



Helping Children, Youth, and Families Cope After Mass Violence

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Today's Speakers

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Overview

- Impacts of Mass Violence and Hate-Based Violence
- Typical Reactions of Adults, Children, and Youth
- What Can Adults Say and Do to Support Youth?
- Caring for the Caregiver
- The Mental Health Effects of Racism
- Coping with Racial Trauma
- Seeking More Help When Needed
- Resources

After Mass Violence

- It is normal to experience significant, even overwhelming, reactions for days, weeks, and months afterwards
- Children, youth, and adults recover over time with supports
- Each of us had a different experience that impacts recovery
- Different reactions are normal

Impact of Mass Violence

- The impact of violence is widespread and to varying degrees affects victims, responders, and the community-at-large.
- Incidents of violence can result in more serious and long-lasting psychological effects than other disasters.
- Disasters of mass violence are particularly hard to comprehend.
- The impact of multiple disasters can feel overwhelming, leading to hopelessness.

Impact of Hate-Based Violence

- Hate-based violence threatens or harms the victims, and also is intended to send a message to the entire community to which the victims belong.
- The traumatic effect is compounded for the group, in this case Black and African Americans, and related groups, in this case other racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups.
- For Black communities and communities of color, hate-based violence exacerbates ongoing racial trauma in the historical context of enslavement, structural inequity, historical and ongoing racial violence, and staggering loss.
- There are higher barriers to accessing treatment.

Supporting Children and Youth

- Children and youth are experiencing traumatic stress
- As parents, educators, caregivers, or other trusted adults, we are coping with traumatic stress while doing our best to support children and youth
- Some children, youth, and adults have compounded effects – Black children and children of color and their families, Jewish children and families, children and families in the school districts or areas affected.

**Traumatic
Stress
has the power
to overwhelm
coping
abilities**



- If you feel intense or overwhelming emotions, that is normal and does not mean you will feel this way forever.
- Most people feel better and safer over time with support and coping skills.
- It is important to watch out for yourself and for others so that you can get additional help if needed.

Feeling Unsafe and Fearful after Mass Violence

- Fear and not feeling safe are common reactions after mass violence. If people were killed at places you go, doing things you do, it is normal to feel scared and unsafe.
- Fears for yourself and your loved ones who are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and religious minorities are heightened.

Typical Reactions of Young Children

- Helpless and uncertainty
- General fear and separation anxiety
- Behavioral challenges, like tantrums, fighting, or arguing.
- Regressions, such as setbacks in sleeping and toileting.
- Reacting physically such as stomachaches and headaches.
- Repetitive, less imaginative, or violent play

Typical Reactions of School Age Children

- Persistent concerns about themselves and others
- Preoccupation with their own actions
- Guilt and shame
- Constant retelling or questioning
- Trouble with academic work or social interactions
- More headaches, stomachaches
- Challenges with sleep
- Disruptive, sometimes reckless or aggressive, behavior

Typical Reactions of Adolescents

- Feeling sad, scared, confused, numb, hopeless, guilty, or that life is meaningless.
- Feeling self-conscious about their reactions
- Guilt and shame
- Change in sleeping and eating.
- Difficulty concentrating on schoolwork.
- Intense engagement with social media, gaming, even while sometimes engaging less outside technology.
- Radical shifts in thinking about the world
- Fantasies of revenge or retribution
- Serious unsafe behaviors like self-harm and using substances

Typical Reactions of Adults

- Not being able to fall or stay asleep, not getting restful sleep, having nightmares.
- Having trouble concentrating, feeling in a fog or dazed.
- Feeling sad, angry, or afraid that the mass violence will happen again.
- Feeling isolated, or numb, like friends and family don't understand, or feeling distant from them.
- Feeling angry at society, authorities, self, God.
- Being unable to get rid of thoughts, images, or visions of the mass violence event.
- Experiencing headaches, stomachaches, a racing heart, or a change in appetite.
- Having sights, sounds, people, places, or other things remind you of the violence.
- Feeling jumpy, irritable, or on guard for danger all or nearly all of the time.
- Feeling a loss of trust in institutions and searching for meaning.

