



Respond » Connect » Reflect

Tips for adults

Supporting you to respond, recover and restore after the tragic event in Christchurch

This is a time that people need to be with others if they can. Spending time with friends, whānau, neighbours, work colleagues and reflecting on your faith and spiritual connections is important. Being with others helps reduce feelings of distress. Focusing on your spirituality can help get you through. Whether it's supporting your family and whānau, neighbours, colleagues or looking after yourself, some of the ideas in this tip sheet might help.

Be assured that most people do recover well when they call on their own natural supports, natural coping mechanisms and resilience.

Routines

One important thing that we know helps is to get back to or develop a structured routine. This will help improve decision making. It might also help your colleagues and/or family feel safe and secure.

Normal reactions

Everyone reacts differently at times like this. You don't need to judge your reactions as right or wrong, bad or good. Your response will be different from others depending on your experience of the event, your past experiences, your faith or spiritual connections, your own resilience, the extent of support from your whānau, friends and colleagues, your health and the level of practical/operational support you have access to.

Shock, distress, tears and being upset are natural responses to an act of violence in the community. They're not necessarily indicative of a traumatic response or the likelihood that you'll develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). If you have distressed feelings for a long period of time, then consider getting help.

For most people who were not directly affected by the incident, the immediate feelings will dissipate over the days and weeks following as your coping strategies and support networks help you come to terms with the experience. For some, the real impact may be weeks or even months after the event.

Values

The tragic event challenged beliefs about our environments, communities and places we live. Now will be a good time to reassess and reaffirm your and your whānau's values. This values base is the very place where response, recovery and ongoing wellbeing lies. It will help you, and those around you, to frame your thinking and actions. It will help you make considered choices and actions towards recovery. It's also a place from which you can safely examine alternative and diverse world views.

Common issues and ways to respond

This information sheet outlines some of the more common issues and concerns that people experience after a stressful event, and how you might support them or help yourself to deal with negative emotions.

Remember, if you need practical help or someone to talk to right now, contact your GP or:

- call or text [1737](tel:1737) any time for support from a trained counsellor
- [Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#) – 0800 327 669
- [Lifeline](#) – 0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or free text 4357 (HELP)
- [Suicide Crisis Helpline](#) – 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO)
- [Healthline](#) – 0800 611 116
- [Samaritans](#) – 0800 726 666.

Concern/issue	Responses	Tips
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Compassion fatigue. *This can happen to people who are helping others in an emergency situation. You can become tense and preoccupied with the suffering of others to the detriment of your own self care. It can lead to feeling burdened, isolating yourself, denial, apathy and bottled up emotions.*

Become aware of this possibility and accept what you're feeling along the way.

Clarify your boundaries.

Exchange information and feelings with people who can validate you.

Be kind to yourself and use the self-help tips in this information sheet to positively change your environment.

- Limit the amount of daily news you watch or read about.
- Try to come to terms with the fact that pain and suffering are realities of life over which we have little or no control.
- Find things to focus on in life and the world that you're grateful for.
- Try to find some meaning in the suffering you see.
- If you must blame something, blame the situation, not a person.
- Show compassion to yourself by being kind, soothing, and comforting to yourself.

Feeling pressures at home or work, *such as over-compensating, being first to arrive at work and the last to leave, always being available for everything, always being prepared to be on call or to fill in.*

Know your stressors.

Think about your unhealthy work responses and what might need to change (eg missing breaks, junk food).

Think about unhealthy home practices (checking emails and responding to emails in bed, answering phones during meals).

- Keep a record for a week or two to identify which situations create the most stress and how you respond to them.
- Establish boundaries around work, community, whānau activities that may cause stress, and keep to them.
- Think about technology use and your boundaries, eg when you'll check email, when you'll answer the phone.
- Develop healthy responses – exercise is a great stress buster.
- Talk to your supervisor, manager, friends, family, whānau. Negotiate and agree on boundaries.
- Take time to recharge.
- Learn how to relax.
- Get some support if needed.

Concern/issue	Responses	Tips
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<p>Feeling overwhelmed by tasks that need to be accomplished (eg housing, food, paperwork for insurance, cleaning up, washing, child care, parenting).</p>	<p>Identify what your top priorities are.</p> <p>Find out what services are available to help get your needs met.</p> <p>Make a plan that breaks down the tasks into manageable steps.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a list of your concerns and decide what to tackle first. Take it one step at a time. • Find out which agencies can help with your needs, and how to access them. • Where appropriate, rely on your family, whānau, friends and community for assistance.
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<p>High anxiety. Tension and anxiety are common after a tragic event. Adults might be excessively worried about the future, have difficulties sleeping, problems concentrating, and feel jumpy and nervous. These reactions can include rapid heart beat and sweating.</p>	<p>Use breathing and/or other relaxation skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time during the day to calm yourself through relaxation exercises to make it easier to sleep, concentrate, and to give you energy. • Try a breathing exercise as follows (five times slowly and as many times a day as needed): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ inhale slowly through your nose and comfortably fill your lungs all the way down to your stomach, while saying to yourself, “My body is filled with calmness” ○ exhale slowly through your mouth and comfortably empty your lungs, while silently saying to yourself, “My body is releasing the tension.” Do this five times slowly and as many times a day as needed.
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<p>Fears of recurrence and reactions to reminders of the event can occur for children and/or people who were close to the incident. It’s common to fear that another similar event might occur and to react to things that are reminders of what happened.</p>	<p>Be aware that reminders can include people, places, sounds, smells, feelings, time of day. Remember that media coverage of the events and their aftermath can be a reminder and keep triggering fears.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you’re reminded, try saying to yourself, “I’m upset because I’m being reminded of the events. I’m safe now and I need to keep practising what I would do if the event occurred again.” • Monitor and limit your viewing of news reports so you just get the information that you need.
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Concern/issue	Responses	Tips
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Concern or shame over your own reactions. Many people have strong reactions after a tragic event, particularly if you saw or shared the video of the event. This could include fear and anxiety, difficulty concentrating, shame over how you reacted and feeling guilty about something. It's expected and understandable to feel many things in the aftermath of a violent event.

