



Coping With the Fort Hood Shootings

[Please click here to view the Fort Hood Press Conference](#)

As the Fort Hood community contends with the tragedy of the Nov. 5 fatal shooting, we offer our condolences to those who have lost loved ones and our hope for a speedy recovery for the wounded soldiers. If you have been impacted by these events, we offer some coping strategies to help you at this difficult time. And remember, professional help is available.

Common reactions to trauma

Following a traumatic event, people typically describe feeling things like relief to be alive, followed by stress, fear, and anger. They also often find they are unable to stop thinking about what happened. Having stress reactions is what happens to most people and has nothing to do with personal weakness. Many will also exhibit high levels of arousal. For most, if the following symptoms occur, they will slowly decrease over time.

Understanding what is happening when you or someone you know reacts to a traumatic event will help you be less fearful and better able to handle things. These reactions may last for several days or even a few weeks and may include:

- feeling hopeless about the future and detached or unconcerned about others
- having trouble concentrating, indecisiveness
- jumpy and startle easily at sudden noise
- on guard and constantly alert
- having disturbing dreams/memories or flashbacks
- work or school problems

You may also experience more physical reactions such as:

- stomach upset, trouble eating
- trouble sleeping and exhaustion
- pounding heart, rapid breathing, edginess
- severe headache if thinking of the event, sweating
- failure to engage in exercise, diet, safe sex, regular health care
- excess smoking, alcohol, drugs, food
- worsening of chronic medical problems

Or have more emotional troubles such as:

- feeling nervous, helpless, fearful, sad
- feeling shock, numb, unable to experience love or joy
- avoiding people, places, and things related to the event
- being irritable or outbursts of anger
- becoming easily upset or agitated
- self-blame or negative views of oneself or the world
- distrust of others, conflict, being over controlling
- withdrawal, feeling rejected or abandoned
- loss of intimacy or feeling detached

Recovery

Immediately following a trauma, almost everyone will find themselves unable to stop thinking about what happened. Many will also exhibit high levels of arousal. For most, fear, anxiety, remembering, efforts to avoid reminders, and arousal symptoms, if present, will gradually decrease over time.

If you have experienced a similar trauma in the past, the recent shootings may evoke feelings of fear, anger and anxiety that you felt after the trauma you experienced in the past. Although these thoughts, feelings and reactions can be very upsetting, it helps to understand that it is normal to have strong reactions to a disaster or traumatic event and its devastation.

Use your personal support systems, family and friends, when you are ready to talk. Recovery is an ongoing gradual process. It doesn't happen through suddenly being "cured" and it doesn't mean that you will forget what happened. But, most people will recover from trauma naturally over time.

If your emotional reactions are getting in the way of your relationships, work, or other important activities you may want to talk to a counselor or your doctor. Good treatments are available.

By Edna B. Foa, Elizabeth A. Hembree, David Riggs, Sheila Rauch and Martin Franklin, Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety, Department of Psychiatry, University of Pennsylvania

Source: Adapted from "Common Reactions After Trauma Fact Sheet," National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, www.ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/ncdocs/fact_shts/fs_commonreactions.html.