For more info about child traumatic stress go to [www.NCTSN.org](http://www.NCTSN.org)

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# Coping after Mass Violence

Mass violence incidents, where several people are injured and killed, affect everyone in the community. Coping with mass violence can be very stressful. You or your co-workers might have been physically injured; you may have been worried about the safety of others, or lost a loved one. You may have been interviewed by the police. It can be difficult to figure out where to begin when trying to understand what happened. Over time, most people begin to feel better and return to normal routines, but knowing about the impact of mass violence can help you take care of yourself and others. Here are some common reactions to mass violence:

## Feeling afraid or unsafe:

Mass violence is shocking and can make you fear for your safety. If the people at the event or those who were killed were doing things that you often do, in places you frequent often, it can contribute to your fear, anxiety, and feelings of not being safe. Fear and not feeling safe are common reactions after mass violence. Know what is being done to enhance security can reduce these reactions. You can have an important voice in these efforts, too. For example, you can advocate for measures that you believe will make you and your co-workers safer, or lend your voice to existing groups that have similar goals.

## Having trouble getting back to your normal routines and feelings:

After mass violence, many may experience some of these reactions even if they aren't talking about them:

- Not being able to fall or stay asleep, not getting restful sleep, having nightmares
- Having trouble concentrating and paying attention at work, not getting anything done, feeling in a fog or dazed
- Feeling sad, angry, confused, or afraid that the mass violence will happen again
- Feeling isolated, or numb, like friends and family don't understand, or feeling distant from them
- Being unable to get rid of thoughts, images, or visions of the mass violence event
- Not caring about things that used to matter or were important
- Experiencing headaches, stomachaches, a racing heart, or a change in appetite
- Having sights, sounds, people, places, or other things remind you of the violence
- Feeling jumpy, irritable, or on guard for danger all or nearly all of the time

If you or someone you know lost a loved one, you may experience additional grief reactions. Each person grieves differently, and there is no one "correct" way of grieving.

## Worrying about family and loved ones:

After mass violence, you may find yourself worrying about your family in new ways, or your worries may have intensified. For example, you may suddenly be much more aware of the impact of these events on relatives with special needs or your children and be more protective or concerned for their well-being. If you sense that your spouse or partner is very distressed about what happened, you might not talk to them about your own feelings because you do not want to further upset them. It can be very helpful to identify someone to talk to about your thoughts, feelings, and reactions related to the mass violence so that you are not alone with your experiences.



**Making everyday issues worse:**

You face many challenges, dealing with COVID-19, addressing economic constraints, facing additional stresses at work, balancing parenting demands, or managing problems at home or in your personal life. You may think that your problems are small compared to mass violence. However, going through this experience can magnify the daily issues that you were already dealing with, and make them feel much worse than before. This may be especially true if you experienced a trauma prior to the mass violence, if you had depression or anxiety in the past, or if you are currently involved in counseling services.

**Impacting identity issues:**

If the mass violence targeted a group that you identify with, this may cause you to have especially strong emotions. You may feel a heightened level of threat, fear, or lack of safety. This also may increase your sense of feeling isolated or cut off from your co-workers, family, or wider community. In many cases, communities respond to mass violence by coming together to support those involved, as well as each other. Others may not understand the discrimination you may have experienced during the event or in prior events. Helping people understand your experience will help them to provide the support you need.

**Searching for meaning:**

It is difficult to understand why the mass violent event occurred and what systems failed to protect you. This can challenge your trust in other people, your religious beliefs, or the ways you think about or view the world. Searching for meaning in the face of hate is extremely challenging. Reading and talking to friends, family members, co-workers, and faith leaders can help you formulate your own ideas about why terrible things happen.

## Taking Care of Yourself

**Limit Media and Social Media Exposure:**

After mass violence, media and social media coverage is constant. You may be tempted to stay glued to your phone, but this can cause even more distress. Try to disconnect from the news and social media at least for several hours every day. If watching TV or being on your phone helps you to cope, turn on a movie, watch a channel that doesn't have news alerts, or play a game.

**Practice Healthy Habits:**

This is a good time to establish a daily schedule that includes eating regular, healthy meals and snacks, exercising, and trying to get as close to a full night of sleep as possible. Turning off electronics at night will help you accomplish this.

**Have Fun:**

It's okay to disengage from tragedy. Give yourself permission to have fun. Consider doing something you really enjoy every day such as going for a walk, writing/journaling, creating art, listening to music, being with family or friends, spending time with your pets, or engaging in other relaxing activities.

**Connect with Others:**

Find ways to connect with your family, friends, and other people who make you feel more relaxed. Don't cut yourself off from loved ones. Find a way to help others through volunteering, or other community activities. Finding ways to connect with others often leads to feeling better. Be compassionate with yourself, as your parenting may not meet your expectations for a little bit. Ask for support in parenting if you need a break. If you are worried about how a co-worker is coping, check in with them, and let them know you care.