Find a good time to discuss your reactions with a family or whānau member or trusted friend.

Remember that these reactions are common and it takes time for them to subside.

Correct excessive self-blame with a realistic assessment of what actually could have been done.

- When talking with someone, find the right time and place and ask if it's okay to talk about your feelings.
- Remind yourself that your feelings are expected and you're not going crazy and that you're not at fault for the events or for viewing the video. If these feelings persist over a long period you might wish to seek professional help.

Changes in attitude, view of the world and of oneself. Strong changes in people's attitudes after an act of violence in the community are common. These can include questioning one's spiritual beliefs, trust in others and social agencies, and concerns about one's own effectiveness and dedication to helping others.

Postpone any major life changes that don't need to be made right now (eg changing something forever when it's not necessary at this time).

Remember that dealing with daily/life challenges increases your sense of courage and effectiveness.

Get involved with community recovery efforts.

- Remember that getting back to a more structured routine can help improve decision-making.
- Remember that negative feelings can change with time and this will affect what decisions you want to make about the future.
- Remind yourself that after a community crisis it helps to reflect on what you value, how you spend your time, your relationships with family, whānau, friends, neighbours, and work colleagues.

Concern/issue	Responses	Tips
<p>Using alcohol and drugs, or engaging in gambling or high-risk behaviours. Many people feel out of control, scared, hopeless or angry after an act of violence in the community and can engage in these behaviours to feel better. This can especially be a problem if there was pre-existing substance abuse or addiction.</p>	<p>Understand that using substances and engaging in addictive behaviours can be a dangerous way to cope with what happened.</p> <p>Consider what need alcohol or drugs is fulfilling. Is there a healthier way to satisfy this need, eg exercise, social connections, meditation, phoning a friend.</p> <p>Get information about local support agencies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you feel like alcohol or drugs, is there another activity you can do instead. • Develop a healthy activity plan for difficult times when you might take substances. • Tell helpful friends about your health plan so they can offer their support. • Avoid friends and places that will challenge your healthy plan. • Remember that substance use and other addictive behaviours can lead to problems with sleep, relationships, jobs and physical health. Get appropriate help.

Shifts in interpersonal relationships. People might feel differently towards family, whānau and friends, eg they might feel overprotective and very concerned for each other's safety, frustrated by the reactions of a family, whānau member or friend, or they might feel like pulling away from family, whānau and friends.

Understand that whānau and friends are a major form of support during the recovery period.

It's important to understand and tolerate different ways that people respond and recover from a tragic event.

Rely on other family and whānau members for help with parenting or other daily activities when you're upset or under stress.

- Avoid withdrawing from seeking support just because you feel you might burden someone else. Most people do better after a crisis with good support from others.
- Don't be afraid to ask your friends, family, whānau and neighbours how they're doing, rather than just giving advice or trying to get them to get over it. Let them know you understand and offer a supportive ear, or lend a helping hand. Spend more time talking with family, whānau and friends about how everyone is doing.
- Say, "You know, the fact that we're grumpy with each other is completely normal, given what we've been through. I think we're handling this amazingly. It's a good thing we have each other."

Concern/issue	Responses	Tips
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Excessive anger. *Some degree of anger is understandable and expected after an act of violence in the community, especially when something feels unfair or unjust. However, when it leads to violent behaviour, extreme anger is a serious problem.*

Find ways to manage anger in a way that helps you rather than hurts you.

If you're experiencing any form of violence from someone else, seek help and a safe place.

- Manage your behaviour by taking time to cool down, walk away from stressful situations, talk to a friend about what's making you angry, get involved in physical exercise, distract yourself with positive activities, or problem-solve the situation.
- Remind yourself that being angry won't get you what you want and might harm important relationships.

If you become violent, get immediate help:

- [I need help | It's Not OK](#), (0800 456 450)
- Relationship Counselling services
- free call or text [1737](#) any time for support from a trained counsellor
- [Lifeline](#) – 0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or free text 4357 (HELP)
- [Samaritans](#) – 0800 726 666.

If you're experiencing violence from someone else, call the Police or Women's Refuge.

Sleep difficulties. *Sleep problems are common after a crisis in the community, as people are on edge and worried about their safety, possessions, house and future life changes. This can make it more difficult to fall asleep and lead to frequent awakenings during the night.*

Make sure you have good sleep routines.

- Agree with your whānau a realistic list of things that you all need to achieve together.
- Try to go to sleep at the same time every day.
- Avoid caffeinated beverages in the evening.
- Limit alcohol consumption.
- Increase daytime exercise.
- Relax before bedtime.
- Limit daytime naps to 15 minutes. Avoid naps later than 4pm.
- See our tip sheet on *Getting a good night's sleep* for more detailed advice.