

# MANAGING DISTRESS

## After a Violent Attack

It seems like the world is becoming an increasingly dangerous place. We hear about bombings in public places, random shootings, and other reports of unpredictable, senseless violence against innocent people. This recent incident reminds us again of how vulnerable we are. We can experience a range of emotions from grief to anger to fear. These emotions can deepen with each new report.

This handout offers some strategies to help manage these difficult feelings. The violence may have occurred in your community, or to someone you know, or come into your world via the media. Anyone who has been directly impacted by a violent act may want to seek professional help or support services. These services can be accessed through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

### Support your natural resilience

- > **Allow your feelings.** Don't try to ignore or deny them. You may feel grief, anger, anxiety, exhaustion, or something else. You may just feel numb. These are all normal reactions. Talking about them with people who care about you can help you process the emotional fallout after an unsettling event. Cry if you need to. Some people find it helpful to let feelings flow out on paper or address them in some creative way, such as painting or music.
- > **Balance your thoughts.** When feeling overwhelmed by tragic events, it's easy to forget the good in the world. Try to balance feelings of pessimism by deliberately thinking about acts of goodness and kindness that people are doing every day. Adding some balance to your viewpoint can help when you feel the world is in a dark place.
- > **Minimize your exposure to news media.** Once you have the facts, it's a good idea to limit watching replays of the events. While it's important to stay informed, constant exposure may add to feelings of distress. Try to give yourself a break from the tragedy and thoughts and feelings stirred up by emotional news stories.
- > **Focus on what you do have control over.** The images we see, the stories we hear, and our own thoughts about what happened can increase our anxiety. It can make you feel overwhelmed and helpless. Try to bring your focus to what you can control, such as learning how to respond in the face of danger. Or how you might respond in a meaningful way, such as volunteering or making a donation.
- > **Turn to others for support.** Being alone with your thoughts and emotions means there is no other voice in the conversation. Others offer different perspectives, while giving you a chance to talk about how you feel. This can bring comfort and help you move forward. It can be especially helpful to talk to others who've shared the same experience.
- > **Tap into your compassion.** Reaching out and supporting others can shift your mental and emotional focus. Doing helpful things and offering kindness to others can open your heart and renew your spirit. It can be a powerful antidote to the inhumanity of violent attacks.

- > **Understand what is being done to protect your community.** The more you know about what has happened, the more effective steps you can take to minimize your risk and increase your sense of safety. Make sure you are getting your information from a reputable source, such as the Department of Homeland Security. Be sure to follow all directions from state and local authorities, including law enforcement.
- > **Move from fear to awareness.** Being constantly fearful is not helpful. It can actually limit awareness. Awareness – paying attention to your surroundings, and noticing anything unusual about people and their behavior – is helpful. Fear is a focus on what *could* happen, which can leave you less aware of what *is* happening. A sudden feeling of fear is an important clue that something may be wrong. If you are always fearful, that sudden feeling can't emerge as a clue.
- > **Maintain a normal routine and lifestyle as much as possible.** When an attack occurs, life can feel chaotic in many ways. The structure and predictability of doing daily tasks helps us to *feel* normal by *acting* normal. For many it can be emotionally liberating to stand up to fear in this simple but powerful way.
- > **Feeling physically strong can help you feel emotionally strong.** Make sure you get enough sleep to feel well rested. Eat a healthy diet. Exercise and being physically active can reduce stress. Avoid overuse of alcohol and/or substances.
- > **Give yourself a break.** It may be hard to focus and concentrate at times after a traumatic event. Your energy level may be low. Be patient with yourself. Don't overload your schedule. Give yourself a little more time to do tasks.
- > **Try relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or meditation,** when emotions run high. Even taking a short time-out to bring your thoughts to the here and now can help. These gentle techniques can help calm the physical symptoms of anxiety and slow down racing thoughts.

## Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is here to help

If you're having a difficult time managing your thoughts and feelings, your EAP is here to support you. You can call your EAP and ask for a telephone consult. You will be connected to a professional who will be able to help you with your reactions.



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