Community Violence: Managing Stress in the Aftermath

An incident of violence in our community can trigger our worst fears about our own and our loved ones’ safety and wellbeing. You may experience tremendous anxiety, feelings of helplessness, and anger. These feelings can be magnified if you knew the victim or directly witnessed the violence.

Here are some tips that may help you manage your distress and feel more positive about your community’s safety and future:

- **Manage your own anxiety.** Anxiety is a normal response and appropriate in tragic situations. Excessive anxiety, however, can make you less able to think clearly and expends energy needlessly. Ask yourself what specific worries are troubling you most and then seek information to address them. Having that information eliminates the fears created by uncertainty. Tap into some relaxation techniques that may have worked for you in the past. For example, engage in exercise or deep breathing, journal your thoughts and feelings, or share them with a confidant. You’ll be better equipped to manage a traumatic event if you can minimize your anxiety. Your ability to handle your anxiety will help those around you do the same.

- **Use anger productively.** Anger is also a normal response when circumstances feel out of control. Expressing your anger to excess is counterproductive. Organizations and people who are the focus of angry sentiments often become defensive and the whole situation can digress into finger pointing and blaming. Use your energy instead to identify what changes you believe are needed and collaborate with others to make those changes happen. Use the energy generated by your anger to do something useful.

- **Stay in touch.** Maintain contact with supportive family, friends, and colleagues to avoid isolation and share any thoughts and feelings about the incident. The silver lining of traumatic events is that they often bring communities together and create a sense of solidarity, which can be healing for everyone involved.

- **Take a break.** Minimize your exposure to all types of media, including the Internet. While getting the news informs you, being overexposed to it can augment your distress. Give yourself permission to not worry about things you can’t control as worry alone won’t protect you and your family. Also, schedule breaks to distract yourself from ongoing media coverage and your concerns about your family’s safety. Do things you enjoy to lift your spirits, go to a movie or a concert, or read a humorous book.

If you need additional information or would like to speak with a counselor, please call the EAP at 800-648-9557 or visit us at www.kgreer.com. We are available 24/7 to assist with your concerns.