Coping with School/Community Violence

You may feel shock by the reports of shootings on high school and college grounds. This type of trauma tests the coping skills of many. Anxiety and fear are common responses felt by those exposed to violence. The short term goal is to find some degree of normalcy and balance.

You may feel anxious after you learn of this event. Those with anxiety disorders or a history of trauma are more likely to have a hard time and develop a stress-related disorder. Some people are calmer than others are and "bounce back" quickly without falling apart. Normal reactions to stress and trauma include:

- Numbness
- Disbelief
- Frustration
- Fear
- Grief
- Anger
- Feeling "on guard" or exposed
- Powerlessness

Ways to cope with anxiety

Know the facts
It is important to know the facts and not respond to rumors. You can then plan to deal with whatever arises.

Minimize media
Get the facts then stop watching or reading about the event. Repeated exposure will likely increase your feelings of worry and helplessness.

Make a family/roommate plan
- "If there is an emergency, we will meet at 'X' or contact each other by cell phones."
- You will feel more in control with a plan.

Distract yourself
Do things that you are able to control such as working, exercising or meeting up with friends. This helps to redirect your thoughts.

Be healthy
- Avoid too much caffeine, which can make you jittery.
- Exercise to help reduce your stress.
- Limit your alcohol use.
- Get enough sleep.

Seek therapy
If you experience the following, consider talking with a professional:

- Problems getting through day to day life
- Not getting enough sleep for two weeks or more
- Not being able to focus or enjoy normal activities
- Change in appetite
- Feeling irritable or more or less reactive than usual
- An increase in worry or feelings of panic (with or without nausea, sweating, changes in heartbeat, breathlessness or sense of doom)

This material provides a general overview of the topic. Particularly in legal and financial areas, you should consult with your personal advisor. Health information is not a substitute for diagnosis or treatment by a therapist, physician or other health care professional. Contact a health care professional with any questions or concerns about specific health care needs.
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