

Post-Mass Shooting Programs and Resources Overview

Updated April 2019

Original Publication Date: October 2017

ASPR TRACIE has developed and gathered additional information on programs and resources available to the communities affected by mass shooting events. Information is organized by programs and resources. Check out our Select Disaster Behavioral Health Resources page for a snapshot of recently published materials.

Programs

Antiterrorism Emergency Assistance Program – Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime

The Antiterrorism Emergency Assistance Program (AEAP) is designed to support victims in jurisdictions that have been overwhelmed following a criminal mass violence or terrorism incident. AEAP is a grant program and are retroactive to the date of the incident. As such, victim-related costs that occur on or after the date of the incident can be reimbursed to eligible applicants once the AEAP grant is awarded.

AEAP Guidelines can be found in the Federal Register, Vol. 67, No. 21, published Thursday, January 31, 2002 on page 4822.

<https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2002/01/31/02-2299/guidelines-for-the-antiterrorism-and-emergency-assistance-program-for-terrorism-and-mass-violence>

In cases of terrorism or mass violence occurring within the United States, 42 U.S.C. 10603b(b) authorizes OVC to provide emergency relief, including crisis response efforts, assistance, training, and technical assistance for the benefit of victims of terrorist acts or mass violence. Funding may be awarded to eligible applicants. Eligible applicants are limited to state victim assistance programs; public agencies, including federal, state, and local governments, and federally recognized Indian tribal governments, as determined by the Secretary of the Interior and published in the Federal Register; public institutions of higher education; and victim service and nongovernmental organizations. Individuals are not directly eligible for AEAP funds. Individual victims may be able to obtain funds from their state victim compensation programs.

Please note that under this program, funding must be used to support victim-related issues and, as a supplemental source of funding, AEAP cannot supplant other funding

sources. AEAP is available for eligible applicants where other sources of funding for victims needs have been overwhelmed. Therefore, funding cannot be used for costs such as existing staffing and facilities; however, AEAP funding may be used to hire additional staff, pay overtime costs, or secure additional office space to support victim needs. Victims needs include, but are not limited to, mental health/trauma informed care; medical expenses (including rehabilitation expenses); vocational rehabilitation expenses; repatriation of remains; funeral expenses; child and dependent care, lost wages, and support of victim participation in criminal justice proceedings. Also, limited victim-related law enforcement overtime expenses, such as death notifications; crime scene cleanup; and security at memorial services, hospitals, certain victim expenses related to their involvement in a trial, and evacuation centers may be considered under AEAP, but the program cannot fund routine police activities. The Guidelines also state that AEAP cannot be used to cover property damage or property loss.

For more information:

For details about AEAP grants, including what is typically funded and who is eligible to apply, access the FY 2019 Solicitation: <https://www.ovc.gov/grants/pdfxt/FY19-AEAP-Solicitation-508.pdf>

For further information about OVC's domestic mass violence and terrorism programs and support, please see: http://ojp.gov/ovc/providers/domestic_terrorism.html and http://ojp.gov/ovc/help/domestic_terrorism.html

Community-Based Providers – Health Resources and Services Administration

HRSA program offices stand ready to provide technical assistance and other information about HRSA programs. Questions about HRSA programs and emergent event response and recovery should be directed to the HRSA EOC at hrsaeoc@hrsa.gov.

Disaster Distress Helpline – Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

The Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH) is a program of the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) which provides crisis counseling and support for anyone in the U.S. experiencing distress or other behavioral health concerns related to any natural or human-caused disaster. Calls (1-800-985-5990) and texts (text "TalkWithUs" to 66746) are answered by a network of independently-operated crisis centers around the country, who provide psychological first aid, emotional support, crisis assessment and intervention, and referrals to local/state behavioral health services for follow-up care & support. The helpline's SMS service is also available in Spanish. Text "Hablanos" to 66746 for emotional support.

Emergency Response Grant – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Funding for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Emergency Response Grant (SERG) is designed to meet emergency substance abuse and mental health needs for primary victims and their families in local communities that are a direct consequence of a precipitating event. SERG funding enables public entities to address these needs when existing resources are overwhelmed and other resources are unavailable. SERG monies are considered “funds of last resort” and cannot supplant or replace other existing funds. See Appendix A.

For more information:

Applicants should contact the SAMHSA Emergency Coordinator at (240) 276-2244 prior to applying.

Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program – Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

NOTE: Use of this program requires a Presidential Declaration of Disaster under the Stafford Act with Individual Assistance eligibility, therefore may not be an option for this event.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) implements the Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program (CCP) as a supplemental assistance program available to the United States and its territories. Section 416 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 1974 authorizes FEMA to fund mental health assistance and training activities in presidentially declared major disaster areas. SAMHSA Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) - Emergency Mental Health and Traumatic Stress Services Branch (EMHTSSB) works with FEMA through an interagency agreement to provide technical assistance, consultation, and training for state and local mental health personnel, grant administration, and program oversight.

