

Coping with Tragedy

Everyone does it differently.

**You may experience some of the symptoms below- this is normal!
And if you experience other emotions, or none at all, that is OK too.**

- **Shock:** often the initial reaction to events like this. Shock is the person's emotional protection from being too overwhelmed by the event. You may feel stunned, numb, or in disbelief concerning the event.
- **Suffering:** this is the long period of grief during which the person gradually comes to terms with the reality of the event/loss. Feelings that life is overwhelming, chaotic and disorganized are common.
- **Sadness:** The most common feeling found following traumatic events like this. It may become quite intense and be experienced as emptiness or despair.
- **Anger:** Can be one of the most confusing feelings for the grieving person. Anger is a response to feeling powerless, frustrated, or even abandoned.
- **Anxiety:** Can range from mild insecurity to strong panic attacks. Often grievors become anxious about their ability to take care of themselves, or fear an event like this will happen to them or a loved one.
- **Guilt:** Including thoughts such as "If only I had..."

Take care of yourself. Here are some ideas:

1. Keep busy! Focus on your projects and classroom assignments, if you can. If not, try to fill your time with other activities. Research indicates that keeping focused on day to day required tasks or routines helps mitigate the effects of stress.
2. Seek out people who care for and support you. Share your reactions, thoughts and how the experience is impacting you.
3. Know that the reactions to tragedy described above are normal responses to a very abnormal experience. They occur in varying degrees of severity and type for each person.
4. Limit the amount of time that you watch details about the tragedy on TV.

5. “Baby yourself” – eat well (avoid caffeine, greasy foods, sugar), get enough sleep, take a hot bath or shower- make sure to do things that are nurturing, things that you enjoy.
6. Do things that will ground, center, and relax you: exercise, do some yoga, take diaphragmatic breaths, meditate. Go to this website for more guidance:
<http://www.allaboutdepression.com/relax>
7. Avoid excessive use of alcohol or drugs as a way to cope with the feelings induced by this event. This way of coping can lead to more stress in the long run. Express your feelings instead.
8. Express your feelings with your art! Drawings, poetry etc. are all healthy ways to manage the feelings related to tragedy and loss.
9. Consider journaling your experience or feelings. Remember that ***anything*** you feel is OK.
10. Consider reaching out to others. Helping others can often help us manage our own feelings of powerlessness.
11. Seek to gain perspective on the experience. This is often helped by participation in counseling. Other aids may include meditation, reading, spiritual reflection or involvement in support groups.

Many counseling services are here for you to process tragedy or anything else you may be struggling with. If you need to talk to someone, please do not hesitate to contact a counseling service near you. There are many skilled counselors who want to speak with you and are invested in supporting you. **You are not alone.**

Information courtesy of Nazareth College Counseling Services
<http://www.naz.edu/counseling-services/documents/Tragedy.doc>