

Coping With News of Tragic and Traumatic Events

Recent reports of protests, shootings, and unrest—whether they hit close to home or far away—may increase feelings of stress, worry, and anxiety. Even if you were not directly impacted by these events, you or family members may be experiencing difficult or painful emotions

Recognizing the normal and natural reactions to traumatic events is the first step to being able to cope with the personal aftermath of trauma. The following information will help you understand the reactions you may be experiencing right now and may encounter in the coming days and weeks, and includes helpful strategies to help you get through this challenging period.

Different stages of coping

- Immediately after the experience, you are likely to be in shock, experiencing numbness and feeling out of touch with reality.
- You may become fearful and feel exhausted. This may last a few days, a week, or even longer.
- After a while, you may believe you have mastered your feelings, but later find that the same early emotions keep returning from time to time. Some people describe this feeling as though they are on an emotional roller coaster. Gradually, feelings of fear decrease in intensity and return less frequently.
- You begin to move forward and feel that you are coping well.

Common reactions

Some common reactions can include:

- Feeling exhausted for no particular reason

- Difficult or broken sleep patterns
- Lack of energy for normal activities
- Difficulty concentrating on or remember everyday tasks
- Feeling that the normal demands of work and home are overwhelming
- Easily irritated by little things, such as noise
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs, particularly in reaction to difficult emotions or for help in falling asleep

Learning to cope

Be sure you take good care of yourself. Do your best to:

- Engage in activities you enjoy
- Spend time with good friends and loved ones
- Eat healthy foods and get plenty of rest
- Talk to others who have experienced or are experiencing a similar event.
- Reach out to spiritual leaders and doctors who can also provide good sources of support
- Talk about your feelings with family and friends and share the above information with them so they can also understand your experience
- Talk to others who experienced or are experiencing the event as they may have similar feelings and insight

Tips for constructively dealing with bad news

- **Take a break from the news.** Set aside a designated time daily for reading the news and limit it to that. Focusing too much on negative events leads to a sense of helplessness that carries over to other parts of your life. It can also lead to a sense of discouragement and hopelessness. There's no need to hide from the news, but don't make it the focus of your day. If you do, you risk letting negativity take control.
- **Alleviate stress and talk about it.** If something in the news deeply disturbs you, talk about it with someone you trust. Getting your feelings out in the open is therapeutic and helps to alleviate stress. If you want to keep it private, write it down

in a journal. You can also call one of the caring counselors at your employee assistance program who can speak to you about anxiety and worry due to tragic events.