The mission of the CCP is to assist individuals and communities in recovering from the effects of natural and human-caused disasters through the provision of community-based outreach and psycho-educational services. Three entities are eligible to apply for and receive CCP funding after a presidential disaster declaration: states, U.S. territories, and federally recognized tribes. The CCP supports short-term interventions that involve the counseling goals of assisting disaster survivors in understanding their current situation and reactions, mitigating stress, assisting survivors in reviewing their disaster recovery options, promoting the use or development of coping strategies, providing emotional support, and encouraging linkages with other individuals and agencies who may help survivors in their recovery process.

Supplemental funding for crisis counseling is available to state or territory mental health authorities through two grant mechanisms:

- The Immediate Services Program (ISP) which provides funds for up to 60 days of services immediately following a disaster declaration
- The Regular Services Program (RSP) which provides funds for up to 9 months following a disaster declaration

While SAMHSA provides technical assistance for an ISP, the monitoring responsibility remains with FEMA. FEMA has designated SAMHSA as the authority responsible for monitoring all RSP programs.

For more information, contact the SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center (DTAC) at 1-800-308-3515 or via email at DTAC@samhsa.hhs.gov

Resources

Disaster Behavioral Health

Coping with Stress Reactions After Mass Violence Events – American Red Cross

The Red Cross offers the topics to help people stay strong following mass violence events. The document is available in Appendix B.

SAMHSA Disaster App – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

The SAMHSA Disaster App makes it easy to provide quality support to survivors. Users can navigate pre-deployment preparation, on-the-ground assistance, post-deployment resources, and more—at the touch of a button from the home screen. Users also can share resources, like tips for helping survivors cope, and find local behavioral health services. And, self-care support for responders is available at all stages of deployment.

Disaster Kit – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Provides a toolkit for disaster recovery workers in mental health awareness.

Explaining the News to Our Kids – Common Sense Media

This resources provides tips for talking to children about distressing incidents they may see on the news or hear about in conversation.

Fact Sheets for Handling Traumatic Stress - Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress

This link provides access to numerous Fact Sheets and resources for leaders, providers, and others to understand how to manage traumatic stress following major disasters and incidents. Search by keyword or click the pre-selected topics.

Incidents of Mass Violence – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

This page is dedicated to Incidents of Mass Violence distress risk factors and warning signs, plus resources for coping that can be added to any online resource web page.

Managing Your Distress in the Aftermath of a Shooting – American Psychological Association

This page provides tips and strategies to identify and manage stress and feelings following a mass shooting.

Mental/Behavioral Health Topic Collection – ASPR TRACIE

This Topic Collection addresses the impact of post-disaster mental and behavioral health-related challenges on the healthcare system.

Responder Safety and Health Topic Collection – ASPR TRACIE

The resources in this Topic Collection focus on safety strategies (e.g., preventing fatigue, ensuring the availability and correct use of personal protective equipment) and maintaining behavioral health (e.g., working through stress and preventing/addressing compassion fatigue).

Select Disaster Behavioral Health Resources – ASPR TRACIE

Incorporating DBH into all phases of emergency management can ensure resident and responder preparedness, an effective, compassionate response effort, and a more resilient community moving forward. The resources on this page can help our stakeholders accomplish these goals.

Talking to Children about the Shooting – The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

This Tip Sheet provides information for caregivers to consider when talking to children about a shooting incident.

Tips for Survivors of a Disaster or Other Traumatic Event: Managing Stress – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

This resource provides stress prevention and management tips.

Tips for Talking With and Helping Children and Youth Cope After a Disaster or Traumatic Event: A Guide for Parents, Caregivers, and Teachers – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Helps parents and teachers recognize common reactions children of different age groups (preschool and early childhood to adolescence) experience after a disaster or traumatic event. Offers tips for how to respond in a helpful way and when to seek support.

Terrorism – The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

This is a compilation of resources for parents, caregivers, and educators regarding terrorism.

Mass Violence

Explosives and Mass Shooting Topic Collection – ASPR TRACIE

These resources can help emergency medical professionals plan for and respond to the changing nature of mass shootings or explosive events.

Helping Victims of Mass Violence and Terrorism: Planning, Response, Recovery and Resources – Office for Victims of Crime

The Office for Victims of Crime is holding a series of webinars in June 2016 to introduce the web-based toolkit Helping Victims of Mass Violence and Terrorism: Planning, Response, Recovery, and Resources to civic, government, and business sectors that are interested in developing a comprehensive victim assistance plan.

