



SAMHSA

Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

Tips for Young Adults: **COPING WITH MASS VIOLENCE**

As someone between the ages of 18 and 26, you're in a critical developmental period in life's progression. Young adulthood is a transitional time that often includes leaving home and entering a university or a changing workforce, as well as evolving social relationships and shifting family roles and responsibilities. You may face new challenges of higher education with heavy student loan debt, begin military service, or try to establish a civilian career path. You may also carry stress related to social media, climate change, the economy, health care, and personal finances while facing uncertainty about your future.

This tip sheet will explore the effects of mass violence on young adults, including the common

signs of its impact, effective coping methods, and resources for more information and support.

Incidents of Mass Violence

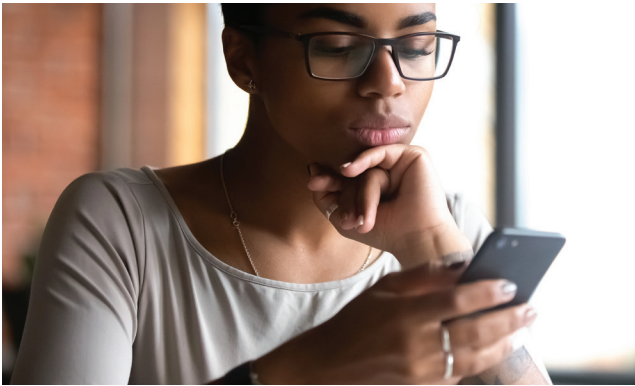
Incidents of mass violence, such as shootings and vehicle attacks, result in many people being injured or killed and cause extreme distress for those who are directly involved as well as the broader community. Even the threat of mass violence, such as bomb threats or civil unrest, can have an impact. Mass violence doesn't always involve large incidents that receive extensive coverage in the media. Those who are affected include victims, families and friends, first responders, and other emergency and healthcare personnel.



Common Reactions

Experiencing a mass violence incident is enormously frightening and can be very stressful in the days, weeks, and months that follow. Reactions vary from person to person and largely depend on your experience during and after the incident, particularly if you experienced physical injury, were involved in a police investigation, or were worried about the safety of loved ones. Many people are able to resume their lives after a period of time, while some people may have a more difficult time coping. It's common to experience a general sense of loss of safety, security, and control.

In addition to other challenges you face as a young adult, you and others in your generation have grown up with the ever-present threat of mass violence. You may have practiced active shooter drills in school and seen mass shootings in the media or in your community. According to the American Psychological Association, 75 percent of young adults report mass shootings as a significant source of stress.



Engagement with social media apps such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and TikTok increases potential exposure to information about incidents of mass violence. The impact and disruption of mass violence may derail your progress during this pivotal point in your life, yet many young adults have taken a resilient stand against mass violence through social justice activities.

After an incident of mass violence, there is no right or wrong way to feel, but it's helpful to know about the common reactions people may have so you can care for yourself and others.

Common Physical Reactions

- Headaches
- Stomachaches
- Rapid heartbeat
- Tightness in the chest
- Change in appetite
- Fatigue

Common Emotional Reactions

- Fear
- Survivor guilt
- Anger
- Jumpiness and feeling on edge
- Feelings of helplessness

Common Cognitive Reactions

- Difficulty concentrating
- Problems with performance at work or school
- Intrusive thoughts associated with the incident
- Upsetting dreams

Common Behavioral Reactions

- Avoiding people, places, and things that remind you of the incident
- Avoiding activities you usually like and enjoy
- Spending more time alone
- Engaging in risky behaviors

Coping After Mass Violence

There are things you can do to reduce and manage your reactions:

- Remind yourself that it's fine to have emotional reactions and that they will lessen over time.

- Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle. That includes maintaining a daily schedule, eating a healthy diet, drinking plenty of water, and exercising regularly.
- Stretch to help relieve stress. Yoga and tai chi are two popular practices that include stretching, and sessions are available on the internet so you can participate on your own schedule. Joining an in-person class is a great way to connect with others as long as health and safety precautions are followed.
- Establish a healthy sleep routine. That means turning off electronics at night, maintaining a comfortable room temperature, and going to bed around the same time every night.
- Use behavioral techniques to relax, such as breathing, guided imagery, and muscle relaxation. These can also be found on the internet, and there are a number of mobile apps that aid in relaxation.
- Identify people you can talk to about your concerns. Sharing your thoughts and feelings can help you to get support with your day-to-day needs, process what happened and make meaning of it, and rebuild your sense of trust.
- Limit exposure to mass media and social media reports concerning the incident. Coverage of mass violence incidents is constant and can cause continued distress. Try turning off the news and shutting down social media for several hours every day. Instead, watch a movie or play a game.
- Connect with family and friends who help you feel comfortable and relaxed. Do things with them that make you happy.
- Write in a journal. This is great way to clarify your thoughts and feelings, process what happened, and problem-solve.
- If going to public places alone elevates your stress, go with a friend or in a group. Try not to isolate yourself. Getting involved in community activities and volunteering is a good way to stay busy and connect with others.
- Avoid using alcohol, tobacco, or other substances to reduce stress. Using the techniques described above is a good alternative.





Signs of the Need for Professional Support

Reactions may change over time, and the timeline for recovery will vary depending on the individual. Here are some signs that signal the need to reach out to a mental health or substance use disorder treatment professional:

- Reactions that increase in intensity, interfere with daily functioning, or persist for several months
- New or increased use of alcohol and/or substances to cope with stress
- Feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness
- Self-harm and thoughts of suicide

If you're in college, you may be able to access support through your school's student services, counseling and psychological services, health services, peer support, or other programs. If you're employed, you may have access to counseling and support through an employee assistance program. Check out the helpful resources box for more sources of information and support in coping with mental health and substance use issues and conditions.



Photos are for illustrative purposes only. Any person depicted in the photo is a model.

Helpful Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

5600 Fishers Lane
 Rockville, MD 20857
 Toll-free: 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)
 TTY: 1-800-487-4889
 Email: samhsainfo@samhsa.hhs.gov
 SAMHSA Store: <https://store.samhsa.gov>

SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center

Toll-free: 1-800-308-3515
 Email: dtac@samhsa.hhs.gov
 Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac>

SAMHSA Disaster Mobile App

Website: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/samhsa-disaster>

Helplines

SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline

Toll-free talk or text: 1-800-985-5990
 Español: Llama o envía un mensaje de texto 1-800-985-5990 presiona "2".
 American Sign Language (ASL): Click on the "ASL Now" button on the website or call 1-800-985-5990 from your videophone.
 Website: <https://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text: 988
 Chat: 988lifeline.org
 (Español) Línea de Prevención del Suicidio y Crisis: 988
 For TTY users: Use your preferred relay service or dial 711 and then 988.

Treatment Locator

SAMHSA's National Helpline

Toll-free: 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357) (24/7/365 treatment referral information service in English and español)
 TTY: 1-800-487-4889
 Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

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