**Seek help:**

Reach out to an EAP service or manager; call a hotline; or speak to a mental health provider, health provider, or a trusted colleague.

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, Call (800) 273-8255, [Chat with Lifeline](#)
- Disaster Distress Helpline, Call or text (800)985-5990 (For Spanish, press "2") to be connected to a trained counselor 24/7/365.
- [7 cups](#) – Trained active listeners are available to chat with you via text or online to help you through difficult times.

## Psychological Impact of Mass Violence

The combination of life-threatening traumatic personal experiences, loss of loved ones, disruption of routines and expectations of daily life, and post-violence adversities pose psychological challenges to the recovery of children and families in the affected areas. The following issues may be helpful to consider:

### Reactions to Danger

*Danger* refers to the sense that events or activities have the potential to cause harm. In the wake of the recent attack, people and communities have greater appreciation for the enormous danger of violence and terrorism and the need for effective emergency management plans. There will be widespread *fears of recurrence* that are increased by misinformation and rumors. Danger always increases the need and desire to be close to others, making *separation* from family members and friends more difficult.

### Posttraumatic Stress Reactions

*Posttraumatic stress reactions* are common, understandable, and expectable, but are nevertheless serious. The three categories are: 1) [Intrusive Reactions](#), meaning ways the traumatic experience comes back to mind. These include recurrent upsetting thoughts or images, strong emotional reactions to reminders of the attacks, and feelings that something terrible is going to happen again; 2) [Avoidance and Withdrawal Reactions](#), including avoiding people, places and things that are reminders of the attacks, withdrawal reactions, including feeling emotionally numb, detached or estranged from others, and losing interest in usual pleasurable activities; and 3) [Physical Arousal Reactions](#), including sleep difficulties, poor concentration, irritability, jumpiness, nervousness, and being “on the lookout for danger.”

### Grief Reactions

Grief reactions are normal, vary from person to person, and can last for many years. There is no single “correct” course of grieving. Personal, family, religious, and cultural factors affect the course of grief. Over time, grief reactions tend to include more pleasant thoughts and activities, such as positive reminiscing or finding uplifting ways to memorialize or remember a loved one.

### Traumatic Grief

People who have suffered the loss of a loved one under traumatic circumstances often find grieving even more difficult than it might otherwise be. Their minds stay on the circumstances of the death, including preoccupations with how the loss could have been prevented, what the last moments were like, and issues of accountability. Traumatic grief changes the course of mourning, putting individuals on a different time course than is usually expected.

### Depression

Depression is associated with prolonged grief and strongly related to the accumulation of post-violent adversities. Symptoms can include depressed or irritable mood, change in sleep or appetite, decreased interest in life activities, fatigue, and feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness. Some youth and adults may experience suicidal thoughts.

### Physical Symptoms

Survivors may experience physical symptoms, even in the absence of any underlying physical injury or illness. These symptoms include headaches, stomachaches, rapid heartbeat, tightness in the chest, change in appetite, and digestive problems. In particular, the hearing tires screech can lead to panic reactions, especially in response to reminders. Panic often is expressed by cardiac, respiratory, and other physical symptoms. More general anxiety reactions are also to be expected.

### Trauma and Loss Reminders

*Trauma reminders:* Many people will continue to encounter places, people, sights, sounds, smells, and inner feelings that remind them of the attack. The sounds of confusion and people screaming may become powerful reminders. Adults and youth are often not aware that they are responding to a reminder, and the reason for their change in mood or behavior may go unrecognized. Media coverage can easily serve as unwelcome reminders. It is particularly difficult when loved ones/friends have been together during a traumatic experience, because afterward they can serve as trauma reminders to each other, leading to unrecognized disturbances in these important relationships, especially in a young person's life. *Loss reminders:* Those who have lost loved ones continue to encounter situations and circumstances that remind them of the absence of their loved one. These reminders can bring on feelings of sadness, emptiness in the survivor's life, and missing or longing for the loved one's presence.

### Post-violent Stress and Adversities

Contending with ongoing stresses and adversities can significantly deplete coping and emotional resources and, in turn, interfere with recovery from posttraumatic stress, traumatic grief, and depressive reactions. For example, teens may exhibit confusion, somatic responses (e.g., headaches, stomachaches), unusually aggressive or restless behaviors, or concerns about safety. Medical treatment and ongoing physical rehabilitation can be a source of additional stress. New or additional traumatic experiences and losses are known to exacerbate distress and interfere with recovery. Likewise, distress associated with prior traumatic experiences or losses can be renewed by the experience of the attack. Youth's recovery is put in jeopardy without properly addressing changes in their relationships, monitoring of their at-risk behaviors, and assisting with changes to future life goals. Some adversities require large-scale responses, while others can be addressed, in part, by personal and family problem solving.

