

# Coping Facts for College Students



When violence occurs, such as the shootings at Virginia Tech, we feel great heartache for those who have lost family and friends, those who were wounded, and those who saw the tragic events unfold. It also leaves us with a heightened sense of vulnerability and wondering about our own future. No one is left unaffected.

The following reactions are normal and natural even though they may seem unusual. As individuals, we all respond in our own unique way. The incidents cannot be erased, and the memory will always be a part of life. Everyone moves at his/her own pace through the stages of crisis and healing.

## COMMON REACTIONS

Disbelief and Shock	Excessive use of alcohol or drugs	Guilt
Irritability and Anger	Headaches and stomach problems	Apathy & emotional numbing
Crying for “no apparent reason”	Low resistance to illness	Work/School/Family Problems
Difficulty making decisions or concentrating	Inability to focus on school work or extra curricular activities	Fear & anxiety about the future
Feeling Overwhelmed	Difficulty sleeping	Withdrawal
Excessive worry about safety and vulnerability; feeling powerless	Changes in eating patterns: loss of appetite or overeating	Religious confusion
Loss of Trust	Fatigue	Suicidal thoughts
Feeling Inadequate	Sadness and depression	Replaying events in our minds

## TIPS FOR COPING

- **Talk about it.** Share your feelings with friends, classmates, faculty and family. Talking and listening to others will help you realize that you are not alone in your feelings
- **Limit media viewing.** Take breaks.
- **Take care of yourself.** Get plenty of rest. Exercise. Eat right. Do things that you find relaxing such as going to the movies or a coffee shop with friends, journaling, etc.
- **Avoid excess:** drinking, drugs and risk-taking activities. These activities can be a way to medicate your feelings, but in the end will only add to or aggravate the problem
- **Stay connected.** You may find yourself wanting to isolate from others. Instead, make plans to visit family and friends who can offer reassurance. If you can't visit, increase your contact through emails and calls.

- **Take action.** Do something positive that will help you gain a greater sense of control. Get involved in campus activities such as a candlelight vigil, benefits, group discussions, the safety committee or other activities where you can make a difference.
- **Resume routines.** Routines are an important part of helping us get back to living and in healing.

## SEEKING HELP

- You may feel overwhelmed by the events that have occurred. Talk with a trusted friend, family member or spiritual advisor.
- Use campus resources such as the health center and the counseling center or reach out to community resources such as your local community mental health center, the local mental health association or trusted faith leaders.
- A feeling of vulnerability may lead you to want to make major life decisions such as dropping out of school, staying closer to family, getting married now because there may not be enough time in the future, etc. Consider postponing such decisions until you have had time to cope through the event and to talk to others about the decisions to be made.
- If you have strong feelings that won't go away, or if intense reactions occur for longer than four to six weeks, you may want to seek professional mental health assistance. Consider obtaining professional assistance if you:
  - Are unable to resume normal activities, studies, etc
  - Feel depressed, or feelings of hopelessness or anger
  - Are extremely anxious
  - Continue to have the events dominate your thoughts
  - Avoid people or places because they remind you of the event
  - Suffer continued physical problems for which no organic cause can be found
  - See your life falling apart with a loss of friendships, or problems with family or at school or work
  - Are overly reliant on alcohol or other drugs to block emotional pain
  - Have thoughts of suicide or hurting others

## RESOURCES

*The National Mental Health Association, 2000 N. Beauregard Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Alexandria, VA 22311*

- *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Disaster Technical Assistance Center (DTAC).*  
<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/EmergencyServices/>



Missouri Department of Mental Health  
 1706 E. Elm Street  
 Jefferson City, MO 65101  
 1-800-364-9687 or 573/751-4122  
[www.dmh.mo.gov](http://www.dmh.mo.gov)