Spanish Translated Disaster Behavioral Health Materials

Ayudando a Niños y Adolescentes a Superar la Violencia y los Desastres: Que Pueden Hacer los Miembros de la Comunidad (Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disasters: What Community Members Can Do)

Ayudando a Niños y Adolescentes a Superar la Violencia y los Desastres: Que Pueden Hacer los Padres (Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disasters: What Parents Can Do)

Ayudando a Niños y Adolescentes a Superar la Violencia y los Desastres: Que Pueden Hacer los Trabajadores del Cuerpo de Rescate (Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disasters: What Rescue Workers Can Do)

Consejos para el personal de respuesta a desastres: Regreso al trabajo (Tips for Disaster Responders: Returning to Work)

Consejos para las familias del personal de respuesta a desastres que regresa a casa: Adaptación a la vida en el hogar (Tips for Families of Returning Disaster Responders: Adjusting to Life at Home)

Consejos para socorristas: Cómo entender la fatiga por compassion (Tips for Disaster Responders: Understanding Compassion Fatigue)

Consejos para socorristas: Cómo prevenir y manejar el estrés (Tips for Disaster Responders: Preventing and Managing Stress)

Consejos para socorristas: Cómo identificar el abuso de sustancias en la comunidad de socorristas (Tips for Disaster Responders: Identifying Substance Misuse in the Responder Community)

Consejos para sobrevivientes de un desastre u otro evento traumático: Manejo del estrés (Tips for Survivors of a Disaster or Other Traumatic Event: Managing Stress)

Consejos para estudiantes universitarios: Después de un desastre u otro tipo de trauma (Tips for College Students: After a Disaster or Other Trauma)

Sugerencias para hablar con niños y jóvenes y ayudarlos a hacer frente después de un desastre o un evento traumático: una guía para padres, cuidadores y maestros (Tips for Talking With and Helping Children and Youth Cope After a Disaster or Traumatic Event: A Guide for Parents, Caregivers, and Teachers)

Mentalhealth.gov in Spanish <https://espanol.mentalhealth.gov>

HIPPA Privacy Rule during a Disaster

[Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act \(HIPAA\) Privacy Rule: A Guide for Law Enforcement](#)

[Bulletin: HIPAA Privacy in Emergency Situations](#)

[HIPAA and Disasters: What Emergency Professionals Need to Know](#)

[HIPAA Privacy Rule: Disclosures for Emergency Preparedness – A Decision Tool](#)

[Health Information Privacy – Is HIPAA Privacy Rule Suspended during a National or Public Health Emergency?](#)

Other Disaster-Related Resources

Family Reunification and Support Topic Collection – ASPR TRACIE

Fatality Management Topic Collection – ASPR TRACIE

Healthcare-Related Disaster Legal/Regulatory/Federal Policy Topic Collection – ASPR TRACIE

Hospital Surge Capacity and Immediate Bed Availability Topic Collection – ASPR TRACIE

Mental/Behavioral Health Topic Collection – ASPR TRACIE

On-Scene Mass Casualty Triage and Trauma Care – ASPR TRACIE

Pre-Hospital Topic Collection – ASPR TRACIE

[HHS Response and Recovery Resources Compendium](#) – Department of Health and Human Services

Appendix A: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Emergency Response Grant (SERG) Fact Sheet

Purpose

Funding for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Emergency Response Grant (SERG) is designed to meet emergency substance abuse and mental health needs for primary victims and their families in local communities that are a direct consequence of a precipitating event. SERG funding enables public entities to address these needs when existing resources are overwhelmed and other resources are unavailable. SERG monies are considered "funds of last resort" and cannot supplant or replace other existing funds.

Eligibility

Eligible applicants are limited to public entities, which are defined as a State or Territory, political subdivision of a State, or a Federally recognized tribal government or organization. These entities may partner with other organizations to respond to the emergency situation; however, the eligible entity must submit the application.

The following criteria must be met to establish that an emergency exists:

- 1) Existing State, Tribal and local systems for mental health and/or substance abuse services are overwhelmed or unable to meet the existing needs of the local community impacted;
- 2) This inability to meet the mental health and/or substance abuse services needs is the direct consequence of a clear precipitating event; and
- 3) No other local, State, Tribal, Federal, or private funding is available to address the specific level of need resulting from the precipitating event and resulting in emergency mental health and/or substance abuse service needs of the impacted community.

SAMHSA does not have a specific appropriation for SERG. Instead, funds are tapped from existing programs not to exceed 2.5 percent of all amounts appropriated in a fiscal year. Therefore, SAMHSA reviews SERG applications with gravity knowing that other programs will sustain cuts to fund SERG.

