

# Experiencing Acts of Violence

## Recovery and Coping Strategies



**The trauma caused by acts of violence can and most often will have a significant emotional impact on people. The combination of atrocity and magnitude of the event, coupled with its unpredictability, will often lead to an intense feeling of vulnerability for our own safety and the safety of others.**

Although we all react in different ways, there is a commonality in that we will most likely initially experience a strong or perhaps overwhelming sense of shock, disbelief and fear. Initial and subsequent reactions may depend on the scale of the incident, degree to which you have been impacted and your exposure to the incident itself.

Your reactions may also depend on current life stressors and previous life experiences.

### **What possible reactions might be experienced?**

Experiencing major traumatic events typically result in a range of moderate to overwhelming anxiety and stress reactions for those individuals directly impacted. Some of the more common reactions you might experience could include:

- **Overwhelming feelings** that may become unpredictable – you may feel shaken up, fearful, anxious, irritable, easily startled and experience mood swings.
- **Headaches, muscle tension, nausea,** gastrointestinal symptoms and fatigue.
- **Intrusive and recurring unpleasant images,** that may also be accompanied by physiological reactions such as sweating and rapid heartbeat.

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- **Difficulties concentrating**, making decisions or becoming easily disoriented.
- **Moderate to major disruption with your sleeping** and eating patterns.
- **Becoming withdrawn and isolated**, avoiding others and disengaging from normal life activities.

### What can you do to take care of yourself?

- **Engage in calming self-talk**, minimize negative thoughts and preserve your balance as much as possible.
- **Prioritize all personal safety** and health needs.
- **Actively seek the support of others** who care about you by reaching out and talking with colleagues, family and friends.
- **Communicate your experience in whatever way feels comfortable**; inform those close to you what would be most helpful to you during this difficult time.
- **Take good care of yourself** by eating at regular intervals, obtaining as much rest and sleep as you can.
- **Resume normal routines** as quickly as possible.
- **Stay active and engage in** light exercise even though it may be difficult.
- **Listen attentively to your body's needs** and always follow your instincts regarding personal self-care.
- **Attempt to restore your own sense of personal control and self-confidence** in your ability to manage this crisis. In this way, you can also help others in need of your support.

### Remember...

Grieving, overcoming anxiety and managing your reactions may take time and this time can vary from one person to another. Recognize that people are inherently resilient; that we all have the ability to cope with difficult, stressful life experiences. Individuals who take good care of themselves and who obtain professional support (if and when needed) will experience diminished symptoms and recover over time.

If you or a colleague continue to experience significant distress, difficulty coping caused by the aftermath of such an event, feel free to contact your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP). Sometimes just talking to an EFAP professional can help you regain a healthy perspective regarding your ability to cope with aftermath of the traumatic event you have experienced. Access to Homewood Health is available to you and your family 24/7, 365 days per year.

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