

Experiencing Threats of Violence: Coping Strategies



The trauma caused by threats of violence or acts of violence can have a significant emotional impact on people. The unpredictability often leads to an intense feeling of vulnerability for our own safety and the safety of others.

Although we all react in different ways, there is a commonality in that we will most likely initially experience a strong or perhaps overwhelming sense of fear and anxiety. Your reactions may also depend on current life stressors and previous life experiences.

What reactions might be experienced?

Threats of violence or terror typically result in a range of moderate to overwhelming anxiety and stress reactions for individuals from groups who are targeted. Some of the more common reactions you might experience include:

- **Overwhelming feelings** that may become unpredictable – you may feel shaken up, fearful, anxious, irritable, easily startled and experience mood swings.
- **Physical symptoms** such as headaches, muscle tension, nausea, gastrointestinal symptoms and fatigue.
- **Intrusive and recurring unpleasant images**, that may also be accompanied by physiological reactions such as sweating and rapid heartbeat.
- **Difficulty concentrating**, making decisions or becoming easily disoriented.
- **Moderate to major disruption** with your sleeping and eating patterns.
- **Becoming withdrawn and isolated**, avoiding others and disengaging from normal life activities.

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What can you do to take care of yourself?

- **Engage in calming self-talk**, minimize negative thoughts and preserve your balance as much as possible.
- **Prioritize** your personal safety and health needs.
- **Actively seek the support of others** who care about you by reaching out and talking with colleagues, family and friends.
- **Prioritize your health**, by eating at regular intervals, obtaining as much rest and sleep as you can.
- **Follow your normal routines** as much as possible.
- **Stay active**, by engaging in exercise, go for a walk or go for a work out even though it may be difficult.
- **Listen attentively to your body's needs** and always follow your instincts regarding personal self-care.
- **Attempt to restore your own sense of personal control and self-confidence** in your ability to manage these threats. In this way, you can also help others in need of your support.

Remember...

Overcoming anxiety and managing your reactions may take time and this time can vary from one person to another. Recognize that people are inherently resilient; that we all have the ability to cope with difficult, stressful life experiences. Individuals who take good care of themselves and who obtain professional support (if and when needed) will experience diminished symptoms and recover over time.