

Twelve Self-help Tips for Coping in the Aftermath of the Attack on the U.S. Capitol

The events that unfolded in the Nation's Capital on January 6, 2021 were deeply upsetting to many people who watched in disbelief as a mob breached the Capitol Building – the “People’s House.” It was acutely troubling and stressful for viewers, and it was terrifying for many of our Nation’s leaders and their staff who feared for their physical safety. Family members and friends were frantic because they did not know whether their loved ones were safe. This event was also distressing to many of us because of the symbolic value of what happened. We also know from past experience and from information we have already received from our stakeholders that this event was a “trauma cue” for some people who have previously endured mass violence, criminal victimization, or other traumatic life events. Trauma cues can increase distress and impede recovery from previous violent victimization experiences.

We at the National Mass Violence Victimization Resource Center have accumulated a great deal of information about practical things people can do to help reduce the stress produced by these types of situations and to live a more resilient life. We are pleased to provide you with this brief “tip sheet” of things you can do, as well as some self-help resources you may find helpful.

1. First, recognize that *any* feelings you are having – as long as they are *not* destructive to self or others – are perfectly acceptable and okay. Then, take positive action by following some of the proactive steps below.
2. Witnessing frightening things happening to other people can set off strong reactions, especially if you have previously gone through something similar. New events can stir up memories of old traumas and bring back painful emotions. Even if you have not experienced similar events in the past, sometimes just seeing other people go through a frightening experience can cause upsetting thoughts about what they might have gone through. Although unpleasant, these are normal reactions that can be managed using the strategies listed here.
3. Accept that what you witnessed and experienced on January 6th may have been frightening, and that it might have felt like a serious threat to the safety and security of our Nation, to *you*, or to someone you know.
4. Talk to a trusted friend, family member or spiritual advisor. They can help you talk through your feelings and validate that *you are not alone* in how you are reacting.
5. Check in with others – by text, email, phone, or in-person. The simple act of reaching out and asking, “How are you doing *right now*?” can be helpful. Check in as often as necessary.

6. Limit your exposure to television and social media. Repeated exposure to images of the violence at the U.S. Capitol is not helpful and may instead increase your levels of distress.
7. Children are being exposed to information via internet, news, and conversations with peers. Limit children's exposure to media (even if you think they are not listening or watching, they take in more than we suspect, and it can frighten them). Provide information to children in developmentally appropriate language: <https://tinyurl.com/nmvvrc-tipsheet-talkingtokids>.
8. Practice and strengthen self-care activities. This includes good sleep hygiene, daily exercise, and eating healthy. Stay active! Take a brisk walk or run; stretch or practice yoga; lift weights; and/or do some quick calisthenics.
9. Limit unhealthy coping strategies such as alcohol and drug use. Excessive use may inadvertently increase anxiety, cause sleep difficulty, and weaken the ability to use effective coping skills and take care of yourself or your loved ones.
10. Try to focus on something other than the difficult emotions you are experiencing. Helpful coping strategies can be found in "[Managing Distress](#)". Other tips on coping can be found here: <https://www.nmvvrc.org/ResilienceTools>.
11. Download and explore *free* self-help apps with resources for stress management and coping with painful emotions. The NMVVRC developed the TRANSCEND app that offers guidance for managing distress after mass violence. Access TRANSCEND from your smart devices at these links (or search for "TRANSCEND NMVC" in the App or Play Stores):
iOS: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/transcend-nmvc/id1504741131>
Android: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=edu.musc.dhs.transcend>

The NMVVRC also provides links to other free helpful apps on the "Self-Help Applications" tab here: <https://www.nmvvrc.org/ResilienceTools>.
12. If you or a loved one is feeling overwhelmed with feelings of anxiety and worry, no-cost professional crisis assistance is available. The National Disaster Distress Hotline at 1-800-846-8517 is available 24/7 to provide crisis support. If you feel that you are in immediate crisis, please call 911. Additional services related to mass violence, including the Crisis Text Line, can be accessed via the NMVVRC website's (www.nmvvrc.org) "Get Help Now" button.

This project is supported by Award No.2020-V7-GX-K002 awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice or the Office for Victims of Crime.