### Consequences of These Reactions

Intrusive images and reactivity to reminders can seriously interfere with school performance and avoidance of reminders can lead to restrictions on important activities, relationships, interests and plans for the future. Irritability and impaired decision-making can interfere with getting along with family members and friends. Trauma-related sleep disturbance is often overlooked, but can be persistent and affect daily functioning. Some may respond by being unusually aggressive or restless, needing to be around parents or caregivers more than usual, or voicing fears or concerns about their safety or the safety of their friends. Adolescents may become inconsistent in their behavior, start to withdraw and avoid social situations, become overly confrontational or aggressive, or engage in high risk behaviors (e.g., driving recklessly, using drugs and alcohol). Depressive reactions can become quite serious, leading to a major decline in school performance, social isolation, loss of interest in normal activities, self-medication, acting-out behavior, and, most seriously, attempts at suicide. Traumatic grief can lead to the inability to mourn, reminisce and remember, fear of a similar fate or the sudden loss of other loved ones, and to difficulties in establishing or maintaining new relationships. Adolescents may respond to traumatic losses by trying to become too self-sufficient and independent or by becoming more dependent and taking less initiative.

### Coping after Catastrophic Violence

In addition to meeting people's basic needs, there are several ways to enhance people's coping. Physical: Stress can be reduced with proper nutrition, exercise and sleep. Youth and adults may need to be reminded that they should take care of themselves physically to be of help to loved ones, friends, and communities. Emotional: Youth and adults need to be reminded that their emotional reactions are expected, and will decrease over time. However, if their reactions are too extreme or do not diminish over time, there are professionals who can be of help. Social: Communication with, and support from, family members, friends, religious institutions and the community are very helpful in coping after catastrophic violence. People should be encouraged to communicate with others, and to seek and use this support where available.

*Restoring a sense of safety and security, and providing opportunities for normal development within the social, family and community context are important steps to the recovery of children, adolescents, and families.*



## Resources in Response to School Shooting

In response to the Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde Texas, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network has developed resources to help children, families, educators, and communities navigate what they are seeing and hearing, acknowledge their feelings, and find ways to cope together. These resources include:

- [Talking to Children about the Shooting](#)
- [Helping Youth After a Community Trauma: Tips for Educators \(En Español\)](#)
- [Talking to Children: When Scary Things Happen \(En Español\)](#)
- [Talking to Teens about Violence \(En Español\)](#)
- [Tips for Talking to Students about Violence](#)
- [Coping After Mass Violence: For Adults](#)
- [For Teens: Coping After Mass Violence\(En Español\)](#)
- [Helping School-Age Children with Traumatic Grief: Tips for Caregivers \(En Español\)](#)
- [Helping Teens with Traumatic Grief: Tips for Caregivers\(En Español\)](#)
- [Helping Young Children with Traumatic Grief: Tips for Caregivers \(En Español\)](#)
- [Guiding Adults in Talking to Children about Death and Attending Services](#)
- [After a Crisis: Helping Young Children Heal](#)
- [Age-Related Reactions to a Traumatic Event](#)
- [Once I Was Very Very Scared](#) – children’s book for young children
- [After the Injury](#)—website for families with injured children
- [Health Care Toolbox](#)—website for pediatric health providers working with injured children
- [Pause-Reset-Nourish \(PRN\) to Promote Wellbeing \(En Español\) \(for responders\)](#)

## Psychological First Aid

The NCTSN also has resources for responders on [Psychological First Aid](#) (PFA; [En Español](#)). PFA is an early intervention to support children, adolescents, adults, and families impacted by these types of events. [PFA Mobile](#) and the [PFA Wallet Card \(En Español\)](#) provide a quick reminder of the core actions. The [PFA online training](#) course is also available on the NCTSN Learning Center.

Additional PFA resources for schools include:

- [Psychological First Aid for Schools](#) (PFA-S) – Field operations guide
- [Providing PFA-S: For Health-Related Professionals](#) – handout
- [Providing PFA-S: For Principals and Administrators](#) – handout

- [Providing PFA-S: For School Support Staff](#) – handout
- [Providing PFA-S: For Teachers](#) - handout

#### From the National Mass Violence and Victimization Resource Center

- [Transcend](#) (mobile app to assist with recovery after mass violence)
- [Rebuild your Community: Resources for Community Leaders](#)
- [Media Guidelines for Homicide Family Survivors](#)
- [Timeline of Activities to Promote Mental Health Recovery](#)
- [Self-Help: Resources for Survivors](#)
- [E-learning Courses: Trainings for Clinicians](#)
- [Resources for Victim Assistance Professionals](#)

#### From the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress at the Uniformed Services University

- [Grief Leadership: Leadership in the Wake of Tragedy](#)
- [Leadership Communication: Anticipating and Responding to Stressful Events](#)
- [Coping with Stress Following a Mass Shooting](#)

A disaster event such as this is unexpected and often brings out strong emotions. People can call or text the SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline’s toll-free number (**1-800-985-5990**) and receive immediate counseling. This free, confidential, and multilingual crisis support service is available to anyone experiencing psychological distress as a result of this event. People who call and text are connected to trained and caring professionals from crisis counseling centers in the network. Helpline staff provide confidential counseling, referrals, and other needed support services.

