

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.

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.

Disaster Distress Helpline

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

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**Call 1-800-985-5990
or text 'TalkWithUs' to 66746**
to get help and support
for any distress that you or someone
you care about may be feeling
related to any disaster.

The **Helpline** and **Text Service** are:

- Available 24 hours a day,
7 days a week, year-round
- Free (standard data/text messaging
rates may apply for the texting service)
- Answered by trained crisis counselors.

TTY for Deaf / Hearing Impaired:
1-800-846-8517

Spanish-speakers:
Text "Hablanos" to 66746

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



*"Ever since the tornado,
I haven't been able to get a full
night's sleep ..."*

*"I can't get the sounds of
the gunshots out of my mind..."*

*"Things haven't been the same
since my shop was flooded ..."*

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1-800-985-5990

 **Text:**
'TalkWithUs' to 66746

 **Visit:**
<http://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>

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Administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Dept. of Health
and Human Services (HHS).

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Disasters have the potential to cause *emotional distress*.

Some are more at risk than others:

- Survivors living or working in the impacted areas (youth & adults)
- Loved ones of victims
- First Responders, Rescue & Recovery Workers.

Stress, anxiety, and depression are common reactions after a disaster.

Warning signs of distress may include:

- Sleeping too much or too little
- Stomachaches or headaches
- Anger, feeling edgy or lashing out at others
- Overwhelming sadness
- Worrying a lot of the time; feeling guilty but not sure why
- Feeling like you have to keep busy
- Lack of energy or always feeling tired
- Drinking alcohol, smoking or using tobacco more than usual; using illegal drugs
- Eating too much or too little
- Not connecting with others
- Feeling like you won't ever be happy again.

TIPS FOR COPING WITH STRESS AFTER A DISASTER:

Take care of yourself. Try to eat healthy, avoid using alcohol and drugs, and get some exercise when you can- even a walk around the block can make a difference.

Reach out to friends and family. Talk to someone you trust about how you are doing.

Talk to your children. They may feel scared, angry, sad, worried, and confused. Let them know it's okay to talk about what's on their mind. Limit their watching of TV news reports about the disaster. Help children and teens maintain normal routines to the extent possible. Role model healthy coping.

Get enough 'good' sleep. Some people have trouble falling asleep after a disaster, others keep waking up during the night.

If you have trouble sleeping:

- Only go to bed when you are ready to sleep
- Don't watch TV or use your cell phone or laptop computer while you're in bed
- Avoid eating (especially sugar) or drinking caffeine or alcohol at least one hour before going to bed
- If you wake up and can't fall back to sleep, try writing in a journal or on a sheet of paper what's on your mind.

Take care of pets or get outside into nature when it's safe. Nature and animals can help us to feel better when we are down. See if you can volunteer at a local animal shelter- they may need help after a disaster. Once it's safe to return to public parks or natural areas, find a quiet spot to sit in or go for a hike.



Know when to ask for help. Signs of stress can be normal, short-term reactions to any of life's unexpected events- not only after surviving a disaster, but also after a death in the family, the loss of a job, or a breakup.

It's important to pay attention to what's going on with you or with someone you care about, because what may seem like "everyday stress" can actually be:

- Depression (including having thoughts of suicide)
- Anxiety
- Alcohol or Drug Abuse.

If you or someone you know may be depressed, suffering from overwhelming feelings of anxiety, or possibly abusing alcohol or drugs ...

Call 1-800-985-5990 or text 'TalkWithUs' to 66746.

You Are Not Alone.



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.

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