

CRITICAL INCIDENT

Coping in the Aftermath of a Shooting

Many people experience a traumatic event during their lifetime. Over the course of the last few years, reports of mass violence and shootings have plagued the news. Although people are resilient and often bounce back after difficult times, these events nearly always interrupt our sense of order and safety. The impact often extends to individuals who live far outside of the affected area with no personal connections to the event. This is especially true when the event is human-caused with the intent of harming others. The following resources are taken from the American Counseling Association (ACA) to cope with the aftermath of a shooting.

Attend to self care

While it may seem counterintuitive to think about taking care of yourself first, you cannot be of service to others if you are unstable. Monitor all of your physical health needs – being sure to eat, sleep, exercise, and (if possible) maintain a normal daily routine.

Pay attention to your emotional health

Be kind to yourself, seek support from people in your life, and remind yourself that what you're experiencing is temporary and normal.

Try to recognize when you or those around you may need extra support

It is not uncommon for individuals of all ages to experience stress reactions when exposed (even through media) to shootings or mass violence. Changes in eating and sleeping habits, energy level, and mood are important signs of distress. Watch for regressed behaviors, such as clinging in children and intense emotional reactions, such as anxiety or a strong need for retribution in adults. When necessary, point individuals to licensed professional counselors who can provide needed support.

Avoid overexposure to media

While it is important to stay informed, media portrayals of shootings and mass deaths have been shown to cause acute stress and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Limit your exposure and take a break from news sources.

Maintain contact with friends and family

These individuals can provide you with emotional support to help deal with difficult times. It is important to ask for help if you are having trouble recovering and everyday tasks seem difficult to manage.