



# Media coverage of traumatic events

## Stay informed, but limit exposure

When a traumatic event or issue happens, it's easier than ever to immerse yourself in round-the-clock coverage. It can be a racial issue, terrorism, a natural disaster that destroys whole communities, or a new and deadly virus with no cure in sight.

Some TV and radio news programs air 24-hour updates and discussions. But perhaps what has changed the news landscape the most is social media. Online posts make it very easy to find out a lot of news fast—often before it is confirmed or the facts are known. Videos, photos, and news stories can go *viral*—that is, spread quickly—by being shared on social media sites.

Depending on the event or issue, the news can make you feel helpless and afraid. It can bring out differences of opinion and lead to arguments with friends and family, online or in person. There is such a thing as watching and reading too much news.

## How media affects the viewer

When a traumatic or disturbing event happens, how do you stay informed without spinning in an endless cycle of fear and worry? Here are some signs that the anxiety is getting to be too much:

- Thinking about the event or issue all the time
- Getting upset about what will happen
- Trouble keeping up with daily tasks
- Snapping at loved ones
- Getting more tired than usual, yet having trouble sleeping

Too much media exposure can make you feel miserable. How do you take a step back and take care of *you*?

## Tips for adults

Any one event may affect people differently. Some can take the news in stride and move on right away. Others might take the event personally, even if it hasn't happened to them or to anyone they know.

There is no right or wrong gut reaction to an event or issue, but how you or your loved one responds is key. Here are some tips:

- **Learn about the event or issue.** Look for trusted news sources for info, and stick with only one or two of them to get updates.
- **Keep on task.** Try to read or listen to the news when it's not in the way of your daily routine. Skip catching up on events right before bed.
- **Talk with a trusted peer about the event or issue.** Family members or friends may make you feel less alone in your concerns. Even if you don't see eye-to-eye, listen to what they have to say and why.

## Tips for children

Kids are curious by nature and will ask about distressing news. Don't brush the topic off or make it taboo. Kids need to know they have adults to talk with safely about many topics.

- **Learn what you can about the matter so you feel comfortable talking about it with your child.** This will help you put it in perspective for him or her.
- **Talk about plans that are in place to help keep your child safe.** Learn about "active shooter," fire, and other safety drills at your child's school so you will be prepared to discuss them before drills occur.
- **Look at it from a community standpoint, together.** Talk about issues like safety measures at school and why they are vital. Talk about nearby neighborhood crime and why it happens. Don't assume the issues aren't going to hit close to home.

Disasters, terrorism, violence, deaths, and problems between races are just a few things kids will want to talk about. Let your kids know that you are willing to have an ongoing and open talk about whatever is on their minds.

The silver lining is that we can find the good that comes out of many awful events. When you're watching bad situations unfold, look for:

- The volunteers who are helping with the cleanup
- How communities come together
- How people find ways to talk about issues and create positive change
- The proactive groups who is advocating for change
- The grassroots efforts to give aid to those in need

Point these bright spots out to your family, friends, and mostly, kids. Pitch in where you can.

## **Source(s)**

- 1 National Institutes of Health
- 2 Coping with Traumatic Events

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