#### Mass Violence

- **Mass Violence/Community Violence**—This part of the SAMHSA Disaster Behavioral Health Information Series resource collection focuses on incidents of mass violence, community violence, and terrorism and their effects. Resources discuss common reactions to incidents of mass violence, tips for coping, and ways to support children and youth in coping.  
[https://www.samhsa.gov/resource-search/dbhis?rc%5B0%5D=type\\_of\\_disaster%3A20549](https://www.samhsa.gov/resource-search/dbhis?rc%5B0%5D=type_of_disaster%3A20549)
- **Coping after Mass Violence**—Written for parents and families, this National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) tip sheet provides information about common reactions to mass violence and self-care tips for those living in communities where an incident of mass violence has taken place. The tip sheet also includes external resources for individuals seeking further support.  
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/coping-after-mass-violence>
- **Improving Community Preparedness to Assist Victims of Mass Violence and Domestic Terrorism: Training and Technical Assistance (ICP TTA) Program**—Funded by the Office for Victims of Crime within the U.S. Department of Justice, the ICP TTA program works to equip U.S. communities to respond effectively to incidents of criminal mass violence and domestic terrorism. The program's website features a resources page (<https://icptta.com/resources>), which offers vetted resources to help emergency managers, victim service professionals, and others make victim services



part of emergency operations plans, as well as a trainings page (<https://icptta.com/trainings>), which includes freely available trainings to help build local capacity.

<https://icptta.com>

- ***Parent Guidelines for Helping Youth after the Recent Shooting***—In this 3-page tip sheet released shortly after a shooting, the NCTSN describes how such an event may affect children and teens as well as parents and other caregivers. The tip sheet lists reactions common among people of all ages, offers coping tips for caregivers, and suggests ways for caregivers to support children and youth in talking about and managing their reactions.

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/parent-guidelines-helping-youth-after-recent-shooting>

This resource is available in Spanish at <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/guia-para-los-padres-para-ayudar-los-jovenes-despues-de-un-tiroteo-reciente>.

- ***Psychological Impact of the Recent Shooting***—This document from the NCTSN lists reactions people may have to a shooting and related experiences (such as loss of loved ones and disruption of routines). It describes grief reactions, depression, and physical reactions, and it highlights ways to cope effectively with reactions to a shooting. <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/psychological-impact-recent-shooting>

**Remembering**—National Mass Violence Victimization Resource Center (NMVVRC)

This web page describes how communities typically respond in grief after an incident of mass violence and offers guidance for community leaders in supporting communities through this process. Information and downloadable resources focus on communities remembering tragic events, incident anniversaries, and memorials.

<https://www.nmvvrc.org/community-leaders/rebuild-your-community/remembering>

- ***Survivors and Witnesses After Traumatic Events***—A product of Voices Center for Resilience, a nonprofit formed after the attacks of September 11, 2001, this tip sheet for the public provides basic information about common effects of exposure to acts of violence, civil unrest, or terrorism. It identifies steps disaster-affected individuals can take in the immediate aftermath of crisis, common reactions to disasters, and tips for coping and asking for help.

<https://voicescenter.org/tip-sheets/trauma/survivors>

- ***Talking to Children about the Shooting***—In this tip sheet, the NCTSN provides suggestions to parents and other caregivers for talking with their children in ways that help them to make sense of and cope with their reactions to a shooting. The tip sheet also identifies reactions common in children and teens to shooting incidents.

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/talking-children-about-shooting>

- ***Tip Sheet for Youth Talking to Journalists After Mass Violence***—This NCTSN tip sheet describes how talking with journalists may affect youth who have survived an incident of mass violence. It lists the rights that youth and families have (for example, they have the right to ask what the interview questions will be in advance of agreeing to an interview). It also identifies signs that reporters are doing their job well, so that readers know what to expect.

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/tip-sheet-youth-talking-journalists-after-mass-violence>

- ***Tips for Parents on Media Coverage***—In this tip sheet, the NCTSN explains the effects that media coverage of a violent incident may have on children and teens and suggests ways for parents and other caregivers to help children and teens manage reactions to media coverage and the violent event. The

tip sheet also includes tips for families with involvement in a violent incident.

