Managing Distress in the Aftermath of a Tragedy

Students and university community members may be struggling to understand how a tragedy could occur and why such a terrible thing would happen. There may never be satisfactory answers to these questions.

We do know, though, that it is typical for people to experience a variety of emotions following such a traumatic event. These feelings can include shock, sorrow, numbness, fear, anger, disillusionment, grief and others. Students may have trouble sleeping, concentrating, eating or remembering even simple tasks. This is common and should pass after a while. Over time, the caring support of faculty and staff, friends, family and community can help to lessen the emotional impact.

Some tips to help strengthen resilience—the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity—are listed below. Everyone is encouraged to:

—Talk about it. Ask for support from people who care about you and who will listen to your concerns. Receiving support and care can be comforting and reassuring. It often helps to speak with others who have shared your experience so you do not feel so different or alone.

—Strive for balance. When a tragedy occurs, it’s easy to become overwhelmed and have a negative or pessimistic outlook. Balance that viewpoint by reminding yourself of people and events which are meaningful and comforting, even encouraging. Striving for balance empowers you and allows for a healthier perspective on yourself and the world around you.

—Turn it off and take a break. Schedule some breaks to distract yourself from thinking about the incident and focus instead on something you enjoy. Try to do something that will lift your spirits.

—Honor your feelings. Remember that it is common to have a range of emotions after a traumatic incident. You may experience intense stress similar to the effects of a physical injury. For example, you may feel exhausted, sore or off balance.
—Take care of yourself. Engage in healthy behaviors to enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress. Eat well-balanced meals, get plenty of rest and build physical activity into your day. Avoid alcohol and drugs because they can suppress your feelings rather than help you to manage and lessen your distress. In addition, alcohol and drugs may intensify your emotional or physical pain. Establish or re-establish routines such as eating meals at regular times and following an exercise program. If you are having trouble sleeping, try some relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation or yoga.

—Be aware that help is available: At times an individual can get stuck or have difficulty managing intense reactions. University Health & Counseling is available to all students at no cost. The dedicated medical and mental health professionals at UH&CS can assist in developing an appropriate strategy for managing symptoms and moving forward. It is important to get professional help if you feel like you are unable to function or perform basic activities of daily living.

Counseling Services has walk in appointments weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:40 p.m and a counselor on call at other times. A limited number of appointments are available through online booking at MyHealthConnect.case.edu.

Campus Address: 220 Sears Building
Phone: 216.368.5872 (24/7)
Email: counseling@case.edu

Health Service appointments can be made online MyHealthConnect.case.edu or by calling the number below. A Nurse Advice line is available after hours.

Campus Address: 2145 Adelbert Road
Phone: 216.368.2450
Email: healthservice@case.edu

Faculty and staff are encouraged to walk students in crisis to UH&CS or contact them for guidance.

IMPACT Solutions is available to faculty and staff for confidential counseling at no cost. Learn more at case.edu/hr/worklife/perks-extras/employee-assistance-program.

Persevere and trust in your ability to get through the challenging days ahead. Taking the steps in this guide can help you cope at this very difficult time.