



How to cope with community and school violence

Aetna Resources For LivingSM

Violence is always upsetting. But there's something about it taking place in a school or right in your community. It can make you question your safety or the safety of those you love most. And it can trigger some strong feelings.

So how do you know that your response is normal and healthy? And how do you know if you should seek support?

Everyone is different

It can be tempting to compare your response to others. But we're all unique. So even if two people go through the same event, they'll often have distinct reactions. What kind of things can impact your response?

- **History.** If you've had violence in your past, it can bring up those feelings again.
- **Mental health.** People with anxiety or depression may have a harder time "bouncing back" from a violent event
- **Resources.** If you have friends, family and other supports, it can make it easier to cope.

And the closer you are to the violence, the more you'll likely be affected. So if you witnessed the event, you'll probably have a more stressful response than if you had learned about it from the news.

What to expect

Whether or not you were directly impacted by violence, you can still be affected. You may feel shock by the reports of shootings on school grounds or in your area. This can test many people's coping skills.

But knowing what to expect can help give you a little peace of mind. People often feel:

- Numbness
- Disbelief
- Frustration
- Fear
- Grief
- Anger
- Feeling "on guard" or exposed
- Powerlessness

Ways to cope

No matter how you're affected, there are things you can do to help. Here are some tips:

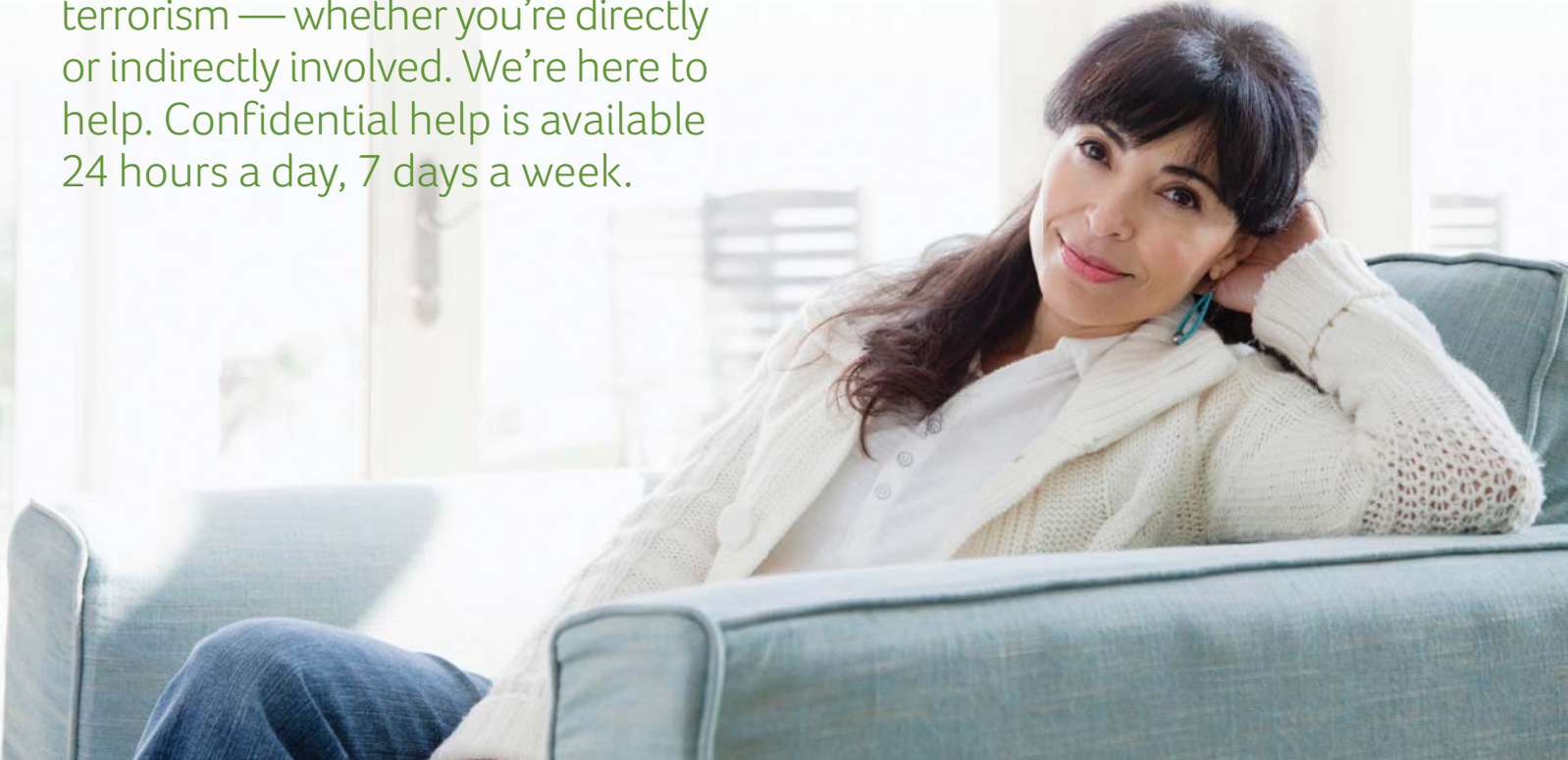
- **Know the facts.** It's important to know the facts and not respond to rumors. You can then plan to deal with what comes up.
- **Minimize media.** Reading or watching the news all the time can make you feel worse. Get the facts and then stop watching or reading about the event.
- **Make a plan with loved ones.** Talk to friends and family about what you'll do if there's an emergency. Decide how you'll contact one another and where you might meet. A plan can help you feel more in control.
- **Distract yourself.** Do things that you are able to control. This can include work, exercise or time with friends.
- **Be healthy.** Stress can affect your health. So take care of your body. Avoid too much caffeine or alcohol. Work out. And get enough sleep.

It's natural to have a reaction to terrorism — whether you're directly or indirectly involved. We're here to help. Confidential help is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

When to get help

Sometimes our reactions to violence overwhelm our normal coping skills. It can help to talk to a mental health expert. You may want to watch for the following symptoms:

- Problems getting through day-to-day life
- Not getting enough sleep for two weeks or more
- Not being able to focus or enjoy normal activities
- Change in appetite
- Feeling irritable or more or less reactive than usual
- An increase in worry or feelings of panic (with or without nausea, sweating, changes in heartbeat, breathlessness or sense of doom)



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