

Collective Grief and Healing After Mass Tragedy



There has been a lot of overwhelming activity in our communities involving violence, trauma, and intense collective grief. Collective grief is when an entire community – society, nation, town, neighborhood – experiences extreme loss or change, after the impact of an event such as mass shooting, war, or natural disaster.

We've been pausing, reflecting, and mourning, and we want to acknowledge what you are experiencing. In the wake of a tragedy, it is common to experience feeling overwhelmed, scared, angry, hurt, shocked, helpless, alone, and sad... among many other things. And sometimes it's hard to know what to do.

There are several ways that we can take care of ourselves when we are experiencing collective grief:

Acknowledge Your Feelings

- Events can be triggering of past events, losses or traumas that are experienced personally, which can be intense. Events can also simply feel overwhelming because we are experiencing empathy as we witness the trauma and loss that others are experiencing. It's okay to acknowledge our feelings even if the event didn't directly impact us. Whatever emotions are coming up for you, sit with them, acknowledge what you are experiencing without judgment. Consider what you need to tend to your emotions.

Memorialize

- We can find rituals and symbols that can honor the grief that others are feeling, that we ourselves are feeling, and the loss of life and sense of security and safety that we are experiencing. Some things include attending a candle vigil, gathering with family and friends, dedicating a meditation or prayer, watching or attending funeral services. Consider what might be helpful for you to do as a sense of memorial in the wake of such an event.

Take a Break

- It's helpful to step away, take a break, give yourself a moment of breath away from the event. It's okay to turn off the television, redirect conversation, or disengage from social media for a bit and engage in some self care. Consider what might be helpful to you right now to take a break.

Take Action

- After we experience something where we feel out of control, taking intentional action in a way that feels right for you can feel empowering, aid in recreating a sense of safety, and healing. This can include political advocacy, reaching out to a neighbor, exchanging kindness with others, and volunteering with organizations that you feel connected to. Consider what might be a way to take action that feels meaningful to you.

For ideas in taking care of you, we invite you to explore HeartLight Center Resources at

- <https://heartlightcenter.org/grief-resources-and-info/>

Some additional helpful resources include:

- Supporting Children After a Mass Tragedy -
<https://www.dougy.org/resources/cause-of-death/mass-tragedies>
- Sesame Street Support and Resources After Traumatic Experiences -
<https://sesameworkshop.org/topics/traumatic-experiences/>

Helpful Resources After a Mass Tragedy:

- <https://whatsyourgrief.com/the-media-overload-detox-diet/>
- <https://www.apa.org/topics/gun-violence-crime/mass-shooting>
- <https://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/coping-in-the-aftermath-of-a-shooting>

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, please contact the National Suicide & Crisis Hotline by calling or texting [9-8-8](tel:988).

If you have any questions about HeartLight Center or grief support, please contact us! We're here to help.



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