

Taking Care of Ourselves: Responding to the National Crisis

September 11, 2001

The tragic events Tuesday morning, September 11, traumatized the nation. An act of violence on this scale touches all of us on some level. In a community of our size and diversity, individual experiences will vary widely. Understanding the nature and impact of the experience is a major part of coping.

Common Reactions to Trauma

Please recognize that experiencing any of the reactions in the list below can be normal and the reactions you experience may change from minute to minute or day to day. Over time, a natural healing process will begin.

- denial, shock, numbness
- feeling vulnerable, unsafe
- anxiety, panic, worry
- irritability, anger, moodiness
- being hyper-alert
- disturbing images
- headaches, fatigue, sleep disturbances
- helplessness, hopelessness
- sadness, crying, despair
- difficulty concentrating
- withdrawal, isolation
- remembering other life traumas
- confusion

It is also not unusual to have no reaction at all.

How to Take Care of Yourself

People can take steps to help themselves, family members and each other cope with stress reactions. This is a list of self-help suggestions.

1. Experience your feelings – you have the right to have feelings even if you were not directly affected.
2. Remind yourself that you are normal and having normal reactions.
3. Talk is one of the most healing medicines. Talk about your feelings with others who feel safe to you such as your friends, family, work groups, student groups, residence hall members.
4. Pay attention to your reactions in order to plan for health and safety. Be aware of your diet, rest, exercise, and use of substances (caffeine, nicotine, alcohol & drugs).
5. Be good to yourself – spend time with people you care about and do things that make you feel better.
6. Remember that each person can experience trauma differently and that you and others may have different needs at different times; try to be flexible and accepting of others.
7. Don't make any big life decisions or changes.
8. Remember that you are under stress and that you may not act or react in a manner you would normally expect.

9. Seek support from campus and community resources. Consult a mental health professional if you need assistance.
10. For those who follow the news, be mindful of how the media reports affect you. While having information is helpful for some crises, some people may want to limit how much they read, listen to, or watch the news.
11. Children's reactions may include excessive fears, unwillingness to go to school, nightmares, and increases in regressive behaviors such as bedwetting and thumb sucking. Give children the opportunity to ask questions, and respond in age-appropriate ways. Remember that children may hear others talk about the trauma, and that without clear information, she or he can gain a distorted view of the crisis. Reassure children by increasing physical contact, keeping in touch, and making plans to do things together.
12. You may have known someone who died. Symptoms of grief and loss are similar to the post-trauma reactions listed above, and many of these coping strategies can help for grief as well.

When and How to Seek Help

Stress reactions usually diminish in severity over time. If your symptoms persist or cause you excessive discomfort, you may want to seek professional assistance.

University Health Services, Tang Center

Counseling Services for Students: 642-9494.

CARE Services for Faculty and Staff: 643-7754.

Death, Grief and Loss: see <http://campus.chance.berkeley.edu/death-response>