

Coping with Tragedy

For Parents & Caregivers

Exposure to a violent event can bring up a lot of different feelings which can come in waves and change over time; fear, anger, anxiety, exhaustion, detachment, or numbness, to name just a few. However, we as adults need to find our own way of coping; the more secure we feel, the better we are able to help our kids. Remember that the basics of caring for other people means caring for yourself first! Self-care is not selfish. Just like the safety instructions on a plane - put on your own oxygen mask first, so you will have the ability to help others. Or to put it another way, you can't pour from an empty cup.

- Don't worry alone; talk about what you are feeling and how this attack has impacted you with people you trust. Meeting in person is challenging right now but we have phone calls, video chats, emails, texts to help us stay connected. **Our relationships are important for us to feel safe and comforted.**
- Plan an activity at least once a day that helps your body relax. This might be reading, listening to music, watching a funny show, or exercising - figure out what works for you. Try twice a day to breathe low, slow, deep breaths for a few minutes.
- Make time for fun and pleasurable activities - we need things to look forward to. This helps us when times are hard.
- Get out of your house every day and move around your neighbourhood.
- Try to eat healthy food regularly. Drink plenty of water. Be mindful of alcohol and other substance intake - too much of these often makes us feel worse over time.
- Try to maximize your sleep and keep to a good routine.
- Think about the strengths that you have that you can draw on. You have faced challenging situations before and those strengths will continue to help you now.
- It can be helpful to think of things you are grateful for right now (large or small).
- Pace yourself in terms of the amount of media information you choose to consume. Sometimes, it's best to just disconnect completely. Pick just one reliable news source and stick with it.
- Be aware that it is normal right now to feel more anxious or to feel numb. After a trauma exposure it is normal to have problems sleeping and to feel more emotional. If however these symptoms persist for over a month and interfere with your ability to function, it's important to reach out for more help.
- If you have specific questions about your kids, call your primary care provider, talk to your school guidance counselor or reach out to mental health and addictions services. We are here to help.

Adapted from the MGH Clay Center (mghclaycenter.org), the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (nctsn.org), and the Centre for the Study of Traumatic Stress (cstsonline.org)
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