



Your Leading Mental Health Resource

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Coping with Disaster in the Aftermath of the Tragedies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Mental Health Association of Montgomery County expresses its deepest sympathies to the family, friends and classmates of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University school shooting victims. As details surrounding the shootings continue to unfold, we recognize that this tragedy affects people across the country and right here in our community. The following guidelines may be helpful to educators, students and parents respond and cope with this event.

Tips for Educators

- Communicate clearly the security measures in place and the resources available for people who need help.
- Since individuals contemplating violent acts often communicate their intentions to friends and classmates, help students develop a plan for what to do if they hear someone planning a violent act.
- Advertise the support services available at the student mental health center and religious centers.
- Develop special training for key personnel – resident assistants, student health center staff, campus police, sororities and fraternities – on how to respond to this tragedy and help students cope.
- Provide culturally relevant resources (e.g., bring in ministers and others from the faith community).

Tips for Students

- Develop a personal plan to ensure your safety in a similar situation.
- Use reliable sources to keep up-to-date on developments and information.
- Limit television viewing. It can be difficult to process images and messages in news reports.
- A range of emotions are normal following tragic events – ranging from depression, anxiousness, anger and ‘numbness.’
- If you feel depressed, anxious or angry, talk to friends, family, ministers or others around you. Likely, those around you are experiencing similar feelings.
- If you feel overwhelmed by your emotions, seek help from your school mental health center, call your local Mental Health America Affiliate or go to www.mentalhealthamerica.net to find help in your community.

Tips for Parents

- Encourage your child to develop a personal safety plan.
- Educate yourself on the disaster and communication plans at your child's school.
- Keep dialogue open with your child – let him or her know that you are there for them to talk through their feelings.
- Encourage your child to take action regarding their school's safety by sharing their concerns with university officials.
- Recognize that college-aged students may minimize their concerns outwardly, but may become argumentative, withdrawn or allow their school performance to decline. Allow them room to react as they feel appropriate.
- If you or your child feels overwhelmed by emotions – such as depression, anxiety or anger – seek help or support from a mental health professional or minister.

*For supportive listening services,
call the Montgomery County Hotline at (301) 738-2255.*

*For immediate response to crisis situations,
call the Montgomery County Crisis Center at (240) 777-4000.*

*For general information or related fact sheets, call Mental Health Association
at (301) 424-0656 or visit www.mhamc.org.*

Adapted with permission from Mental Health America.