



District Branch/State Association

Office of Corporate Communications & Public Affairs Outreach Toolkit

The Office of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs (CCPA) is the principle APA office for developing and disseminating information to the media.

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Introduction

The Office of Corporate Communications & Public Affairs (CCPA) has developed this media toolkit regarding disasters. The toolkit is designed to assist the District Branches and State Associations in educating the media and public on psychiatry, mental illness and other key issue areas.

The toolkit includes talking points and additional resources to help in outreach efforts. *This is an internal document for APA members' use only. Please do not distribute to the media.*

If you would like additional communications information, or a template press release, please contact Erin Connors, APA Senior Media Relations Specialist, at 703-907-8562 or by email at econnors@psych.org.

Mental Health Resources for Coping with Traumatic Events

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) offers tips and other mental health resources on how to minimize possible mental and emotional effects of trauma caused by a disaster.

Traumas and disasters can have tremendous psychological impacts on those who are affected directly and indirectly. Most people will do well after a traumatic event; some may emerge even stronger. Individuals who are affected may have various stress reactions that present psychological, as well as physical, symptoms. However, there are steps that individuals can take for themselves and their families to lessen the psychosomatic impacts felt by the community at large and those involved in the event.

After an event has passed, the APA recommends following these steps to begin coping with the possible devastation and stress that follows:

1. Keep informed about new information and developments, but avoid overexposure to news rebroadcasts of the events. Be sure to use credible information sources to avoid speculation and rumors.
2. Learn what local resources are available to aid those affected by the tragedy and be prepared to share this information.
3. If you feel upset, you are not alone. Common reactions to trauma include anxiety, depression, irritability, difficulty sleeping, isolating yourself from others and increased use of alcohol and tobacco to manage your emotions. Talking with friends, family or colleagues who likely are experiencing the same feelings may help.
4. If you have contact with children, keep open dialogues with them regarding their fears of danger and the traumatic event. Let them know that in time, the tragedy will pass. Don't minimize the danger, but talk about your ability to cope with tragedy and get through the ordeal.
5. Feelings of anxiety and depression following a traumatic event are natural. You may want to seek psychiatric care if:

- a) you are having increasing problems at home or work
- b) you are using more alcohol
- c) your symptoms don't get better after a few days (or are getting worse)
- d) you just don't feel right
- e) a loved one or colleague comments that you don't seem like yourself

Your primary care provider or Employee Assistance Plan (EAP) can help connect you with mental health services.

For more information on coping with mental illnesses, visit the APA's patient / public education website: www.psychiatry.org/mental-health

Information on coping after a disaster or tragedy is available at <http://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/coping-after-disaster-trauma>

The APA Blog includes several posts about the [Impact of Trauma](#), [Women, Disasters and Resilience](#) and [Talking to Children About Disasters](#).

APA Office of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs

Additional Talking Points

General:

- We are concerned that this tragedy may cause significant distress and pose a potential threat to the mental health of those involved. It is important for everyone to know that psychiatric help is available and treatment does work.
- As friends, families and coworkers begin to deal with this event, they all need to understand that this type of trauma can have a tremendous psychological impact on those affected. While most people do well after a traumatic event, some will have stress reactions that present psychological as well as physical symptoms. The causes behind such incidents are often complex, and there are usually no simple answers.
- By working together, parents, teachers, advisors, health care professionals and other concerned individuals can develop effective strategies to identify individuals who need help.

Coping After Trauma:

- Keep informed about new information and developments, but avoid overexposure to news rebroadcasts of the event. Be sure to use credible information sources to avoid speculation and rumors.
- If you feel upset, you are not alone. Common reactions to trauma include anxiety, depression, irritability, difficulty sleeping, isolating yourself from others and increased use of alcohol and tobacco to manage your emotions. Talk to friends, family or peers who likely are experiencing the same feelings.
- If you have contact with children, keep open dialogues with them regarding their fears of danger. Let them know that, with time, healing from a tragedy is likely and hoped for. Don't minimize the dangers, but talk about your ability to cope with tragedy and get through the ordeal. Avoid subjecting children to overexposure to news of the traumatic event.
- Feelings of fear, sadness and anger following a traumatic event are natural and may persist for days or much longer. You may want to seek psychiatric care if you are having increasing problems at home or work, you are using more alcohol, your symptoms don't get better after a few days (or are getting worse), you just don't feel right or a loved one or colleague comments that you don't seem like yourself. For more information on coping with mental illnesses, visit the APA's patient / public education website: www.psychiatry.org/mental-health.