Definition of a Precipitating Event

For the purposes of the SERG program, a precipitating event must have a sudden, rapid onset and a definite conclusion. Examples include natural disaster (e.g., hurricane, tornado, storm, flood, earthquake, fire, drought); technological disaster (e.g., chemical spill, major industrial accident, transportation accident); or a criminal act (e.g., act of terrorism, hostage situation, riot, incident of mass violence). Such incidents may result in significant death, injury, exposure to life-threatening circumstances, hardship, suffering, loss of property, or loss of community infrastructure.

Application Information

Applicants should contact the SAMHSA Emergency Coordinator at (240) 276-2244 prior to applying. The SAMHSA Emergency Coordinator will discuss application requirements and program parameters and provide the applicant with the application materials.

The Immediate SERG award is designed to be used over the initial 90-day period after the precipitating event, and provides for funding up to \$50,000. Because Immediate SERG funds must be expended within 90 days from the date of the emergency, the Immediate SERG application is due within 10 calendar days of the precipitating event.

The Intermediate SERG award is designed to meet the systemic substance abuse and/or mental health needs during the recovery period following the Immediate SERG award period. Intermediate awards have no predefined budget limit and are dependent on a justifying needs assessment and other data. The Intermediate SERG application is due within 90 days of the date of the emergency and may fund up to 1 year of services. An Immediate SERG is not a prerequisite to apply for an Intermediate SERG.

Other Federal Funding Sources

SAMHSA coordinates with other Federal agencies to avoid duplication of services. Other funding sources to consider include Federal Emergency Management Agency, Readiness, Response and Recovery Directorate; U.S. Department of

Appendix A: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Emergency Response Grant (SERG) Fact Sheet

Education, Safe and Drug Free Schools Program or School Emergency Response to Violence; U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime; U.S. Department of Transportation, National Transportation Safety Board; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Emergency Response Program; U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service; and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Indian Health Service.

Appendix B: American Red Cross Coping with Stress Reactions after a Mass Violence Event



COPING WITH STRESS REACTIONS AFTER A MASS VIOLENCE EVENT

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

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

Practice Psychological First Aid with each other:

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

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

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

Appendix B: American Red Cross

Coping with Stress Reactions after a Mass Violence Event

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

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

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

Source: *Coping in Today's World: Psychological First Aid for Friends and Neighbors*, American Red Cross, 2010
 Coping with Stress after Mass Violence Events
 Rev. June 2016





AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

How to talk to children about difficult news

Children's lives are touched by trauma on a regular basis, no matter how much parents or teachers try to keep the "bad things" away. Instead of shielding children from the dangers, violence or tragedies around us, adults should talk to kids about what is happening.

The conversation may not seem easy, but taking a proactive stance, discussing difficult events in age-appropriate language can help a child feel safer and more secure.

As much as adults may try to avoid difficult topics, children often learn or know when something sad or scary happens. If adults don't talk to them about it, a child may overestimate what is wrong or misunderstand adults' silence. So, be the first to bring up the difficult topic. When parents tackle difficult conversations, they let their children know that they are available and supportive.

Guide the conversation

Think about what you want to say. It's OK to practice in your head, to a mirror or with another adult. Some advanced planning may make the discussion easier. You won't have to think about it off the top of your head.

Find a quiet moment. Perhaps this is after dinner or while making the next day's lunch. This is time and place where your children can be the center of your attention.

Find out what they know. For example, there was a shooting at a school or a bomb set off in another country. Ask them "What have you heard about this?" And then listen. Listen. Listen. And listen more.

Share your feelings with your child. It is OK to acknowledge your feelings with your children. They see you are human. They also get a chance to see that even though upset, you can pull yourself together and continue on. Parents hear it often: Be a role model. This applies to emotions, too.

Tell the truth. Lay out the facts at a level they can understand. You do not need to give graphic details.

For young children, you may need to have the conversation about what death means (no longer feel anything, not hungry, thirsty, scared, or hurting; we will never see them again, but can hold their memories in our hearts and heads).

Say, "I don't know." Sometimes the answer to the question is "I don't know." "Why did the bad people do this?" "I don't know" fits.

Above all, reassure. At the end of the conversation, reassure your children that you will do everything you know how to do to keep them safe and to watch out for them. Reassure them that

you will be available to answer any questions or talk about this topic again in the future. Reassure them that they are loved.

Take care of yourself

Talking about and experiencing difficult news and tragedies can be exhausting. Don't forget to take care of yourself:

- Turn off the news.
- Take a break.
- Engage in physical activity.
- Do something that will lift your spirits and those of your family.