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/tips-parents-media-coverage-shooting>

- ***Unexpected Challenges for Communities in the Aftermath of a Mass Violence Incident***—This tip sheet from the National Mass Violence Victimization Resource Center lists some unexpected issues a community may encounter after experiencing a mass violence incident. The document also provides suggested solutions for managing these challenges and prioritizing a community’s safety and recovery. <http://nmvvc.org/media/301cm3if/tipsheet2.pdf>

## Resources for Children, Youth, Parents and Other Caregivers, and Schools

- **Children and Adolescents**—Several sections of the SAMHSA Disaster Behavioral Health Information Series (DBHIS) resource collection focus on the common responses and needs children and adolescents may have during and after disasters. These sections include resources that highlight the unique needs of children and adolescents in and after disasters, as well as how adults who work with children, and parents and other caregivers, can offer support to children and adolescents in coping. Following are SAMHSA DBHIS sections related to children and adolescents:

Resources intended for children: <https://www.samhsa.gov/resource-search/dbhis?rc%5B0%5D=audience%3A20195>

Resources for adolescents: <https://www.samhsa.gov/resource-search/dbhis?rc%5B0%5D=audience%3A20192>

Resources about children and disaster: <https://www.samhsa.gov/resource-search/dbhis?rc%5B0%5D=populations%3A20575>

Resources about adolescents and disaster: <https://www.samhsa.gov/resource-search/dbhis?rc%5B0%5D=populations%3A20151>

- **Children and Disasters**—Part of the Disaster Survivors portal (<https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/disaster-survivors>) at the SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center website, this web page describes how children and teenagers may experience disasters differently from adults, offers tips for disaster planning for families, identifies common reactions to disasters in children and teenagers, and provides suggestions for adults for helping children and teenagers cope after disaster. Links to related resources are also provided. <https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/disaster-survivors/children-and-disaster>
- ***Tips for Talking With and Helping Children and Youth Cope After a Disaster or Traumatic Event: A Guide for Parents, Caregivers, and Teachers***—This SAMHSA tip sheet can help parents, other caregivers, and teachers recognize and address problems in children and teens affected by a disaster. The tip sheet describes reactions that are common in young survivors at different ages, as well as how to help children cope with these reactions. <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/tips-talking-helping-children-youth-cope-after-disaster-or-traumatic-event-guide-parents/sma12-4732>
- **Understanding Child Trauma**—This web page from SAMHSA presents statistics on child trauma, which may be experienced as part of a natural or human-caused disaster, and lists signs of traumatic stress in children and youth. It also offers tips for parents and other caregivers for helping children and youth to cope with trauma. Links are also provided to downloadable infographics in English and Spanish provided by the SAMHSA National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative. <https://www.samhsa.gov/child-trauma/understanding-child-trauma>

- ***Psychological First Aid for Schools (PFA-S) Field Operations Guide, 2nd Edition***—Developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) and the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, this guide defines PFA-S, a model school communities can use to support students, their families, and staff immediately after a natural or human-caused disaster. Appendix C of the guide includes handouts for responders, parents and families, and students after a disaster.  
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/psychological-first-aid-schools-pfa-s-field-operations-guide>
- **SchoolSafety.gov**—Provided by the U.S. Departments of Homeland Security, Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services, this website features information and resources that K–12 school personnel, parents and caregivers, and law enforcement can use to explore school safety topics and recovery from a disaster or other emergency affecting a school. The Recovery section of the site at <https://www.schoolsafety.gov/respond-and-recover/recovery> offers a range of resources on recovery for school communities.  
<https://www.schoolsafety.gov>
- ***After a Crisis: How Young Children Heal***—This tip sheet from the NCTSN describes how young children may respond to disasters and other crises and suggests ways for parents and other caregivers to support them in coping. The tip sheet uses the word SAFETY as a memory aid for readers, with each category of tips beginning with a letter in the word.  
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/after-crisis-helping-young-children-heal>
- ***Age-Related Reactions to a Traumatic Event***—In this information and tip sheet, the NCTSN provides an overview of how children and adolescents may react to a traumatic event, including a natural or human-caused disaster that they experience as traumatic. This resource describes reactions typical within specific age ranges and offers tips for families, doctors, and school personnel to help children and adolescents cope.  
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/age-related-reactions-traumatic-event>
- ***Childhood Traumatic Grief: Information for Mental Health Providers***—This NCTSN tip sheet provides an overview of the grieving process for children and explains childhood traumatic grief for professionals providing services to children. The resource includes signs of traumatic grief and tips for supporting the child in recovery.  
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/childhood-traumatic-grief-information-for-mental-health-providers>
- ***Childhood Traumatic Grief: Youth Information Sheet***—In this 2-page resource, the NCTSN describes grief in children and teenagers and explains childhood traumatic grief, which has some different signs and symptoms from other grief. Tips are provided for coping with traumatic grief.  
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/childhood-traumatic-grief-youth-information-sheet>
- ***Creating Effective Child- and Family-Focused Disaster Behavioral Health Messages on Social Media***—In this approximately 40-page toolkit, the NCTSN provides guidance for professionals serving disaster-affected communities, as well as child-serving mental health organizations, in using social media to communicate with the public through all phases of disaster. The toolkit presents an overview of social media platforms; information about developing social media posts; and key communication considerations by phase of disaster, including in the aftermath of disaster and during long-term recovery.  
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/creating-effective-child-and-family-focused-disaster-behavioral-health-messages-on-social-media>