Adults Make a Difference

- Reactions of children and youth are strongly influenced by adults
- What parents, teachers, relatives, coaches, mentors, say and do makes a big difference
- Children look to adults for information, comfort, and help
- Adolescents are listening to what adults do and what they say
- **If you are thinking about it, you are not going to harm.**

Supporting Children and Youth

- Whether or not you live with or work directly with children, you can help.
- As a neighbor, camp counselor, pastor, teacher, pediatrician, relative, or caregiver, you can help.
- Understand that there are a range of reactions and that children and youth can experience trauma reactions for weeks and months after the event, including after periods they seem ok.

How Can Adults Help?

- **Be trauma-informed.** Start from the position that behavior or response may be a trauma reaction. Be thoughtful about the impacts on specific children – Black children and children of color, Jewish children, children in the school districts or areas affected.
- **Be patient.** There is no timeline for healing.
- **Be flexible.** Be open to modifying speed or content if you are working with children.
- **Stay structured.** Keep a predictable schedule. Help children practice daily healthy habits (eating and drinking, hygiene, sleeping, getting outside and connected with others).

How Can Adults Help?

- **Be consistent.** Rules and consequences help children and youth feel safe.
- **Be sensitive.** Help filter violent content and redirect triggering conversations. Limit media and social media exposure.
- **Be collaborative.** Set up systems to check in with other adults in the youth's life.

Coping as a Family

- Say out loud that family members all have reactions and there might be different reactions
- Normalize that there may a strain in the family or with others
- Brainstorm ways to understand and support each other
- Promote your family beliefs and values.
- Routines support a consistent emotional environment in the face of stress.
- Rituals provide touchpoints and create a sense of security and belonging.

Coping as a School, Camp, or Other Setting

- Say out loud that members all have reactions and there might be different reactions
- Normalize that there may a strain
- Brainstorm ways to understand and support each other
- Promote your organization's beliefs and values.
- Routines support a consistent emotional environment in the face of stress.
- Rituals provide touchpoints and create a sense of security and belonging.

What Can Adults Say?

- Start the conversation. Not talking about mass violence, with children and youth who have heard about traumatic events, can be scarier.
- Don't force the conversation.
- Start with asking what they know.
- Gently correct inaccuracies.
- **There is no perfect thing to say.**
- End discussion with reassurance and safety plans.

What Can Adults Say?

"There was a very sad thing that happened. It is very sad because people were hurt and people were killed. I want you to know that if you ever have any questions or want to talk about it, you can always talk to me. What have you heard about it?"

"This is hard to talk about. A man with a gun killed people at a school today. A lot of people are there helping kids and families who were hurt or whose family members died. We all feel so sad and angry and confused that this happened. What have you heard about it?"

How to Help Young Children

Provide comfort and cuddles.

Come sit on my lap.

Ensure there is a safe place to play and let your child use play to express their feelings.

Let's draw together.

Be cautious about adult conversations and exposure to media. For young children, aim for no media exposure.

Let's turn this off and talk about your day at school.

Validate feelings.

I can tell you feel sad right now.

I know you are feeling scared right now.

How to Help Young Children

Provide reassurance. Share notes, pictures, or transition objects when children have to separate.

You are safe with me.

You are safe with your teacher.

I am going to work now, and I will be back after your nap.

Papa is going to church with Sissy and will come back for dinner.

Praise children for what they are doing well.

I was so proud when you were brave about going to Nana's today.

You did a great job telling me that you were sad.

You kept your hands to yourself when you felt mad.

How to Help Young Children

Be tolerant of regression. Do not shame or punish.	I'm going to change the sheets and get you some fresh clothes. I'm proud that you are staying so calm.
Keep limits.	It's always okay to feel angry. I won't let you hurt anyone.
Directly address magical thinking and fears that children may have.	I noticed you were worried it might be your fault. Nothing that happened was your fault.
Practice coping skills.	When you feel sad, you can cuddle your tiger. Let's practice taking our big breath and counting to four.

How to Help School Age Children

Signal that you are open to conversations. Be open to addressing the same questions again.

**What have you heard about what happened?
What questions do you have for me?**

You know that I'm always here to talk about the shooting, whenever you have a thought or a question.