Seek professional help

These tips and strategies can help you guide your children through the current crisis. If you are feeling stuck, overwhelmed or your child shows persistent signs of stress or agitation, you may want to consider talking to someone who could help. A licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can assist you in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward. To find a psychologist in your area, visit the Psychologist Locator (<http://locator.apa.org/>)

Additional resources

- Disaster Distress Hotline (<http://www.disasterdistress.samhsa.gov/>) - SAMHSA.gov
- Listen, Protect, Connect – Psychological First Aid for Teacher & Students (<http://1.usa.gov/U0hv1f>) (PDF, 2MB) - Ready.gov
- Tips for Talking With and Helping Children and Youth Cope After a Disaster or Traumatic Event – a guide for parents, caregivers, and teachers (<http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA12-4732/SMA12-4732.pdf>) (PDF, 300KB) - SAMHSA.gov
- Helpful Hints for School Emergency Management: Psychological First Aid for Students and Teachers: Listen, Protect, Connect – Model & Teach (http://rems.ed.gov/docs/HH_Vol3Issue3.pdf) (PDF, 430KB) - U.S. Department of Education
- Explaining the News to Our Kids (<http://www.common sense media.org/advice-for-parents/explaining-news-our-kids>) - CommonSenseMedia.org
- Children & Grief: Guidance and Support Resources (<http://www.scholastic.com/childrenandgrief/>) - Scholastic.com
- The Road to Resilience (<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>) - APA.org

Thanks to Robin Gurwitch, PhD, who assisted with this article.
Published November 2015

The full text of articles from APA Help Center may be reproduced and distributed for noncommercial purposes with credit given to the American Psychological Association. Any electronic reproductions must link to the original article on the APA Help Center. Any exceptions to this, including excerpting, paraphrasing or reproduction in a commercial work, must be presented in writing to the APA. (mailto:permissions@apa.org) Images from the APA Help Center may not be reproduced.

Find this article at:

<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/talking-to-children>



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Managing your distress in the aftermath of a shooting

Managing Your Distress in the Aftermath of a Mass Shooting

You may be struggling to understand how a shooting could occur and why such a terrible thing would happen. There may never be satisfactory answers to these questions.

We do know, though, that it is typical for people to experience a variety of emotions following such a traumatic event. These feelings can include shock, sorrow, numbness, fear, anger, disillusionment, grief and others. You may find that you have trouble sleeping, concentrating, eating or remembering even simple tasks. This is common and should pass after a while. Over time, the caring support of family and friends can help to lessen the emotional impact and ultimately make the changes brought about by the tragedy more manageable. You may feel that the world is a more dangerous place today than you did yesterday. It will take some time to recover your sense of equilibrium.

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

Here are some tips:

- **Talk about it.** Ask for support from people who care about you and who will listen to your concerns. Receiving support and care can be comforting and reassuring. It often helps to speak with others who have shared your experience so you do not feel so different or alone.
- **Strive for balance.** When a tragedy occurs, it's easy to become overwhelmed and have a negative or pessimistic outlook. Balance that viewpoint by reminding yourself of people and events which are meaningful and comforting, even encouraging. Striving for balance empowers you and allows for a healthier perspective on yourself and the world around you.
- **Turn it off and take a break.** You may want to keep informed, but try to limit the amount of news you take in whether it's from the Internet, television, newspapers or magazines. While getting the news informs you, being overexposed to it can actually increase your stress. The images can be very powerful in reawakening your feeling of distress. Also, schedule some breaks to distract yourself from thinking about the incident and focus instead on something you enjoy. Try to do something that will lift your spirits.
- **Honor your feelings.** Remember that it is common to have a range of emotions after a traumatic incident. You may experience intense stress similar to the effects of a physical injury. For

example, you may feel exhausted, sore or off balance.

- **Take care of yourself.** Engage in healthy behaviors to enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress. Eat well-balanced meals, get plenty of rest and build physical activity into your day. Avoid alcohol and drugs because they can suppress your feelings rather than help you to manage and lessen your distress. In addition, alcohol and drugs may intensify your emotional or physical pain. Establish or re-establish routines such as eating meals at regular times and following an exercise program. If you are having trouble sleeping, try some relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation or yoga.
- **Help others or do something productive.** Locate resources in your community on ways that you can help people who have been affected by this incident, or have other needs. Helping someone else often has the benefit of making you feel better, too.
- **If you have recently lost friends or family in this or other tragedies.** Remember that grief is a long process. Give yourself time to experience your feelings and to recover. For some, this might involve staying at home; for others it may mean getting back to your daily routine. Dealing with the shock and trauma of such an event will take time. It is typical to expect many ups and downs, including "survivor guilt" — feeling bad that you escaped the tragedy while others did not.

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

Recovering from such a tragic event may seem difficult to imagine. Persevere and trust in your ability to get through the challenging days ahead. Taking the steps in this guide can help you cope at this very difficult time.

This tip sheet was made possible with help from the following APA members: Dewey Cornell, PhD, Richard A. Heaps, PhD, Jana Martin, PhD, H. Katherine O'Neill, PhD, Karen Settle, PhD, Peter Sheras, PhD, Phyllis Koch-Sheras, PhD, and members of Div. 17.

