

# Dealing with the Trauma

## After a Shooting



You may be struggling to understand how a shooting could occur and why such a terrible thing would happen. 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.

Shootings are unpredictable and uncontrollable. Situations that are perceived as unpredictable and uncontrollable are much more likely to bring on high levels of helplessness, anxiety, and fear.

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 can strengthen your resilience—the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity—in the days and weeks ahead. Here are some suggested tips:

**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.

**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.

Many of the symptoms that may arise, such as being on edge and constantly on guard, are actually part of your body's natural and adaptive response to a highly stressful event. For many people, these symptoms will naturally decline over time. However, for some, these symptoms may persist and get worse.

A trauma-focused therapist can help you understand how you are thinking about the trauma and how to shift it into more helpful thinking.

**Your Employee Assistance Program offers you and your family confidential support at no-cost.**

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