Have direct, factual conversations. If your child is bringing it up, it is scarier to have their questions brushed aside.

Thanks for asking me that question. I'm proud of you for bringing up something that's hard to talk about.

Answer questions honestly. It is okay to say you don't know.

We might not have an answer for why something terrible happened.

How to Help School Age Children

Normalize that stress reactions are common.

Did you know that a lot of kids and adults feel scared and worried right now? Some kids feel really sad and angry. Anything that you feel is okay.

Let children know it's okay to take a break from talking and thinking about the event or participating in related activities.

I know you've been working a lot on the memorial. I want you to know that it's okay to do other things too.

Address shame and guilt.

Many children, and even adults, feel like you do. They are angry and blame themselves, thinking they could have done more. You're not at fault. There was nothing you could have done.

Limit media exposure. Watch with them if possible, pause, and reflect.

What do you think that he meant when he said that?

How to Help School Age Children

Manage reminders. Think about locations, images, sounds, anniversary dates.

I know that driving near that street can make you feel worried. Let's go a different way for a while.

Model your coping skills and take accountability for actions.

I want to say sorry for using a loud voice earlier. I was having a hard day thinking about what happened. Going for a walk helped me feel better.

Give kids concrete information about how to respond to scary things.

If you hear about someone who might be having a hard time or thinking about hurting people, it's really important to tell someone. Sometimes they might say it's a secret or that you'll be in trouble if you tell. I promise you will not get in trouble for trying to help. Who are two adults you can tell?

How to Help School Age Children

Address magical thinking and fears about responsibility.

Help kids feel safe. When kids ask if a shooting is possible at their school, they are asking if it is likely.

Sometimes kids and even adults think that they could have done something to stop what happened. I want to let you know that there was nothing you could have done. Nothing that happened was your fault.

I know that you've been thinking about something dangerous happening at your school. Your teachers and principal spend a lot of time working on keeping everyone safe. Do you know the rules your school has to help everyone stay safe?

Tell me about your worries. What is it that is making you feel unsafe?

How to Help School Age Children

Point out the forces of good in the community.

Did you know that for weeks people have been volunteering to bring food to people who can't get food right now?

Redirect energy to constructive things to do.

I wonder if you and me might feel a little better today if we took a walk.

Sometimes I feel better when I can help someone. Do you think we should write a card or find some things to donate today?

Let children know that most people recover.

Most people feel really stressed after something terrible happens. We won't always feel this way. We will feel more like ourselves again.

How to Help Adolescents and Young Adults

Keep conversations open. Know that teenagers might have an easier time not talking face to face. Let teens exit conversations when they want. Multiple short conversations are better than one long conversation.

Makes teens aware of expected strains on relationships.

I was thinking about you today. How are you feeling?

After something terrible happens, a lot of times relationships can change. You and your friends, or us in our family, might not get along the same way for a while. What do you think about that?

You know, it's totally normal that we're all cranky with each other right now. Given what we've been through, I think we're doing a pretty great job helping each other. I'm so glad I have you.

How to Help Adolescents and Young Adults

Be tentative and provide options. Avoid lecturing.

Sometimes it helps me to talk about what happened and sometimes I don't want to think about it at all. What are you thinking today?

Normalize reactions and label emotions.

I noticed you've been feeling anxious about leaving the house.

I've been finding it really hard to concentrate lately. What about you?

Sometimes it can feel like everyone else has moved on or seems ok. I want you to know that people who might look like they are fine are still feeling a lot.

How to Help Adolescents and Young Adults

Help teens understanding what is underneath acting out. Provide consequences without shaming.

After something like this happens, a lot of people feel so sad and out of control. Sometimes people feel like drinking more or doing drugs can help somehow. It's totally normal to feel like that but it's not a good idea to act on it. What do you think about that?

Address risk-taking behavior and provide consequences without shaming.

After something like this happens, a lot of people feel out of control and think that drinking or drugs can help. You know our house rules.

How to Help Adolescents and Young Adults

Praise.

I know you woke up when your brother had a nightmare last night. Thank you for being so patient with him.

I know you're going through a lot. I just want to let you know how proud we are of you every day.

