

## Things Families Can Do To Cope with Trauma

When a traumatic event happens, it is common and normal to have unsettling feelings, thoughts and behaviors. Below are some ideas for ways to cope...

- Try to keep calm, because that will help you think more clearly and be more helpful to those around you, especially children. Don't panic or react to rumors.
- Reassure young children that they are safe. Tell them in simple words that some bad things are happening in the community and world but that they are safe right now.
- Answer questions in simple and honest ways if asked, do not volunteer a lot of information. It is okay to say you don't know.
- Keep young children (under 8 years old) away from graphic images of violence. For older children, monitor exposure to graphic images. Graphic images and what you imagine the experience victims to have been is one source of distress.
- For younger children, try to keep to normal family routines, like bedtime stories or regular dinner times, and other activities, such as sports or clubs, as much as possible.
- Give older children and teens opportunities to express reactions to the traumatic event by encouraging them to talk about how they are feeling, why they think these acts happened, and what they think should be done.
- Avoid speculating beyond facts to more frightening implications. Acknowledge feelings of anger or desire for retribution but do not encourage them. Expressing a lot of anger tends to make people more angry and upset.
- Distraction works for some; talking works for others. The other is thinking about the implications for a changed sense of safety in the world. Try to keep a perspective. It is important to remember that despite the horror of these acts, people in the community have learned to live meaningful and mostly safe lives even with the threat of violence. Highlight the efforts that have been made to help the community be safer.
- People cope with crisis differently. Try to avoid judging or condemning others for their individual coping styles. Do not pressure family members to handle the trauma by either talking about it or by getting on with things. Both types of coping can work. However, most people find talking with others helpful.
- Check in with or stick close by family and friends. This is almost always a comfort to people.
- Big traumatic events can bring up memories of past personal trauma. Be aware that this can happen and, if needed, seek professional help.
- If you feel a need to be with members of your community on a broader level, contact your local community organizations. Many of them will have specially organized events or will have someone who can assist you with referrals.
- Many people want to help. If reactions become overwhelming, seek professional help.

**Harborview Center for Sexual Assault & Traumatic Stress**

Box 359947 325 Ninth Ave. Seattle, WA 98104-5570 206-744-1600 Fax 206-744-1614 [hcsats.org](http://hcsats.org)

---

*Owned by King County and Managed by the University of Washington*