

Coping With Trauma: Young Adults

Remember:

- Whether or not you were directly affected by a traumatic event, it is normal to feel anxious about your own safety, to picture the event in your own mind, and to wonder how you would react in an emergency.
- People react in different ways to trauma. Some may become irritable or depressed; others lose sleep or have nightmares; and others may deny their feelings or simply “blank out” the troubling event. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to feel after experiencing trauma.
- While it may feel better to pretend the event did not happen, in the long run, it is best to be honest about your feelings and to allow yourself to acknowledge the sense of loss and uncertainty.
- It is important to realize that, while things may seem off balance for a while, your life will return to normal.
- It is important to talk with someone about your sorrow, anger, and other emotions, even though it may be difficult to get started.
- You may feel most comfortable talking about your feelings with a professor, counselor, or church leader. The important thing is to share your feelings with someone you trust.
- It is common to be angry at people who have caused great pain. This desire comes from our outrage for the innocent victims. We must understand, though, that it is futile to respond with more violence. Nothing good is accomplished by hateful language or actions.
- While you will always remember the event, the painful feelings will decrease over time, and you will come to understand that, in learning to cope with tragedy, you have become stronger, more adaptable, and more self-reliant.

Common Responses to Trauma:

- Disbelief and shock
- Fear and anxiety about the future

- Disorientation; difficulty making decisions or concentrating
- Inability to focus on schoolwork and extracurricular activities
- Apathy and emotional numbing
- Irritability and anger
- Extreme mood swings
- Sadness and depression
- Feelings of powerlessness
- Extreme changes in eating patterns; loss of appetite or overeating
- Crying for “no apparent reason”
- Headaches and stomach problems
- Difficulty sleeping
- Excessive use of alcohol and drugs

Most of these reactions will decrease as time passes and you begin to resume your daily activities. Because everyone experiences stress differently, don't compare your progress with other people's or judge their reactions and emotions.

Tips for Coping

- Talk about it.
- Limit media viewing. Take breaks from watching news coverage of the event.
- Take care of yourself. Taking good physical care of yourself with rest, exercise, and healthy eating will help your body to deal with stress. Do activities that you enjoy and find relaxing.
- Avoid excess. Avoid using alcohol, drugs, and tobacco products as a way of dealing with stress.
- Resume routines. Getting back to your daily routines in life can be a good method for regaining a sense of control.
- Get involved. Engaging in positive activities like group discussions and candlelight vigils can help promote comfort and healing.