

## Tips for College Students on Coping with Campus Violence and Trauma

Many college students, faced with the recent violence on the Virginia Tech campus, find that they now feel uncertain about a future for which they had just begun to plan. Some may be concerned about parents, relatives or friends in the military or who are living overseas. Others may wonder how they, themselves, may become directly involved in this crisis. No one is unaffected.

Whether you are directly or indirectly impacted, it is important to know that each person reacts differently to crisis, and it is common and expected to experience a range of responses. Emotional responses can appear immediately or sometimes develop months later. Students who live away from home may have a more difficult time coping without the reassurance of having family nearby.

Understanding how you feel and taking positive steps to address those feelings can help you cope. Remember that, while things may never be quite the same again, they will get better and you will feel better.

### Common Responses to Crisis

- Disbelief and shock
- Disorientation; difficulty making decisions or concentrating
- Inability to focus on schoolwork and extracurricular activities
- Apathy and emotional numbing
- Sadness and depression
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Intrusive thoughts; replaying events in our minds
- Excessive worry about safety and vulnerability; feeling powerless
- Crying for “no apparent reason”
- Irritability and anger
- Headaches and stomach problems
- Difficulty sleeping
- Extreme changes in eating patterns; loss of appetite or overeating
- Excessive use of alcohol or drugs

### Tips for Coping

- **Talk about it.** Encourage others to share their perspectives. Sharing your feelings with friends, classmates, professors, advisors and family will help you work through your emotions. Talking with others will relieve stress and help you realize that you’re not alone with your feelings.
- **Take care of yourself.** Get plenty of rest and exercise. Do things that you find relaxing and soothing. Remember to eat nutritious foods. Limit your exposure to media reports and images of the war. Avoid excessive drinking and risk-taking activities. Try to maintain your usual routines.
- **Stay connected.** Maintain contact with friends and family. Make plans to visit family or others who can offer reassurance. If you can’t visit them in person, increase your contact through phone calls and e-mails.

- **Do something positive.** Do something that will help you gain a greater sense of control (for example, give blood, take a First Aid class, collect donations for “care packages” for people in the military or write letters to service men and women). Whether you support or oppose the war, you can write letters to elected officials or get involved in campus activities, such as a candlelight vigil, benefit, discussion group or special lecture.
- **Ask for help.** If you feel overwhelmed by events, remember that it’s not a sign of weakness. Talk with a trusted friend, family member or spiritual advisor. Use on-campus resources, such as the college counseling center and health center, or reach out to community resources, such as faith leaders or the local mental health association.

If you have strong feelings that won’t go away, or if you’re troubled for longer than four to six weeks, you may want to seek professional help. Being unable to manage your responses to a crisis and to resume your regular activities may be a symptom of depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder. People who have existing mental health problems and those with a history of trauma may want to check in with a mental health care professional. Help is available. You don’t have to deal with this alone.

**For More Information:**

For a free and confidential mental health screening, go on-line to [www.mhacolorado.org](http://www.mhacolorado.org).

**American College Counseling Association**  
**American College Health Association**  
**American College Personnel Association**  
**Anxiety Disorders Association of America**  
**National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information**  
**National Institute of Mental Health**  
**National Panhellenic Conference**  
**The BACCUS and GAMMA Peer Education Network**

[www.collegecounseling.org](http://www.collegecounseling.org)  
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