The full text of articles from APA Help Center may be reproduced and distributed for noncommercial purposes with credit given to the American Psychological Association. Any electronic reproductions must link to the original article on the APA Help Center. Any exceptions to this, including excerpting, paraphrasing or reproduction in a commercial work, must be presented in writing to the APA. (mailto:permissions@apa.org)
Images from the APA Help Center may not be reproduced.

Find this article at:

<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/mass-shooting>

COPING IN THE AFTERMATH OF A SHOOTING

Over the course of the last few weeks, reports of mass violence and shootings have plagued the news. Although people are resilient and often bounce back after difficult times, these events nearly always interrupt our sense of order and safety. The impact often extends to individuals who live far outside of the affected area with no personal connections to the event. This is especially true when the event is human-caused with the intent of harming others. Even counselors with advanced training can become overwhelmed by the intensity of these tragic events. In the aftermath of recent shootings, ACA would like to provide some tips and resources for counselors and those they serve:

- **Attend to self care.** While it may seem counterintuitive to think about taking care of yourself first, you cannot be of service to others if you are unstable. Monitor all of your physical health needs - being sure to eat, sleep, exercise, and (if possible) maintain a normal daily routine.
- **Pay attention to your emotional health.** Remember that a wide range of feelings during these difficult times are common. Know that others are also experiencing emotional reactions and may need your time and patience to put their feelings and thoughts in order.
- **Try to recognize when you or those around you may need extra support.** It is not uncommon for individuals of all ages to experience stress reactions when exposed (even through media) to shootings or mass violence. Changes in eating and sleeping habits, energy level, and mood are important signs of distress. Watch for regressed behaviors, such as clinging in children and intense emotional reactions, such as anxiety or a strong need for retribution in adults. When necessary, point individuals to licensed professional counselors who can provide needed support.
- **Avoid overexposure to media.** While it is important to stay informed, media portrayals of shootings and mass deaths have been shown to cause acute stress and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Limit your exposure and take a break from news sources.
- **Maintain contact with friends and family.** These individuals can provide you with emotional support to help deal with difficult times.
- **Focus on your strength base.** Maintain practices that you have found to provide emotional relief. Remind yourself of people and events which are meaningful and comforting.
- **Talk to others as needed.** It is important to ask for help if you are having trouble recovering and everyday tasks seem difficult to manage.

Here are some resources counselors can use to find out more about coping with mass violence:

ACA Disaster Mental Health Resources: <http://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/trauma-disaster>

ACA has numerous disaster mental health resources which help familiarize counselors with some of the skills needed for working with survivors. Some useful fact sheets for crisis and disaster response:

- Helping Survivors with Stress Management Skills
- Disaster and Trauma Responses of Children
- Disaster and Trauma Effects on Parents

National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder:

Impact of mass shootings on survivors, families and communities: <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/newsletters/research-quarterly/V18N3.pdf>

Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration

Coping with Mass Violence and Shooting: <http://www.samhsa.gov/trauma/>

The National Institute of Mental Health: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/coping-with-traumatic-events/index.shtml>

The National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov

Coping with Traumatic Events

Overview

A traumatic event is a shocking, scary, or dangerous experience that affects someone emotionally. These situations may be natural, like a tornado or earthquake. They can also be caused by other people, like a car accident, crime, or terror attack.

How individuals respond to traumatic events is an important area of research for the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). Researchers are exploring the factors that help people cope as well as the factors that increase their risk for problems following the event.

Warning Signs

There are many different responses to potentially traumatic events. Most people have intense responses immediately following, and often for several weeks or even months after, a traumatic event. These responses can include:

- Feeling anxious, sad, or angry
- Trouble concentrating and sleeping
- Continually thinking about what happened

For most people, these are normal and expected responses and generally lessen with time. Healthy ways of coping in this time period include avoiding alcohol and other drugs, spending time with loved ones and trusted friends who are supportive, trying to maintain normal routines for meals, exercise, and sleep. In general, staying active is a good way to cope with stressful feelings.

However, in some cases, the stressful thoughts and feelings after a trauma continue for a long time and interfere with everyday life. For people who continue to feel the effects of the trauma, it is important to seek professional help. Some signs that an individual may need help include:

- Worrying a lot or feeling very anxious, sad, or fearful
- Crying often
- Having trouble thinking clearly
- Having frightening thoughts, reliving the experience
- Feeling angry
- Having nightmares or difficulty sleeping
- Avoiding places or people that bring back disturbing memories and responses.

