



AMERICAN COUNSELING ASSOCIATION

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Over the course of the last few weeks, 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. Even counselors with advanced training can become overwhelmed by the intensity of these tragic events. In the aftermath of recent shootings, ACA would like to provide some tips and resources for counselors and those they serve:

- **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.** Remember that a wide range of feelings during these difficult times are common. Know that others are also experiencing emotional reactions and may need your time and patience to put their feelings and thoughts in order.
- **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.
- **Focus on your strength base.** Maintain practices that you have found to provide emotional relief. Remind yourself of people and events which are meaningful and comforting.
- **Talk to others as needed.** It is important to ask for help if you are having trouble recovering and everyday tasks seem difficult to manage.

Here are some resources counselors can use to find out more about coping with mass violence:

ACA has numerous disaster mental health resources which help familiarize counselors with some of the skills needed for working with survivors. Some useful fact sheets for crisis and disaster response:

- Helping Survivors with Stress Management Skills
- Disaster and Trauma Responses of Children
- Disaster and Trauma Effects on Parents

National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder:

Impact of mass shootings on survivors, families and communities:

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/newsletters/research-quarterly/V18N3.pdf>

Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration

Coping with Mass Violence and Shooting: **<http://www.samhsa.gov/trauma/>**

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