Talking to Children about Traumatic Events:

Traumatic events are not easy for anyone to comprehend or accept. Understandably, many young children feel frightened and confused. As parents, teachers and caring adults, we can best help by listening and responding in an honest, consistent and supportive manner. Fortunately, most children, even those exposed to trauma, are quite resilient. By creating an open environment where they feel free to ask questions, we can help them cope with stressful events and experiences, and reduce the risk of lasting emotional difficulties. Although these may be difficult conversations, they are important.

There is no “right” or “wrong” way to talk with children about such tragic events. However, here are some suggestions that you may find helpful:

- Create an open and supportive environment where children know they can ask questions. At the same time, it’s best not to force children to talk about things unless and until they’re ready.
- Give children honest answers and information. Children will usually know, or eventually find out, if you’re “making things up.” It may affect their ability to trust you or your reassurances in the future.
- Use words and concepts children can understand. Gear your explanations to the child’s age, language and developmental level.
- Be prepared to repeat information and explanations several times. Some information may be hard to accept or understand. Asking the same question over and over may also be a way for a child to ask for reassurance.
- Acknowledge and validate the child’s thoughts, feelings and reactions. Let them know that you think their questions and concerns are important and appropriate.
- Remember that children tend to personalize situations. For example, they may worry about their own safety and the safety of immediate family members, friends and neighbors.
- Be reassuring, but don’t make unrealistic promises.
- Help children find ways to express themselves. Some children may not want to talk about their thoughts, feelings or fears. They may be more comfortable drawing pictures, playing with toys or writing stories or poems.
- Let children know that lots of people are helping the families affected by the event. It’s a good opportunity to show children that when something scary happens, there are people to help.

- Children learn from watching their parents and teachers. They will be very interested in how you respond to this tragedy. They also learn from listening to your conversations with other adults.
- Don't let children watch too much television / news coverage with frightening images. The repetition of such scenes can be disturbing and confusing.
- Children who have experienced trauma or losses in the past are particularly vulnerable to prolonged or intense reactions to news or images of the traumatic event. These children may need extra support and attention.
- Monitor for physical symptoms including headaches and stomachaches. Many children express anxiety through physical aches and pains. An increase in such symptoms without apparent medical cause may be a sign that a child is feeling anxious or overwhelmed.
- Children who are preoccupied with questions or concerns about the tragedy should be evaluated by a trained and qualified mental health professional. Other signs that a child may need additional help include ongoing sleep disturbances, intrusive thoughts or worries, or recurring fears about death. If these behaviors persist, ask your child's pediatrician, family physician or school counselor to help arrange an appropriate referral.
- Although parents and teachers may follow the news and the daily events with close scrutiny, many children just want to be children. They'd rather play ball, games or climb trees.

Social Media Tips

- **Use credible information sources** to avoid speculation and rumors. Be especially careful about this on social media, since anyone can create an account and spread false information. Sometimes an account may look like an official account but is not.
 - A blue check-mark next to an account name on Twitter means that Twitter has verified that it is the actual person or organization. However, an organization may be official, but not have a blue check mark, like the APA account – in this case, check their timeline and other profile information to make sure it is the official account.
 - **Do not retweet/share any new information that you have not checked across multiple reputable sources.**
- Unfortunately, some people like to take advantage of events to harass others online. It is best not to engage with this kind of rhetoric. There is no argument to be won, as people who initiate this kind of harassment are not there for thoughtful debate, only to hurt others.
- **Find out what hashtag other reputable organizations are using** to talk about the issue. Use this if you'd like your content to be seen in the context of others posting about the event. Make sure the central conversation around the hashtag is one you want to be part of. Sometimes hashtags are used sarcastically or have the meaning skewed in other ways. (It is OK not to use a hashtag.)
- If you're unsure about what to say, the talking points included in this kit work well for social media content. Here are some **sample social media posts to tailor for your use**:
 - Our thoughts are with those impacted by the recent tragic events.
 - Even for people not directly affected, a traumatic event like this can have significant impact. Coping after tragedy apapsy.ch/cope-tragedy
 - Tragic events have psychological impacts on adults & children. How can we help children cope w these experiences? apapsy.ch/children-disasters
 - Intense feelings are natural, but can be overwhelming. What can you do to practice self-care after tragedy? apapsy.ch/cope-tragedy
- **Check scheduled posts.** If you use any social media scheduling software, check the content that you have scheduled. Make sure that there isn't anything that may seem insensitive or offensive about the incident that will be automatically posted.
- If posting that you are available to help, share a link or phone number where people can reach you and/or be sure to check your social media regularly to see if anyone in need has responded.