Physical responses to trauma may also mean that an individual needs help. Physical symptoms may include:

- Headaches
- Stomach pain and digestive issues
- Feeling tired
- Racing heart and sweating
- Being very jumpy and easily startled

Those who already had mental health problems or who have had traumatic experiences in the past, who are faced with ongoing stress, or who lack support from friends and family may be more likely to develop stronger symptoms

and need additional help. Some people turn to alcohol or other drugs to cope with their symptoms. Although substance use can temporarily cover up symptoms, it can also make life more difficult.

Mental health problems can be treated. If you or someone you know needs help, talk with your health care provider. If you are unsure where to go for help [visit NIMH's Help for Mental Illness](#) webpage.

Learn More

Health Topics

[Anxiety Disorders](#)

[Depression](#)

[Find Help for Mental Illnesses](#)

[Medications](#)

[Post-traumatic Stress Disorder \(PTSD\)](#)

[Psychotherapies](#)

[Statistics on Mental Health](#)

[Substance Use and Mental Health](#)

[Suicide Prevention](#)

Federal Resources

[Find Help for Service Members and Their Families](#) (Department of Health and Human Services)

[MedlinePlus](#) (National Library of Medicine)

[MedlinePlus, en Español](#), (Biblioteca Nacional de Medicina)

[National Center for PTSD](#) (Department of Veterans Affairs)

[Public Health Emergency Page](#) (Department of Health and Human Services)

[Resources for Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery](#) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

Free Brochures and Factsheets

[Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Disasters and Other Traumatic Events: What Parents, Rescue Works, and the Community Can Do](#)
[Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](#)

Multimedia

[Dr. Sandro Galea talks about disasters and mental health research](#) (2011)

[Dr. Robert Heinssen and Dr. Farris Tuma talk about traumatic stress in the military](#). (2009)

Health Hotlines

[Disaster Distress Helpline](#): People affected by any disaster or tragedy can call the Disaster Distress Helpline to receive immediate counseling. Calling 1-800-985-5990 or texting **TalkWithUs** to **66746** will connect you to a trained professional from the closest crisis counseling center within the network. The hotline is sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

[Crisis Text Line](#) : help is available 24 hours a day throughout the US by texting **START** to 741741

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) : If you or someone you know is in a crisis, get help immediately. You can call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Line at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**. The lifeline is a free 24-

hour, confidential suicide prevention hotline available to anyone in crisis or emotional distress. By calling the hotline number, you'll be connected to a skilled, trained counselor at a crisis center in your area 24/7. Veterans Chat (confidential), **text to 838255** (part of the Veterans Crisis Line)

Last Revised: February 2017

Unless otherwise specified, NIMH information and publications are in the public domain and available for use free of charge. Citation of the NIMH is appreciated. Please see our Citing NIMH Information and Publications page for more information.

The National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov

Coping with Traumatic Events

Overview

A traumatic event is a shocking, scary, or dangerous experience that affects someone emotionally. These situations may be natural, like a tornado or earthquake. They can also be caused by other people, like a car accident, crime, or terror attack.

How individuals respond to traumatic events is an important area of research for the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). Researchers are exploring the factors that help people cope as well as the factors that increase their risk for problems following the event.

Warning Signs

There are many different responses to potentially traumatic events. Most people have intense responses immediately following, and often for several weeks or even months after, a traumatic event. These responses can include:

- Feeling anxious, sad, or angry
- Trouble concentrating and sleeping
- Continually thinking about what happened

For most people, these are normal and expected responses and generally lessen with time. Healthy ways of coping in this time period include avoiding alcohol and other drugs, spending time with loved ones and trusted friends who are supportive, trying to maintain normal routines for meals, exercise, and sleep. In general, staying active is a good way to cope with stressful feelings.

However, in some cases, the stressful thoughts and feelings after a trauma continue for a long time and interfere with everyday life. For people who continue to feel the effects of the trauma, it is important to seek professional help. Some signs that an individual may need help include:

- Worrying a lot or feeling very anxious, sad, or fearful
- Crying often
- Having trouble thinking clearly
- Having frightening thoughts, reliving the experience
- Feeling angry
- Having nightmares or difficulty sleeping
- Avoiding places or people that bring back disturbing memories and responses.

Physical responses to trauma may also mean that an individual needs help. Physical symptoms may include:

- Headaches
- Stomach pain and digestive issues

Feeling tired
Racing heart and sweating
Being very jumpy and easily startled

Those who already had mental health problems or who have had traumatic experiences in the past, who are faced with ongoing stress, or who lack support from friends and family may be more likely to develop stronger symptoms and need additional help. Some people turn to alcohol or other drugs to cope with their symptoms. Although substance use can temporarily cover up symptoms, it can also make life more difficult.

Mental health problems can be treated. If you or someone you know needs help, talk with your health care provider. If you are unsure where to go for help [visit NIMH's Help for Mental Illness](#) webpage.