I saw that you took a deep breath right then.

Address revenge and retribution directly.

After something like this happens, people can spend a lot of time thinking about how to get revenge. We're all under a lot of stress and it's normal that our sadness can come out as anger. One thing I've learned is that anger doesn't take away sadness or solve any problems, it just leads to more anger. Can we talk about things that could help more?

How to Help Adolescents and Young Adults

Provide safety and security with extra checking in and boundaries.

Things are feeling scary and dangerous for all of us. I'm going to be calling you every day after school to check in. It won't be like this forever– I just need to check in a little more right now to help us both feel safer.

Help direct energy towards something constructive.

I think everyone in our family is really feeling like we want to help. Here are some things we could do. What other ideas do you have?

Keep checking in.

I'm going to check in with you tomorrow about how you are.

Caring for Caregivers

- Taking care of yourself is critical.
- Don't forget basic coping skills.
 - Eat well and stay hydrated
 - Physical activity
 - Bathe, dress, comb hair
 - Sleep well and in a routine
 - Purposeful activity
 - Time outside
 - Time to check in with yourself
 - Down time

Caring for Caregivers

- Acknowledge the hardship of the last few years (and beyond).
- Be gentle with yourself. You are doing the best you can. It may not be the same as before. That is ok.
- Be flexible in taking things on. You may need to take care of yourself before taking care of others.
- Check in with yourself before responding.
- Acknowledge your identities and connections to communities under strain.
- Be compassionate towards others. They are doing the best they can. Checking in can be healing.

Caring for Caregivers

- Limit your media and social media exposure. You may feel guilty about being able to check out. Ask yourself if the way that you are engaging is helping. Disable news alerts.
- Put off major decisions.
- Focus on one thing at a time when ordinary things feel overwhelming.
- Reach out for support.
- Find things to enjoy.

Parent and Caregiver Anxiety

- Unfortunately, violent events are likely to occur in the future.
- The job of parents and caregivers is to keep children safe while allowing them to grow.
- It is understandable to want to keep children out of harm's way entirely and it is impossible.

Managing Parent and Caregiver Anxiety

- Remind yourself that media coverage can distort true risk
- Know your children's whereabouts
- Be aware of and discuss emergency procedures
- Strive to keep communication open
- Encourage children and youth to speak up when they see or hear something

Post-traumatic growth

- Nothing will ever make what happened okay.
- Tragic events can lead to opportunities and growth.
- New chances for connection
 - Opportunities to express love and experience gratitude
 - Opportunities to work together to change things
 - Opportunities to plan for future hard times
- **Children, youth, and adults need hope to cope with trauma.**

People are exposed to racism on a micro-level and on a macro-level.



Micro-level:

Experiencing racism yourself or watching others experience it.



Macro-level:

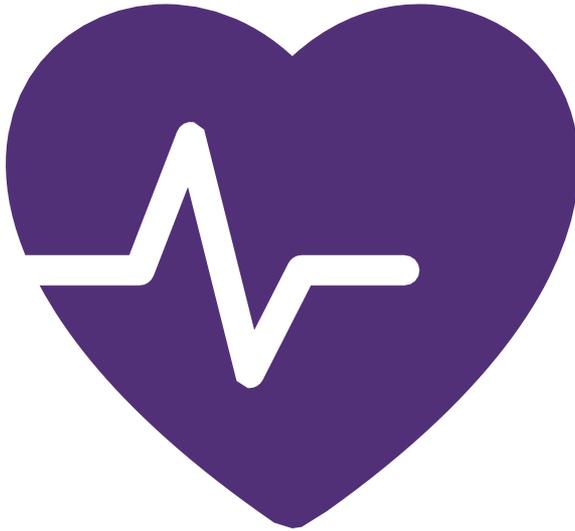
Experiencing racism through the effects of policies, in the media or through institutions like the justice system, education system, or financial system.

When someone experiences racism, it may cause them to feel



- Sad, depressed, or have suicidal thoughts
- Anxiety and vigilance, on guard for the next discriminatory experience
- Internalized racism (believing negative messages about people of color) and decreased self-worth
- Pessimistic and hopeless about the possibility of change
- Distress and post-traumatic stress
- Anger
- Lack of energy for planning, thinking, and coping
- Increased likelihood of using alcohol and substances

How Does Racism Impact Our Bodies?

