



TIPS FOR SURVIVORS

Coping With Grief and Trauma after Community Violence

It is not uncommon for the individuals and communities as a whole to experience grief and trauma reactions after an incident of community violence. Grief and trauma reactions are a normal response of sorrow, emotions, anger and confusion that comes from losing someone or someone important to you. Most people will experience a natural occurrence of grief after the death of a loved one, but grief and trauma responses can be the result of other types of losses. In situations of community violence, people may experience the loss of their sense of safety, their trust in those who live in their neighborhoods, or their trust in local government and service providers. The trauma and grief of community violence can be experienced by all involved.

This tip sheet contains information about some of the signs of grief, trauma and anger, and provides useful information about how to cope with these responses. In addition the Helpful Resources section provides numbers and service provider information for those who may want further help.

Reactions to Violence

Often after a death or loss of some kind, many people express feeling empty and numb, or unable to feel. Some people complain that they become angry at others or at situations, or they just feel angry in general, even without a reason.

Some of the physical reactions to grief and trauma may include the following:

- Trembling and shakiness
- Muscle Weakness
- Nausea, Trouble eating
- Trouble Sleeping , trouble breathing
- Dry Mouth

People experiencing grief and trauma may have nightmares, withdraw socially, and may have no desire to participate in their usual activities, work or school.

How long do reactions last?

Grief and trauma reactions last as long as it takes you to accept and learn to live with the changes that have occurred in your community due to the violence and its aftermath. For some people these reactions last a few months; for others, it may take more than a year. It's different for every person depending on his or her health, coping styles, culture, family supports, and other life experiences. How long people grieve and have trauma responses may also depend on the resilience of the community and the ability of its members to take on roles and responsibilities that will help restore the basic needs of the community, such as getting children back to school and businesses back to working again.

Helpful Resources

211 Ottawa

Distress Center 613-238-3311

Mental Health Crisis Line 866-996-0991

Your local Community and Health Resource Center



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Reactions to Community Violence in Children

Witnessing community violence and death can be traumatic experiences that cause negative mental health outcomes, particularly for children. Close relationships are important to children's development and the loss of family or community member can represent the loss of social capital – the emotional support that enhances our well-being. Children may experience depression, post traumatic stress, anxiety, aggression, poor academic achievement, hopelessness and risky behavior. These losses can even affect their capacity for relationships and diminish future expectations.

Tips for Helping Children Cope With Greif, Loss and Trauma

- Allow children to talk about their feelings and to express their reactions (e.g. crying, being sad, etc.)
- Try to follow the same routines as usual
- Encourage use of play and laugh
- **Limit exposure to violence on TV news**
- **Encourage them to get adequate rest and to eat healthy meals**

What can Individuals Do To Cope With Their Grief and Trauma?

Talking to someone who understands and respect how you feel – family members, faith leaders, people you trust- is helpful way to ease your grief and trauma reactions. Recognize that although you might still have these feelings over a long period, they will likely be less and less intense over time. Make sure to exercise, and eat. Do the things that you used to enjoy doing even if you don't always feel like it. This will help you get back into your routines. Allow yourself to feel joy at times and to cry when you need to.

Even though they may be experiencing grief or trauma reactions, some individuals also exhibit positive changes from their experiences of loss such as the following:

- Becoming more understanding and tolerant
- Having increased appreciation for relationships and loved ones
- Being grateful for what they have and or for those in their community who are loving and caring
- Experience enhanced spiritual connection
- Becoming more socially active

If you have experienced the death of a loved one or you have been exposed to community violence – feelings of grief and anger are normal reaction. But if these feelings persist, access the resources on this page for more information on getting help.

What Can Communities Do To Cope With Their Grief and Trauma?

Often the community needs to come together to honor those who died and find meaning in their deaths in a way that will help everyone in the community recover. People may create a memorial and decide together that this will remind them never to allow such violence in their community again. It may help them be determined to work out their differences in other ways in the future- for example, by forming a community advisory group or identifying a local leader to be their liaison with police services and other government

Prepared by the Ottawa Police Service Victim Crisis Unit