Learn More

Health Topics

[Anxiety Disorders \(www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml\)](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml)

[Depression \(www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml\)](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml)

[Find Help for Mental Illnesses \(www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help/index.shtml\)](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help/index.shtml)

[Medications \(www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/mental-health-medications/index.shtml\)](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/mental-health-medications/index.shtml)

[Post-traumatic Stress Disorder \(PTSD\) \(www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml\)](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml)

[Psychotherapies \(www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/psychotherapies/index.shtml\)](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/psychotherapies/index.shtml)

[Statistics on Mental Health \(www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/index.shtml\)](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/index.shtml)

[Substance Use and Mental Health \(www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/substance-use-and-mental-health/index.shtml\)](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/substance-use-and-mental-health/index.shtml)

[Suicide Prevention \(www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/index.shtml\)](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/index.shtml)

Federal Resources

[Find Help for Service Members and Their Families](#) (Department of Health and Human Services)

[MedlinePlus](#) (National Library of Medicine)

[MedlinePlus, en Español](#), (Biblioteca Nacional de Medicina)

[National Center for PTSD](#) (Department of Veterans Affairs)

[Public Health Emergency Page](#) (Department of Health and Human Services)

[Resources for Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery](#) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

Free Brochures and Factsheets

[Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Disasters and Other Traumatic Events: What Parents, Rescue Works, and the Community Can Do](#) (www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/helping-children-and-adolescents-cope-with-disasters-and-other-traumatic-events/index.shtml)

[Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](#) (www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml)

Multimedia

[Dr. Sandro Galea talks about disasters and mental health research](#) (www.nimh.nih.gov/archive/media/2011/disasters-and-mental-health-research.shtml) (2011)

[Dr. Robert Heinssen and Dr. Farris Tuma talk about traumatic stress in the military](#) (www.nimh.nih.gov/archive/media/2009/tuma.shtml) (2009)

Health Hotlines

Disaster Distress Helpline: People affected by any disaster or tragedy can call the Disaster Distress Helpline to receive immediate counseling. Calling 1-800-985-5990 or texting **TalkWithUs** to **66746** will connect you to a trained professional from the closest crisis counseling center within the network. The hotline is sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Crisis Text Line: help is available 24 hours a day throughout the US by texting **START** to 741741

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: If you or someone you know is in a crisis, get help immediately. You can call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Line at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**. The lifeline is a free 24-hour, confidential suicide prevention hotline available to anyone in crisis or emotional distress. By calling the hotline number, you'll be connected to a skilled, trained counselor at a crisis center in your area 24/7.

Veterans Chat (confidential), **text to 838255** (part of the **Veterans Crisis Line**)

Last Revised: February 2017

Unless otherwise specified, NIMH information and publications are in the public domain and available for use free of charge. Citation of the NIMH is appreciated. Please see our [Citing NIMH Information and Publications](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/site-info/citing-nimh-information-and-publications.shtml) (www.nimh.nih.gov/site-info/citing-nimh-information-and-publications.shtml), page for more information.

Science News About Coping with Traumatic Events



Celebrity Suicides Stress Crisis Services (www.nimh.nih.gov/news/science-news/2019/crisis-and-suicide-prevention-services-struggle-with-demand-after-celebrity-suicides.shtml)



An Asian American Family's Story of Resilience (www.nimh.nih.gov/news/science-news/2016/coping-with-familial-mental-illness-in-stressful-times.shtml)

Featured Publications About Coping with Traumatic Events

[More Publications About Coping with Traumatic Events](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/trauma-listing.shtml) (www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/trauma-listing.shtml)

Coping with Traumatic Events Research

[PubMed: Journal Articles About Coping with Traumatic Events](#)

Contact Us

The National Institute of Mental Health Information Resource Center

Available in English and Español

Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. eastern time, M-F

Phone: [1-866-615-6464](tel:1-866-615-6464)

TTY: [1-301-443-8431](tel:1-301-443-8431)

TTY (toll-free): [1-866-415-8051](tel:1-866-415-8051)

Live Online Chat: [Talk to a representative](#)

Email: nimhinfo@nih.gov

Fax: 1-301-443-4279

Mail: National Institute of Mental Health
Office of Science Policy, Planning, and Communications
6001 Executive Boulevard, Room 6200, MSC 9663
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663

Follow Us

[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [YouTube](#) [NIMH Newsletter \(www.nimh.nih.gov/news/e-mail-newsletters/index.shtml\)](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/e-mail-newsletters/index.shtml) [NIMH RSS Feed \(www.nimh.nih.gov/news/web-channels/index.shtml\)](#) [NIMH Widget \(www.nimh.nih.gov/widgets/index.shtml\)](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/widgets/index.shtml)

Subscribe to NIMH Email Updates

Type email address... Type email address...

Subscribe