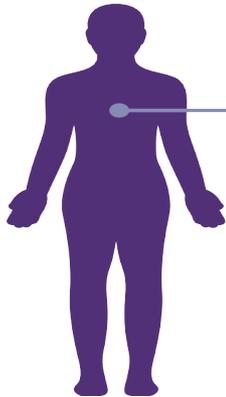


When someone encounters a stressful situation, their body gets ready to respond. Their heart starts racing, blood pressure increases and their breathing speeds up as their body releases stress hormones. It's the natural way that the body prepares to manage stress. But, **when a stressor - like structural racism - never goes away, the body can stay in this heightened state.**

Remember: Mental health impacts physical health.

Experiencing Discrimination is a Stressor to The Body

Over time, the constant stress of racism can have long-term physical health effects like:



- Inflammation
- Higher cortisol levels
- Higher blood pressure
- Increased heart rate
- Decreased immune function

Experiences of racial discrimination can cause racial trauma.

When people encounter racism more often, their symptoms may be more intense.

Someone with racial trauma may:

- Constantly think about and re-experience distressing events
- Have anxiety and hypervigilance
- Suffer from chronic stress
- Experience physical symptoms like headaches or stomachaches
- Have difficulties with memory
- Struggle with sleep or insomnia
- Avoid people and be less willing to take risks

Remember... racial discrimination isn't the only form of discrimination.



People of color who **also** experience discrimination based on their gender identity, sexuality, disability status or other identities, are: **more likely to be impacted by its trauma AND less likely to be actively included in efforts to combat structural racism.**

**Racism impacts mental health.
If you are struggling, please reach out.**

You are not alone.

Crisis Text Line: Text **GOT5** to **741741**

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

Coping with Racism and Racial Trauma

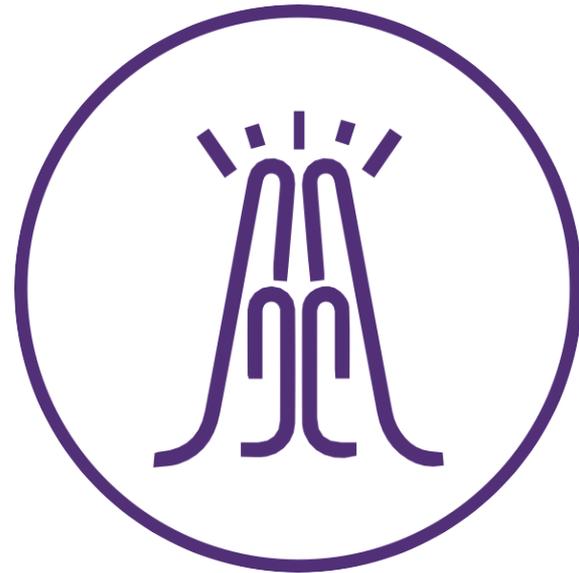


- If you're experiencing racism, it is not your responsibility to fight against it or battle the systems that support its structure.
- But it is important to learn how to cope with its effects. Self-care and self-love can be healing and anti-racist acts.

Coping with Racism and Racial Trauma

Find a role model or mentor.

This connection can be a powerful part of coping.



Coping with Racism and Racial Trauma

Talk about your experiences.

People who don't acknowledge the racial discrimination they've experienced are often at higher risk for mental health struggles.



Coping with Racism and Racial Trauma

Name what you are feeling as you feel it.

When your emotions are a reaction to racism, label the connection. It can be empowering and validating.



Coping with Racism and Racial Trauma

Remind yourself that taking time to pause can improve your health.

Rest is an act of self-care and healing.



Coping with Racism and Racial Trauma

Connect with others who understand what you experience and can provide social support.

Peer interaction is one of the most effective ways to cope. This connection could be with a friend, family member, or a mental health professional.



Coping with Racism and Racial Trauma

Identify your specific triggers

(Places, people, or situations) and think about how to cope with them. Role-playing how to react may help with anxiety and help you process the trauma.



