

Coping with community unrest

Recent tragic events have caused unrest in our communities, which has left many people feeling a sense of loss, frustration, hopelessness and fear.

Tragic events can cause a range of intense physical, emotional and psychological symptoms. People often experience shock and disbelief immediately after the traumatic event and find it difficult to accept the reality of what is happening.

Emotional reactions

When the initial shock subsides, normal emotional responses in the following hours and days can include:

- Fear and anxiety. These emotions can come in waves, at unpredictable times.
- Sadness and depression.
- Guilt, shame or despair.
- Anger and irritability.
- Emotional numbness and feelings of separation from others.

Physical reactions

Physical reactions are the result of stress hormones flooding the nervous system. Common physical symptoms include:

- Difficulty falling asleep.
- Fatigue.
- Headaches, abdominal pain or other physical pain.
- Heart racing.
- Dizziness or fainting.
- Change in appetite.

The painful emotions after a traumatic event need time to process. The following tips will help you to reduce traumatic stress reactions and begin healing.

What you can do

- Take care of yourself first. Eat healthy foods, get enough rest and exercise regularly. Physical activity can reduce anxiety and promote well-being.
- Talk to people you trust about your concerns. A supportive network is very important for emotional health.
- Make time for hobbies and fun activities or find interesting volunteering activities. This can be a healthy distraction from everyday stress.
- Limit your exposure to disruptive television, radio and social media coverage.
- Practice mindfulness and relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and meditation.

What to avoid

- Blocking emotions with alcohol or other drugs only prolongs healing and potentially causes other problems.
- Big changes in life. Allow yourself time before making big decisions.
- Cutting yourself off from other people. You do not need to go it alone.
- Too much media coverage of events. Disturbing images on news or social media sites can further traumatize.

When to get help

The disturbing thoughts, feelings and physical reactions typically become less intense and less frequent in the days and weeks following the event. If you experience stress reactions that affect your ability to lead a normal life for six weeks or more, you may need help from a mental health professional. While everyone is different and heals at their own pace, some people develop post-traumatic stress disorder, known as PTSD, after a traumatic event. Signs of PTSD include disturbing memories, nightmares or flashbacks, suicidal feelings, disconnectedness from others, and disturbances in the home and work environment. It is important to seek help if you think you have symptoms of PTSD.

Help is available. Your program is completely confidential and here to help you and your household members 24/7/365. No situation is too big or too small. Give us a call or visit your program website to get started.