

# **Ithaca College Counseling and Psychological Services**

## **Coping with and Responding to Traumatic Events\***

### **TYPICAL RESPONSES**

- Shock and disbelief – Immediately after learning about a traumatic event many people feel numb or feel like such an event can't be real.
- Speculation about what happened and information seeking – Listening to or watching news, checking the internet for updates, talking to others about what you know or have heard.
- Wanting to turn off the TV and the radio “make it all go away” for a while.
- Feelings of sadness or anger about the tragedy and discussing these feelings with others.
- Wanting to check in with loved ones, even if they are not close to the disaster or in immediate danger. It is normal to want to touch base with someone you care about.
- If you are in a role where you need to attend to or provide for others, you may not be aware of your own feelings until the immediate crisis is over.

In the hours and days following such tragedies, the shock begins to wear off and more feelings may emerge. These feelings might include anger, sadness, fear, panic or depression. It is important to share these feelings with people whom you trust. This is a time when you might seek supportive counseling from a trained counselor or therapist.

### **SIGNS THAT SUGGEST THAT PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING MIGHT BE APPROPRIATE**

- You are experiencing memories of previous losses, traumas, or crisis.
- You are experiencing heightened feelings of anxiety, fear for your own safety, or rage.
- You are crying more than usual in response to sadness and fear.
- You are experiencing difficulty sleeping or nightmares.
- You become angry or upset more easily than typical.
- You notice a tendency to isolate yourself or withdraw.

Changes in behavior are usually significant when they interfere with usual activities, change behavior in significant ways, or persist for more than two weeks.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF**

- Breathe – slow and deep abdominal breathing.
- Maintain regular exercise.
- Moderate intake of fats, sugar, caffeine, alcohol and smoking.
- Keep a regular sleep schedule as much as possible.

\*Adapted from University of Wisconsin Eau Claire Counseling Services  
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- Schedule your time and meet as many of your usual commitments and activities as possible.
- Take time to be alone in order to listen to yourself.
- Don't withdraw for an extended period of time.
- Avoid overextending yourself in your work or in new commitments.
- Be aware of your feelings and talk about them with others.
- Transfer the energy of anger into productive activities within your community.
- Ask others directly for what you need and want.
- Help others.
- Pray, meditate, spend time in nature, or do whatever suits your belief system and allows you to connect with something larger than yourself.

## **ACTION THAT YOU CAN TAKE WITH OTHERS**

With Individuals:

- Listen
- Show that you hear their feelings and that you care
- Just be with them
- If appropriate, respect their desire to be alone and to grieve in their own way
- Give them time and space to grieve
- Assist people with solving immediate concerns or problems
- Help connect people with available resources

Within Your Community:

- Give blood
- Donate to your local Red Cross chapter
- Volunteer
- Find ways to contribute your unique talents and areas of expertise to your community
- Provide opportunities in classrooms or in work settings for people to talk with each other about their reactions to the recent events – right now people need a sense of community, safety, and places to talk
- Initiate or contribute to communications with others that help to create a sense of understanding of how these events can happen and what we can learn from them

## **SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL HELP**

Counselors are available at the Ithaca College Counseling and Psychological Services to meet with students. Call 274-3136 or come to the Counseling Center in the lower level of the Hammond Health Building. Immediate counseling is available on a walk-in basis for those affected by this tragedy.

National crisis hot lines are also available for people who want support or information, call 1-800-667-8273.

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