

## MANAGING YOUR DISTRESS IN THE AFTERMATH OF A SHOOTING (AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION)

### Tips for Coping

- **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.

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.

*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 with credit given to the American Psychological Association.*



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- **Help others.** 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.

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.

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 or counselor can assist you in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward. **It is important to get professional help 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.

### What if these feelings won't go away?

If you recently experienced a traumatic event, feelings of shock, grief, sorrow, numbness, fear or anger are part of a natural and normal reaction.

However, if these feelings persist, intensify, or seem severe, please seek help. Resources you may turn to include your doctor or primary health care provider, community-based bereavement programs, counseling services, a faith-based group, or the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

EAP services are confidential and are provided by your employer at no cost to you. Employees and their dependent family members are eligible for EAP services.

For further assistance through the EAP, please contact ESPYR at **800-869-0276**.

You may speak with an EAP counselor or arrange in-person EAP counseling. You may also securely request EAP services from the website: [www.espyr.com](http://www.espyr.com).

Your password is: **interioreap**

More information about the Employee Assistance Program is also available at this website and on the ESPYR app