



Coping With Loss or a Violent Event

Events such as losing a loved one in a tragic way or experiencing or witnessing a violent event can be traumatic and can shatter our sense of safety. Afterward, we may struggle to understand what happened and why. Recovery will take time and can be difficult. While family and friends can help us cope, dealing with the long-term psychological impact and reactions may require additional or professional support.

This handout provides information on common reactions to stress from these events and where to find support when needed. For free, confidential mental health and substance use support today, call or text 988 or chat at nyc.gov/988. Trained counselors are available 24/7 to speak with you and connect you to services, and counseling is available in more than 200 languages.

Common Reactions to Stress From Loss or a Violent Event

Stress reactions after experiencing loss or a violent event are natural and include:

- Shock and sorrow; fatigue and anger; or fear, horror and helplessness
- Trouble sleeping or eating
- Difficulty concentrating or with memory and making decisions
- Constantly reliving the event or having painful memories or nightmares
- Actively avoiding any place, situation or conversations that are reminiscent of the event
- Being constantly anxious, guarded or easily startled, as if you are in danger
- Feeling numb and detached from your surroundings and others

These reactions are often very unpleasant to experience, but understanding them can help you process and cope better with loss or the event. These stress reactions should lessen and become manageable or go away with time.

Coping With Loss

Grief is a natural response to losing a loved one. You may experience common grief reactions, which usually will pass with time and support. You may:

- Feel empty and numb, angry, or guilty
- Experience physical reactions such as trembling, nausea and weakness
- Think about what could or should have been done differently
- Have nightmares or trouble concentrating
- Feel unable to return to or enjoy your usual activities

There is no correct or one way to grieve, and how and for how long you grieve will vary from person to person. You may move between the stages of grief — accepting the loss of someone, working through the pain, adjusting to living without someone and moving forward with living — before finding peace and acceptance.

Coping With a Violent Event

If you have experienced a violent event, the healing process can be challenging. To help you cope:

- Talk about your loss and ask for help if you feel stuck or overwhelmed; you may find this is comforting and makes you feel less alone.
- Accept your feelings; know you can recover at your own pace and in your own way.
- Learn about the process of working through it — there will be ups and downs.
- Take care of yourself: Try to maintain a routine, eat well, move more and get enough rest. Do something relaxing, energizing or uplifting. Also, avoid using alcohol and drugs to cope.
- If the event was in the media, limit exposure to TV and the internet, including on your smartphone.
- Strive for balance: Remind yourself of good and meaningful things, even if they feel distant at the moment.
- Consider becoming more active in your community, which can offer a network of support.

Finding Support

There are times when you may need additional or professional support. Help is available for all New Yorkers regardless of insurance, ability to pay or immigration status. Professionals can also help determine if you have a condition such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). If you experience any of the following reactions, call 988 or see a health care provider:

- **You cannot move forward:** Your feelings of grief persist, or you feel unable to function and perform basic daily activities.
- **You become depressed:** Depression is not the same as grief and sadness. It is a mental health condition for which you can get support. You may have depression if you:
 - Feel persistently sad and tired, hopeless, or worthless
 - Lose interest in things you used to enjoy
 - Experience changes in sleep and eating
 - Have difficulty concentrating or with memory and making decisions
 - Have thoughts of suicide or death
- **You experience lasting stress reactions:** If your stress reactions last longer than a month or if they worsen or interfere with your daily activities and functions, you may be experiencing PTSD — a serious mental health condition for which there is help.

Are you feeling overwhelmed? Are you concerned about someone else? Call or text 988 or chat online at nyc.gov/988. Trained counselors are available 24/7 for free, confidential support in more than 200 languages to discuss mental health and substance use issues.

Visit nyc.gov/988 for more information. If you need help finding a health care provider, call **311** or 844-NYC-4NYC (844-692-4692) — there are services available for all New Yorkers regardless of insurance, ability to pay or immigration status.