- **Help Kids Cope**—This free mobile app provides information to help parents and other caregivers, teachers, counselors, and others to talk about disasters with children. The app features tips and checklists to help with disaster preparation; information about how children typically respond to disasters; and links to books, activities, and other resources for children. Developed by the NCTSN and other organizations, the app runs on iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch, as well as Android devices.  
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/help-kids-cope>
- **Helping School-Age Children with Traumatic Grief: Tips for Caregivers**—After children lose someone they love in a disaster or other event, they may go through traumatic grief, particularly if the death was sudden or frightening. In this tip sheet, the NCTSN explains how school-age children may experience traumatic grief and suggests ways for parents and other caregivers to support them in moving through and coping with this type of grief.  
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/helping-school-age-children-traumatic-grief-tips-caregivers>
- **Helping Young Children with Traumatic Grief: Tips for Caregivers**—In this tip sheet, the NCTSN explains how young children may experience traumatic grief, which can arise after a disaster or other event in which the child lost a loved one. The tip sheet lists ways in which young children may go through and express traumatic grief and offers suggestions for parents and other caregivers to support children in coping.  
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/helping-young-children-traumatic-grief-tips-caregivers>
- **Helping Your Child Cope With Media Coverage of Disasters: A Fact Sheet for Parents**—Provided by the Disaster and Community Crisis Center at the University of Missouri, this fact sheet explains how media coverage of disasters may affect children and adolescents. It also offers strategies to help parents address these effects, including monitoring and placing limits on consumption of media, explaining disaster coverage, and helping children develop coping skills.  
[https://dcc.missouri.edu/assets/doc/products/disaster\\_media\\_factsheet\\_for\\_parents\\_dcc.pdf](https://dcc.missouri.edu/assets/doc/products/disaster_media_factsheet_for_parents_dcc.pdf)

The fact sheet is available in Spanish at

[https://dcc.missouri.edu/assets/doc/products/DCC\\_Media\\_Parent\\_SPANISH.pdf](https://dcc.missouri.edu/assets/doc/products/DCC_Media_Parent_SPANISH.pdf).

- **Helping Youth after Community Trauma: Tips for Educators**—In this 1-page tip sheet, the NCTSN identifies 10 ways youth may react to community traumas such as natural or human-caused disasters and suggests ways for educators to respond to these reactions and support youth in coping. The tip sheet also advises educators to find professional mental health support for youth—and for themselves—as needed.  
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/helping-youth-after-community-trauma-tips-educators>
- **Once I Was Very Very Scared**—This book for young children introduces several animal characters (e.g., squirrel, turtle, dog) who have gone through traumatic experiences, including disaster trauma, and are experiencing different reactions. It can be used by parents and other important adults in the lives of children to talk about difficult and traumatic experiences and support children in coping. The book is available in several languages other than English.  
<https://piploproductions.com/stories/once>
- **Psychological First Aid: Adults Working with Children and Teens**—Provided by the New York State Office of Mental Health, this information and tip sheet describes—for parents and other caregivers how disasters may affect children and factors that can shape how children react to disasters. It identifies steps parents and other caregivers can take to support children and teens in coping after a

disaster.

[https://www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/disaster\\_resources/pfa/adults\\_children.pdf](https://www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/disaster_resources/pfa/adults_children.pdf)

- **PFA: Parent Tips for Helping School-Age Children after Disasters**—This handout lists reactions children may have to disasters, ways parents can respond helpfully to these reactions, and examples of things parents can do and say to support their school-age children after a disaster. The handout is part of the *PFA Field Operations Guide*.

