

Managing Traumatic Exposure and Events

As human beings, our resiliency and capacity to cope ebbs and flows. For many of us in these difficult times, our capacity to cope with new challenges may feel at an all-time low. And yet, each day we each face new demands on our coping capacities, including ongoing uncertainties stemming from the impact of the COVID pandemic, together with almost daily stories of tragedies and traumas—including anti-Black, anti-Asian and other racist violence, mass shootings, and human suffering from natural disasters—through our news and media outlets. As we absorb horrifying events like this, it is natural for us to experience a range and mix of feelings including sadness, anxiety, worry, feelings of helplessness or anger, difficulty concentrating, difficulty sleeping, and social withdrawal.

Anyone can also be traumatized by watching coverage of events like this. Additionally, seeing traumatic events like this can trigger or re-awaken previous traumas—whether those be personal, community, historical, or intergenerational. Common symptoms in the aftermath of trauma include:

- physiological symptoms like jumpiness, a racing heart, and hyper-vigilance for our own safety and the safety of those we care about
- intrusive thoughts or images about the traumatic event, flashbacks, and nightmares
- intense emotions around the event, feelings of anxiety, and depression, as well as difficulties with concentration or memory
- avoidance of things associated with the trauma—sights, sounds, smells,

If you are experiencing symptoms like this, know that these are natural responses to experiencing trauma, and that time, social supports, and healing practices can help these symptoms dissipate. Healing from trauma is not a linear process, though. It has its ups and downs, progressions and setbacks.

Wherever you are in your own healing journey, practicing self-compassion is a key to healing. As you navigate these challenging times, we offer these tips for managing exposure and experiences of traumas.

- **Unplug.** While it is important to be well-informed, you can moderate and limit exposure to traumatic images and information, as well as limit worry and agitation by limiting the amount of time you spend plugged into media coverage.
 - Choose a small number of trusted sources of information.
 - Try not to watch video of violent acts.
 - Set a limit on the amount of time that you will spend consuming media sources and stick to that limit.
- **Focus on things that you have control over.** Experiences of trauma are something that no one chooses, and they tend to rob us of a sense of control. So, setting aside our (human) desire to be in control of everything, and focusing instead on the limited number of things that we can actually control in our lives can help establish a sense of safety—physical and emotional.
 - Be intentional about the choices you make throughout your days—how you choose to spend your time, what clothes you choose to wear, what you choose to eat, etc.
 - Spend time thinking about the places you feel safe(r) and prioritize spending time in those locations.



- Identify the people with whom you feel safe(r) and trust and prioritize spending time with those people.
- Be intentional about engaging [self-care practices](#) every day—even multiple times a day.
- **Learn to be in the present moment.** Responses to trauma such as flashbacks and intrusive thoughts take us out of the current moment and often leave us feeling stuck in the traumatic event. Mindfulness, meditation and [grounding practices](#), can help us shift back to the present and create a sense of safety. Offices like the [Chaplain's Office](#) and [Wellness Resource Center](#) can introduce you to mindfulness practices and supportive resources, or you can use apps like Headspace, Liberate, or Simply Being.
- **Connect with a sense of purpose or meaning, including spiritual and/or religious practices and communities.** Trauma often makes us feel that we are coming undone. Connecting or reconnecting with a sense of meaning, or to a community of care can provide a sense of groundedness because it helps us see the connection between ourselves and something much bigger than ourselves. At a time when our outlook may feel bleak, spiritual and religious practices can also bring a sense of centeredness, awe, mystery, wonder, and joy.
- **Stay connected to social supports.** Maintaining connections to friends, family, and co-workers provides outlets for sharing feelings and relieving stress. If disruptions caused by coronavirus have separated you from these social supports, make a point of checking in. Plants and can be supportive nurturing presences in our lives.
- **Take action.** Trauma and grief often leave us feeling disempowered or helpless. Taking action is one way to begin to regain a sense of control, and to bring to life the values that you hold dear. Deciding to take action can take many forms, including writing in a journal, writing to your congressperson, signing petitions, sharing messages of solidarity and support through social media, participating in community engaged service, and participating in community engaged action or protest.
- **Seek help when needed.** Anyone who is feeling overwhelmed by anxiety or who is having difficulty managing traumas can seek professional mental health support.
 - Students can contact the Counseling Center (719-389-6093)
 - Staff and Faculty can contact the Employee Assistance Program (800-272-7255)
 - Chaplain Kate Holbrook can also serve as a confidential support for all members of the campus community.

Additional resources for managing trauma include:

[How to Manage Trauma](#) from the National Council for Behavioral Health

[Racial Trauma Toolkit](#) from Boston College

[Racial Trauma is Real: The Impact of Police Shootings on African Americans](#) by E. A. Turner & J. Richardson

[Tender, Loving Self-Care for Asian Americans](#) from Psychology Today

[Therapy for Black Girls Podcast](#)- especially Episode 134: The Impact of Racial Trauma

[Asians Do Therapy podcast](#)

[Latinx Therapy podcast](#)

[Resources for Mental Health](#) from Project LETS

[Recovering from Sexual Violence](#) from RAINN

[Coping with Community Trauma](#) from the Muslim Wellness Foundation

[4 Ways to Heal Yourself with Love](#) from Lion's Roar Buddhist Wisdom for Our Time

