

GUIDANCE ASSOCIATES OF PENNSYLVANIA

412 Erford Road, Camp Hill, PA 17011 (717) 732-2917; FAX: (717) 732-5375
20 Briarcrest Square, Suite 205, Hershey, PA 17033 (717) 533-4312

Stanley E. Schneider, Ed.D.
Director

Coping with Tragedy

Incidents of terrorism have shocked, saddened and angered our country, and left many people – both those directly and indirectly affected – wondering how to deal with the aftermath of such tragic events. This digest offers tips and information on taking care of yourself, helping others cope and talking to your children about violence.

Reactions to a Traumatic Event

Disasters of any type can result in extreme emotions, including stress, helplessness, fear, irritability, anger, depression and grief. Although everyone deals with trauma and stress differently, there are some common reactions including:

- Recurring thoughts or nightmares about the event
- Difficulty sleeping or changes in appetite
- Anxiety and fear, especially when exposed to events or situations reminiscent of the trauma
- Feelings of depression, sadness and having low energy
- Memory problems including difficulty remembering aspects of the trauma
- Difficulty focusing on work or daily activities
- Spontaneous crying, feelings of despair and/or hopelessness
- Avoiding activities, places or even people who remind you of the event
- Feeling emotionally “numb,” withdrawn, disconnected or different from others
- Feeling extremely protective of or fearful for, the safety of loved ones

If you or a loved one is experiencing extreme symptoms of stress, depression, grief or anger, consult a professional such as your doctor or a clinician at Guidance Associates of Pennsylvania at (717) 732-2917

Comfort and help may come from a variety of sources. Allow yourself to ask for help. Consider the following tips for self care:

- Reach out to supportive friends and family for comfort and guidance.
- Be patient and give yourself plenty of time to recover and rest.
- Try to maintain a nutritious diet to keep your energy up.
- Focus on your breathing – deep, slow breaths will help calm you.

Keep in mind that emotional and physical reactions to a traumatic event may not appear immediately. Sometimes they may appear hours, days or even weeks or months after the event. The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, months or possibly longer depending on the severity of the event. According to the American Psychological Association, individuals who are unable to regain control of their lives, or who experience the symptoms above for more than a month, should consider seeking professional mental health assistance.

How Children React to Trauma

How a child responds to a tragic event will vary depending on a child’s age, personality and maturity level – and how directly he or she was involved with the tragedy. Children that were directly affected by an incident may suffer from severe anxiety or trauma – and will probably need professional help. All children, however, may be affected by the violence.

Younger children may react by showing more separation anxiety when their parents leave them at child care or school. Some children, particularly those age nine and under, may be unable to grasp the reality of the tragedy, or comprehend that violence could affect their own lives. Others may be frightened that something could happen to