

Coping with Violence in the Community

When there is constant news coverage regarding violence in our world, it can seem that it is becoming an increasingly dangerous place. As a result, more of us are experiencing increased anxiety and fear as we go about our daily lives. If this sense of fear is ongoing or we are in close proximity to violence, we can find ourselves constantly reacting to a high level of stress. This may result in decreased productivity at work and have a traumatic impact on our daily living.

Coping with Fear

Let's consider some steps to take if you are feeling increased fear and anxiety as a result of high profile crimes or violence being discussed in the media or happening in your community. Those who have been directly impacted may want to seek professional help or support services. These services can be accessed through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

- One of the best ways to manage fear is to understand what is being done to protect your community. The more we know about the current danger, the more effective steps we can take to minimize our risk of becoming victims. Make sure that you are getting your information from a reputable source, this includes following all directions from state and local authorities, including law enforcement.
- Be aware. When you are in a situation where there is potential violence, it's important to remain vigilant. Pay attention to your surroundings, have a plan for seeking shelter if needed.
- Maintain a normal routine and lifestyle as much as possible. This encourages us to *feel* normal by *acting* normal.
- Focus on what you *do* have control over. The images we see on television, the stories we hear, and our own thoughts about violence can increase our anxiety. The average person may believe there is little he or she can do to avoid potential violence. While we can't control the bigger picture, we can control some of the things in our own lives that might reduce our risk of being victims, such as avoiding an area where violence is occurring, reviewing a safety plan with your workplace, your family, and your friends.
- Minimize your exposure to television news. Once you have gotten the facts, don't keep watching replays of events, and discussion of the "what ifs". Television news coverage can be overly dramatic, with editing, commentary, sound and video clips used to arouse emotion and compete for viewers.
- If you notice that you are having strong feelings, acknowledge them to yourself. Don't try to ignore or deny them.



- Talk about your fears or concerns with people who support you. We get emotional support by giving voice to and sharing our concerns.
- Make sure you get enough rest and eat a healthy diet so that you feel your best.
- Avoid destructive behaviors such as alcohol and substance abuse.
- Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or meditation. These can help you maintain control over the physical symptoms of anxiety.

Helping Your Children Cope with Fears Related to Violence

Our children are particularly vulnerable to fears in the wake of violence. They have a harder time than we do understanding what is happening and putting it into perspective. For this reason, we need to pay special attention to their needs. Here are some tips for doing this:

- Give them honest information about the event(s), at a level they can understand. Offer only as much information as they request.
- Encourage your children to talk to you about their thoughts and feelings related to the event(s).
- Listen to their concerns, and then reassure them. For example, point out that this is limited to a small number of people, and the risk to any particular individual is very low.
- Limit your child's exposure to broadcast news media. Watching repeated images of the event(s) can be as disturbing to a child as if it were happening anew each time. When you do let them watch the news, watch it with them and discuss it afterwards.
- Maintain family routines, particularly around meals, bedtimes, and scheduled social and leisure activities. Provide soothing activities such as reading with them or playing board games as a family.
- Be especially patient with your children, your spouse and yourself. Hug them and tell them you love them. Be understanding of your own needs and if necessary, it is OK to lower your expectations.
- Expose them to stories about heroes, volunteers and public servants. This may help to counteract some of the negative event(s).

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