

Coping with Tragedy

For Teenagers

Many adolescents will be scared. That's because they're old enough to more fully understand the impact of what happened, and they're wondering how the events will impact their lives personally. They're also struggling with questions about prejudice, justice, power, and control—and, since they've likely heard a lot about the tragedy, for them, the world may feel quite unsafe or uncertain.

What could parents see in this age group?

- Not being able to fall or stay asleep, not getting restful sleep, having nightmares
- Having trouble concentrating and paying attention to school or work, feeling in fog or dazed
- Feeling sad, angry, confused, or afraid that the violence will happen again
- Feeling isolated or numb, making comments that friends and family don't understand or shutting themselves off from family/friends
- Being unable to get rid of thoughts or images of the violent event
- Not caring about things that used to matter
- Headaches, stomachaches, change in appetite
- Irritability

What can parents do?

- Talk with your teen about the event. Find out what they know and what questions they have.

- Let your teenagers listen in as you discuss both the event and your feelings about it with other adults. If they join in, welcome their participation. The simple act of talking and sharing your feelings will go a long way in helping them.
- Be with them as they watch news reports of the event and the aftermath. Comment on what you're seeing and feeling, and listen openly to their comments as well.
- Ask them about what they are seeing on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and other social media. Look at some of the posts together, and talk openly about both the ideas and feelings represented.
- Sometimes it's easier for teens to talk about difficult things if they don't have to look you in the face. That's why some of the best discussions take place while you're doing something else, such as playing a game, driving in the car, or helping out at home. Support them doing things they enjoy and taking breaks from thinking about the event. Be a good role model for this in your own self-care as a parent/caregiver.

Adapted from the Clay Centre (mghclaycentre.org), the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (nctsn.org), and the Centre for the Study of Traumatic Stress (cstsonline.org)