

Coping with Fears Following A Traumatic Event

The tragic events that occurred yesterday at Virginia Tech have injected intense feelings of shock and sadness in the daily lives of people throughout the country. All of us are reacting differently to these traumatic events. Our reactions may be emotional, physical, mental or behavioral.

Fear and traumatic stress

Fears may develop rapidly after a traumatic event. After the initial feelings of shock and numbness wear off, some people may find that they are still having trouble resuming daily life because of lingering fear. Fears may revolve around activities directly related to the traumatic event, or they could be about something you have read, heard, or even imagined about the event. Fears can also be related to a resurgence of painful feelings from a past trauma or loss that is triggered by the current situation. Reactions may be emotional, physical, mental or behavioral. Sometimes, the emotional “aftershocks” from stress reactions appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. In some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

It's normal to experience these fears and other responses to traumatic stress like:

- anxiety or nervousness
- irritability
- depression
- anger
- mood swings
- physical symptoms such as chronic aches and pains or difficulty sleeping
- nightmares

The amount of time that people will experience these emotions and fears will vary. It may depend on the nature of your involvement with the traumatic event or whether you've experienced other kinds of trauma or loss in your life. If your reactions persist for a long period of time or are resulting in difficulties at work, you may find that professional help can give you the support you need to regain a sense of control and well-being.

Coping with fear

Some people are able to cope with their fears by talking about them with a trusted friend or loved one. Others may be able to control fear with personal relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or listening to comforting music. Here are some other things you can do to combat fear:

- Use available resources. Support and information is available to you through your *Employee Assistance Program (EAP)* 1-800-275-7460 or 202-307-8160.

- Give yourself time. It may take a while to recover from the shock of a traumatic event. Be patient with yourself and ask others to be patient too.

- Spend extra time with the people you love. Talk about the recent events and your fears.

- Try not to compare yourself with others. Everyone responds to trauma differently.

- Consider joining a support group. Talking with others who are experiencing fear as a result of a traumatic experience may be helpful. Ask your EAP for help finding a group.

- Use exercise as a way to keep calm. Some people find that taking a walk or other forms of exercise may clear the mind, making it easier to face fears.

- Seek support from your faith community. Many people find comfort and solace from faith communities when they are grappling with difficult issues.

If you are experiencing difficulty following the recent events at Virginia Tech, try to remember that it will pass with time. However, if your fears linger for months or if they are making daily life overwhelming, it's important to seek professional assistance. Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can provide DEA employees and family members with confidential assistance, support, information and short-term counseling and additional resources (1-800-275-7450 or 202-307-8160).

The DEA Employee Assistance Program

1-800-275-7460

