

Coping strategies help us deal with aftermath

All of us have felt the impact of the terrorist attacks last week in New York City and Washington, D.C. and the plane crash near Pittsburgh, Pa. All of a sudden our world is not safe. It not only feels that way, but the recent events have led us to know that in a new way. While there have been many good articles already written about reactions people are experiencing to this tragedy as well as responses which we can make, I wanted to add my voice to the group; those who follow this column can find here some tools for themselves and those whom they love and care for.

Coping strategies

The Pastoral Counseling Centers of Tennessee Inc. have put together some Common Responses to Trauma and also Some Helpful Coping Strategies for Adults and Children. I will share these ideas with you briefly. Because our community and our own selves have been threatened, we will feel anxious. Fear and uncertainty will accompany this anxiety. These reactions show up in physical, behavioral, emotional and spiritual ways.

Some Common Responses to Trauma: It may be difficult both to get to sleep and to remain asleep. Because we have seen it so much, we may replay the events in our minds, even when we do not want to think about them. The shock and disbelief that we feel will remain for a time. It is not only normal to feel stunned, but it is also normal for that feeling to last for awhile. Our concentration will be interrupted. We may find it hard to remember or to pay attention to everyday normal tasks. We may become emotionally numbed. Because of the intensity of the anxiety and its related feelings, we may find ourselves unresponsive to daily pleasures and activities. We may develop a travel anxiety, particularly to airplanes; the thought of going far away from home may bring new concerns with it. Our safety has been taken from us and we feel vulnerable. We may find ourselves very afraid for ourselves and for loved ones.

What to do

What can we do about these conditions and experiences? Here are some ideas. First of all connect. We want and need to stay connected with the normal world. While it has changed, reach out to significant others for reassurance and support. At this time your religious leader and congregation may be some of those places to turn. We need to be loved and to love in return.

Connect with those whom you love and who know what is important. Communicate with people. Communicate deeply and completely what your reactions are to these traumatic events. We must talk about our feelings. Talking with others will help us to organize our experience; we will better understand ourselves. Prayer is one form of communication.

Act. By that I mean do positive things that will boost your spirit and involve your mind and body. Right now people are being asked to donate money for air masks and other supplies for the volunteers. Blood will continue to be needed; donate. Find other ways locally to contribute to ongoing needs. Your religious leader can help you identify these needs. You are a feeling person, so listen to your feelings and talk about them where appropriate. At this time it is appropriate to feel mad, scared, hurt, and even glad for the moments of good news in the midst of this tragedy. Maintain a sense of humor.

Acknowledge children

As you care for the children you are close to, be sure to acknowledge their fears and anxieties. Accept their feelings. Assure them of your presence and love. Because the children have been exposed to so much dark information, control the amount of information they see, depending on their age. Explore with them what they know and answer their questions and join them in the struggle to understand what has happened. Continue the normal patterns of daily life. Eating, sleeping, recreation and worship patterns should all continue. These rituals give us all structure and stability. Sometimes the safety of additional lights will help one through a tough time. If adults that the children are close to must travel, be sure to talk with them about that; offer them reassurance and find ways to stay in touch. These are just a few suggestions. Stay in community, including your religious community. Maintain the certainty of your faith. Talk with others about your concerns and about theirs. These feelings will linger for a long time. Be prepared for them and patient with yourself and with them. Dr. Paul Melrose is clinical director of the Samaritan Counseling Center of Southeast Michigan. He can be reached through [www.metanola.org/paulmelrose](http://www.metanola.org/paulmelrose) or at (248) 474-4701.



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