Coping with Racism and Racial Trauma

Consider getting involved in activism and problem-solving.

It can help boost your sense of control, confidence and contribution. It can also help connect you to others who can validate and support you.



Post-Traumatic Stress Reactions

Being unable to manage your responses to the disaster and resume your regular activities may be symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a real and treatable illness.

- Intrusive Reactions, meaning ways the traumatic experience comes back to mind.
- Avoidance and Withdrawal Reactions, including avoiding people, places and things that are reminders of the attacks, withdrawal reactions, including feeling emotionally numb, detached or estranged from others, and losing interest in usual pleasurable activities.
- Physical Arousal Reactions, including sleep difficulties, poor concentration, irritability, jumpiness, nervousness, and being “on the lookout for danger.”

Depression and Traumatic Grief

- Traumatic grief is more common when a loss was under unexpected or tragic circumstances. Preoccupation with the death and the circumstances may be experienced.
- Depression may include serious, long-term experiences of sadness or irritability, inability to enjoy pleasurable activities, fatigue, and thoughts of suicide

Seeking Help

- These reactions are common and understandable, and they are serious.
- Help is available in many forms.
- Asking for help is a sign of strength, not a sign of weakness.
- When reactions last for months or interfere with functioning, reach out for help

Seeking Help

- Reach out to an EAP service or manager; call a hotline; or speak to a mental health provider, health provider, or a trusted colleague.
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255,
- Chat with Lifeline Disaster Distress Helpline, Call or text (800)985-5990 (For Spanish, press “2”) to be connected to a trained counselor 24/7/365.
- Reach out to your child’s pediatrician and school mental health supports.
- You and your pediatrician can get support at Project Teach:
<https://projectteachny.org/>

Buffalo Resources

Clinical Mental Health Services -

Endeavor Health Services

Central Intake: (716) 895-6701

Central Intake email

address: Centralintake@ehsny.org

Best Self Behavioral Health

Central Intake: (716) 884-0888

Spectrum Human Services

Central Intake: (716) 539-5500

Mental Health Crisis Services -

(Adults) Crisis Services - (716) 834-3131

(Under 18) Spectrum C.A.R.E.S. - (716) 882-4357

Spectrum 24/7 Help Line - (716) 710-5172

Project Hope Resources -

Buffalo Urban League Project Hope - (716) 250-2478

Spectrum Project Hope - (716) 566 - 6506

Resources

Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 (English/Spanish); TTY: 1-800-846-8517.

24-hour Crisis Text Line: Text GOT5 to 741741 to Connect with a Crisis Counselor, Free 24/7 support.

24-Hour Support for Deaf or hard of hearing American Sign Language users: The national Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH) is now offering direct crisis counseling and support for Deaf or hard of hearing American Sign Language users via a dedicated videophone option.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: The SAMHSA-funded National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a source of support available 24/7 to people in crisis, including challenging reactions to disasters. Call 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255), or, for support in Spanish, call 1-888-628-9454. <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>.

New York Project Hope Emotional Support Helpline: 7 days a week, 8am-10pm
1-844-863-9314 or visit <https://nyprojecthope.org>

Resources

For the most up to date information about what is occurring in Buffalo as well as available resources for those impacted visit the [Governor's Website](#).

[New York State Office of Mental Health](#)

[Coping Tips for Traumatic Events and Disasters](#)

[Tips for Survivors of a Disaster or Other Traumatic Event: Managing Stress](#)

[Psychological First Aid](#)

[Coping with Stress Following a Mass Shooting](#)

[The Mental Health Effects of Racism](#)

[Leadership Communication: Anticipating And Responding To Stressful Events](#)

[Grief Leadership: Leadership In The Wake Of Tragedy](#)

Resources

[National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)

[For Teens: Coping After Mass Violence\(En Español\)](#)

[Helping Youth after Community Trauma: Tips for Educators\(En Español\)](#)

[Talking to Children about Mass Violence](#)

[Teacher Guidelines for Helping Students after Mass Violence](#)

[Psychological Impact of Mass Violence](#)

[Helping School-Age Children with Traumatic Grief: Tips for Caregivers \(En Español\)](#)