

COPING WITH VIOLENCE

In the Community

With community violence in the news, more of us are experiencing increased anxiety and fear as we go about our daily lives. If this sense of fear is ongoing or we are in close proximity to violence, we can find ourselves constantly reacting to a high level of stress. This may result in decreased productivity at work and can have a traumatic impact on our daily living.

Coping with fear and other difficult emotions

If you are feeling increased fear, anxiety or other intense emotions as a result of high profile crimes or violence being discussed in the media or happening in your community, the following tips may be helpful.

- > **Get reliable information.** One of the best ways to manage fear is to understand what is being done to protect your community. The more we know about the current situation, the more effective steps we can take to minimize our risk. Be sure to get information from a reputable source. Know and follow all directions from state and local authorities.
- > **Be aware.** When you are in a situation where there is potential violence, it's important to remain vigilant. Pay attention to your surroundings; have a plan for seeking shelter if needed.
- > **Focus on what you do have control over.** The images we see on social media and television, along with the stories we hear and our own thoughts about violence, can increase our anxiety. Think about what you can control and how you can reduce your risk of being a victim. This may include avoiding an area where violence is occurring. You may want to review your workplace safety plan and discuss safety with your family and friends.
- > **Minimize your exposure to media.** Once you have the facts, it's a good idea to limit watching replays of the events. While it's important to stay informed, constant exposure may add to feelings of distress. Try to give yourself a break from the intensity of what is happening and thoughts and feelings stirred up by emotional news stories.
- > **Allow your feelings.** If you notice that you are having strong feelings, acknowledge them to yourself. Don't try to ignore or deny them.
- > **Talk about your fears or concerns** with people who support you. We get emotional support by giving voice to and sharing our concerns.
- > **Maintain a normal routine and lifestyle** as much as possible. This encourages us to *feel* normal by *acting* normal.
- > **Take care of yourself.** Make sure you get enough rest and eat a healthy diet so that you feel your best. Avoid overuse of alcohol and/or substances.
- > **Try relaxation techniques.** When emotions run high, deep breathing or meditation may be helpful. These gentle techniques can help you get control over the physical symptoms of anxiety and calm your thoughts.
- > **Those who have been directly impacted** may want to seek professional help or support services. These services can be accessed through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Helping your children cope with emotions related to violence

Our children are particularly vulnerable to fears in the wake of violence. They have a harder time understanding what is happening and putting it into perspective. We need to pay special attention to their needs. Here are some tips for doing this.

- > **Give them honest information about the event(s)**, at a level they can understand. Offer only as much information as they request.
- > **Encourage your children to talk** to you about their thoughts and feelings related to the event(s).
- > **Listen to their concerns, and then reassure them.** For example, point out that this is limited to a small number of people, and the risk to any particular individual is very low. Communicate that you will always do your best to keep them safe.
- > **Limit your child's exposure to broadcast news and social media.** Watching repeated images of the event(s) can be as disturbing to a child as if it were happening anew each time. Try to watch it with them, and discuss it afterwards.
- > **Share stories about heroes**, volunteers and public servants. This may help to counteract some of the negative event(s).
- > **Maintain family routines**, particularly around meals, bedtimes, and scheduled social and leisure activities. Structure helps a child feel safe. Make time for soothing activities such as reading with them or playing board games as a family.
- > **Be especially patient** with your children, your family, and other loved ones. Give them signs of reassurance such as hugs and affection. Also be patient with yourself and understanding of your own needs.

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