

What You Need to Know...



Understanding Your Mental Health In Times of War and Terrorism

Facing a new war and the continuing terrorist threat, Americans are experiencing many powerful emotions. For most people, the intense feelings of anxiety, sadness, grief and anger are healthy and appropriate. But some people may have a more profound and debilitating reaction to the war.

It is important to remember that everyone reacts differently to trauma and each person has his or her own tolerance level for difficult feelings. To cope with these emotions, there are some things you can do for yourself and others. Experts say that remaining engaged in our world, staying connected with people, and being optimistic about the challenges ahead are key to riding through otherwise traumatic times. In fact, in times of turmoil, people can make changes that improve their lives and life satisfaction.

Knowing what is a normal response to an abnormal situation, and what signs might indicate you have a more serious problem, will help you determine if and when to seek help from a mental health professional.

Common Responses

It is common to have difficulty managing your feelings during times of war, threat of terrorism or traumatic events. Many people will experience such symptoms as:

- Disbelief and shock
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Inability to focus
- Apathy and emotional numbing
- Irritability and anger
- Sadness and depression
- Extreme changes in eating patterns; loss of appetite or overeating
- Feeling powerless
- Crying for “no apparent reason”
- Headaches and stomach problems
- Difficulty sleeping
- Excessive use of alcohol and drugs
- Disorientation; difficulty making decisions or concentrating

Signs to Seek Help

When feelings do not go away or are so intense that they impair your ability to function in daily life, you may have a diagnosable disorder that requires mental healthcare. There are signs that can help you determine whether you are having a normal reaction to our nation’s crisis or if you’re experiencing a mental health problem. These signs include:

- Not taking pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Having thoughts of death or suicide
- Having a sense of a foreshortened future
- Nightmares and reoccurring thoughts about war or a traumatic event
- Being unable to stop thinking about the war or a traumatic event
- Continued difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- Feeling jumpy or easily startled
- Being overly concerned about safety

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- Feeling guilty, worthless or hopeless
- Avoiding thoughts, feelings or conversations that remind you of a traumatic event
- Avoiding places or people that remind you of a traumatic event

If you are experiencing these symptoms, talking with a mental health professional or taking a mental health-screening test can help you understand how well you are coping. Take that step and get help.

Tips for Coping

- **Talk about it.** By talking with others, you can relieve stress and realize that others share your feelings.
- **Take care of yourself.** Get plenty of rest and exercise, avoid excessive drinking and eat properly. Avoid foods that are high in calories and fat.
- **Limit exposure to images of the war.** Especially avoid television news programs.
- **Do something positive.** Give blood, prepare “care packages” for people in the military, write letters to service men and women. Whether you support or oppose the war, write letters to elected officials, take part in community meetings, etc.
- **Ask for help.** Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. Talk with a trusted relative, friend or spiritual advisor.

For More Information:

For a free and confidential mental health screening, go on-line to www.mhacolorado.org.