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/pfa-parent-tips-helping-school-age-children-after-disasters>

The handout is also available in three languages other than English:

nese: <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/pfa-parent-tips-helping-school-age-children-after-disasters-chinese>

anese: <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/pfa-parent-tips-helping-school-age-children-after-disasters-japanese>

nish: <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/pfa-consejos-para-padres-como-ayudar-ninos-de-edad-escolar>

- ***Psychological First Aid: Teachers and Educators***—Designed for personnel at schools that have experienced an incident of violence or a natural disaster, this tip sheet describes how teachers and educators may experience disasters and how PFA can help. PFA is an evidence-informed, modular approach that can be used to assist disaster survivors. The tip sheet offers ideas for teachers to take care of themselves and support others in the school community in coping and healing after disasters. [https://www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/disaster\\_resources/pfa/teachers\\_educators.pdf](https://www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/disaster_resources/pfa/teachers_educators.pdf)
- ***Recovery From Large-Scale Crises: Guidelines for Crisis Teams and Administrators***—In this tip sheet, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) describes what to expect in schools after disasters and other crises and how school crisis teams and administrators can support the school community in coping and recovery. NASP identifies steps administrators and crisis teams can take at different points after the crisis, from immediately after the crisis to more than a year later. <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/school-violence-resources/recovery-from-large-scale-crises-guidelines-for-crisis-teams-and-administrators>
- **Resilience and Coping Intervention (RCI)**—This intervention can be used to help children and adolescents cope with disasters and other forms of community trauma. RCI is designed for groups of 5 to 10 people and can be delivered in one or several sessions. RCI groups can be implemented in programs based in schools and other settings and led by teachers, counselors, or other professionals who have been trained in the intervention. <https://dcc.missouri.edu/rci.html>
- ***Responding to Stressful Events: Helping Children Cope***—This brochure contains information on helping children cope after disaster. It highlights common reactions in children in specific age ranges and describes how parents and other caregivers, families, and teachers can provide support. The brochure was developed by the Mental Health Support Network of Canada, a coalition of Canadian associations focused on mental health and stress management. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/reports-publications/responding-stressful-events/helping-children-cope.html>
- ***Responding to Stressful Events: Helping Teens Cope***—Developed by the Mental Health Support Network of Canada, this brochure advises parents and other caregivers and teachers on how they can support teenagers in coping with disasters. The brochure describes common reactions to disasters in teenagers, ways adults can respond that may be helpful, and activities for teens that may help them in coping.



<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/reports-publications/responding-stressful-events/helping-teens-cope.html>

## General Disaster Response and Recovery Information

- **Tips for Survivors: Coping With Grief After a Disaster or Traumatic Event**—In this tip sheet, SAMHSA defines and describes grief, discusses ways of coping with grief, and explains complicated or traumatic grief. The tip sheet also offers relevant resources for additional support.  
<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Tips-for-Survivors-/SMA17-5035>
- **Tips for Survivors of a Disaster or Other Traumatic Event: Managing Stress**—This SAMHSA tip sheet gives stress prevention and management tips for dealing with the effects of a disaster or trauma. It identifies common reactions to disasters and other traumatic events, lists tips to manage and lower stress, and highlights signs of the need for professional support.  
<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Tips-for-Survivors-of-a-Disaster-or-Other-Traumatic-Event-Managing-Stress/SMA13-4776>

This tip sheet is also available in Spanish at <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Tips-for-Survivors-of-a-Disaster-or-Other-Traumatic-Event-Managing-Stress-Spanish-Version-/SMA13-4776SPANISH>. A similar tip sheet is available in Punjabi at <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Tips-for-Survivors-of-a-Traumatic-Event-Managing-Your-Stress-Punjabi-Version-/NMH05-0209PUNJABI>.

- **Coping with a Disaster or Traumatic Event**—At this web page, CDC emphasizes the importance of effective coping after a disaster and getting professional help if needed for reactions that are difficult and intense. Links are provided to additional information about managing your emotional health as a survivor and about supporting your children in coping.  
<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/index.asp>

This information is available in Spanish at <https://emergency.cdc.gov/es/coping/index.asp>.

- **The Impact of Disaster and Mass Violence Events on Mental Health**—Intended for mental health and substance use disorder treatment professionals, this online article from the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) summarizes research on common reactions to disasters. The article identifies common reactions in disaster-affected communities and describes how reactions increase and decrease in communities over time, as well as highlighting risk factors for longer term reactions.  
[https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/violence\\_trauma\\_effects.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/violence_trauma_effects.asp)
- **Managing Grief after Disaster**—Written for mental health and substance use disorder treatment professionals, this online article from the National Center for PTSD contains information on bereavement, grief, and traumatic grief. It also covers complications of bereavement, risk factors for these complications, and treatment of people experiencing bereavement.  
[https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/manage\\_grief\\_disaster.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/manage_grief_disaster.asp)
- **Online Clinical Trainings**—Provided by the National Mass Violence Victimization Resource Center, this web page includes descriptions and links to trainings focused on treatments for trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder in children and adults. Treatments for which trainings are provided include trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, cognitive processing therapy, and prolonged exposure.  
<https://www.nmvvrc.org/vsps-clinicians/online-clinical-trainings>

