**Ten tips: Coping with Crisis and Loss**

On rare occasions, individuals, families and even communities go through crises that affect them deeply. Whether it’s the loss of a loved one after a longstanding illness or the realization that a shocking tragedy has struck, as human beings we are all touched and try to cope in different ways. Here are some coping strategies that are universally helpful in times of great sadness or loss.

1) **Reach out.** In times of crisis it’s important to seek out and embrace the support of others. Some people are comfortable doing this and can accept support easily. Others who are more reserved and self-reliant are not used to doing this and may even be concerned about “burdening” others. Know that it is precisely in times of crisis that we should reach out to family, friends, co-workers and neighbors. They are, more often than not, honored and happy to help.

2) **Support others.** Just as receiving support is important to healing and well-being, so is offering emotional support to others who need it. If you have a friend, neighbor, family member or colleague who is struggling and you are in a place to provide support, know that this may be as beneficial to you as it is to them. Listening and being supportive allows us to develop perspective and to feel useful in times of challenge.

3) **Volunteer.** Similarly, because crisis can leave us feeling confused, helpless and overwhelmed, a truly meaningful way to cope with these emotions is to give back in practical ways. Whether this means volunteering your time at a local food bank, offering to help with your college’s efforts to support individuals affected by the trauma, simply donating money to a relevant charity, volunteering can help you feel directed and purposeful in a way that benefits all.

4) **Make a spiritual connection.** For those people who belong to a faith community, reaching out to a spiritual leader or congregation for counsel and support can be both meaningful and reassuring. For those who are not religious, turning to meditation, time spent in nature or other forms of quiet contemplation can be healing, as well. Insight Timer is an app with many free excellent visualizations and meditations, including ones for sleep.

5) **Exercise.** The value of consistent, moderate exercise for tension release, mood enhancement and morale-building cannot be underestimated. Again and again, research exploring the benefits of exercise on mood, sleep and overall health and well-being points to its longstanding beneficial effects. This is true at times of particular stress and grief, as well.

6) **Limit exposure.** In times of crisis, and especially when a tragedy has made headlines, your instinct may be to stay informed and up-to-date with recent developments. This is fine—so long as you are comfortable handling all the information available. **If, however, you find yourself feeling overwhelmed, stressed and unable to sleep, it’s okay to give yourself a break from the news and perhaps limit your intake to a degree that you can handle—for instance, one check-in a day on-line with a credible news source.** Be honest with yourself about what is and what isn’t helping you in this regard.
7) **Get the facts.** At times of tragedy or great loss it is natural for our world views to be affected by the events at hand. Not only are we stressed and saddened—we may also feel like the world and the world may actually be a more dangerous place than it used to be. If you have this concern, it is important to keep in mind that most of the tragedies we hear about on the news are extremely rare. That is, in fact, what makes them newsworthy. Keep this in mind as you go about your life and daily business and work on moving forward as best as you can. Reach out for support if you are feeling too afraid to function as you would like.

8) **Get your sleep.** Aside from breathing, eating and drinking, there is likely no more important function to our survival and well-being than sleep. The vast majority of us need approximately eight hours of sleep a night to feel rested, relaxed and capable of meeting the next day’s challenges. At times of stress, quality sleep is even more important. So make sure to take care of yourself simply by going to sleep in good time and giving yourself permission get your zzz’s. For helpful sleep tips, check out these links: [http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/sleep-topics/healthy-sleep-tips](http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/sleep-topics/healthy-sleep-tips)

9) **Be patient.** Some people go through a crisis and think that they should be “over it” within a week or two. The truth is, big events can take time to process, and feeling better can take a while, as well. Know that, if, you’re not feeling back to yourself quickly, that is likely normal. On the other hand…

10) **Seek counseling.** Should you find that the event that distresses you is impacting you in an ongoing way and that it affects your ability to function at work, at home or just day-to-day, feel free to consult with one of the therapists at the Counseling Services Center. We are here to help you explore your concerns, develop positive coping strategies and get back to yourself again. Our services are confidential and free of charge.

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