- **Bounce Back Now**—Bounce Back Now is a free mobile app available through the Google Play and App Stores. It is intended to help people with coping and resilience after a natural disaster or incident of mass violence. Once users have created an account, they can complete regular questionnaires to assess mental health, access education and coping tools, and put together a plan for improving emotional health. There are also parenting tips for helping children and teens in coping with the emotional impacts of a disaster.  
<https://www.bouncebacknow.org>
- **Mass Disasters, Trauma, and Loss**—This booklet from the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies discusses common reactions to disasters, factors that make people more likely to experience reactions for longer periods, and steps survivors can take to cope effectively after a disaster. Signs of the need for professional mental health assistance are also provided.  
[https://istss.org/ISTSS\\_Main/media/Documents/ISTSS\\_MassDisaterTraumaandLoss\\_English\\_FNL.pdf](https://istss.org/ISTSS_Main/media/Documents/ISTSS_MassDisaterTraumaandLoss_English_FNL.pdf)

The booklet is available in three languages in addition to English:

Arabic: [https://istss.org/ISTSS\\_Main/media/Documents/ISTSS\\_MassDisasterTraumaandLoss\\_Arabic\\_FNL.pdf](https://istss.org/ISTSS_Main/media/Documents/ISTSS_MassDisasterTraumaandLoss_Arabic_FNL.pdf)

Schinese: [https://istss.org/ISTSS\\_Main/media/Documents/ISTSS\\_MassDisasterTraumaandLoss\\_Sch\\_FNL.pdf](https://istss.org/ISTSS_Main/media/Documents/ISTSS_MassDisasterTraumaandLoss_Sch_FNL.pdf)

Spanish: [https://istss.org/ISTSS\\_Main/media/Documents/ISTSS\\_MassDisasterTraumaandLoss\\_Spa\\_FNL.pdf](https://istss.org/ISTSS_Main/media/Documents/ISTSS_MassDisasterTraumaandLoss_Spa_FNL.pdf)

- **PFA: Tips for Adults**—Part of the *Psychological First Aid Field Operations Guide*, this handout identifies common reactions in adults who have experienced a disaster, suggests responses, and offers examples of things to do and say to cope with the reaction. These suggestions and examples include a breathing exercise for relaxation, prioritization of responsibilities that feel overwhelming, and tapping into existing relationships for support.  
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/pfa-tips-adults>

This resource is available in Spanish at <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/pfa-consejos-para-adultos>.

The SAMHSA Disaster App allows disaster behavioral health responders to navigate resources related to pre-deployment preparation, on-the-ground assistance, and post-deployment resources. Users can also share resources from the app via text message or email and quickly identify local mental health and substance use disorder treatment services. <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/samhsa-disaster>

# Tips for Self-Care Following A Trauma

Adapted from a National Center for PTSD Fact Sheet by LSU Health Sciences Center - New Orleans



## Common reactions to traumatic events and disasters include:

- New or renewed fears, sadness, helplessness, anger.
- Feeling overwhelmed, confused, distracted, emotionally numb, or disoriented.
- Nightmares or upsetting thoughts and images that come to mind.
- Young children may be upset, distracted, or feel out of sorts.

These are normal reactions to very stressful events. With the help of family and friends, most people gradually feel better as time goes by.

## What can people do to cope?

- Spend time with other people. Resist the tendency to isolate yourself from your known supports, such as trusted friends and family.
- If it helps, talk about how you are feeling. Use judgment about whether you feel able to listen to others who need to talk.
- Get back to your everyday routines. Familiar habits can be very comforting.
- Take time to grieve and cry. Letting these feelings out will help them to pass.
- Take small, doable steps toward tackling big problems. Take one thing at a time instead of trying to do everything at once.
- Try to eat healthy food at regular meal times.
- Take time to walk, stretch, exercise, and relax, even if just for a few minutes at a time. Get enough rest and sleep.
- Do something that just feels good to you like taking a warm bath, or taking a walk.
- Take breaks from the stress of the event. Turn off the TV news reports and do something you enjoy.

## What can adults do to help children cope?

- Let them know you understand their feelings.
- Truthfully reassure them that they are safe.
- As much as possible maintain their usual routines (e.g., nap and bed times, etc.)
- Do not expose them to frightening images and discussions of the events including news programs, newspapers or discussions of adult concerns.)
- Speak to children in simple, reassuring terms about the disaster. Remember they will be concerned primarily about the safety of their home, their possessions, their friends, school, etc.

## When should a person seek more help?

*Other people may need extra help coping if a month after the traumatic event he/she:*

- Still feels very upset or fearful most of the time
- Acts very differently compared to before the trauma
- Can't work or take care of kids or home
- Has problems with important relationships that are continuing to get worse since the traumatic event
- Uses drugs or drinks significantly more than before the disaster
- Feels jumpy or has ongoing nightmares
- Has flashbacks about the disaster
- Remains unable to enjoy life