

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

When You or Your Children Are Upset by News Reports

Media coverage of a violent crime, natural disaster, war, act of terrorism, or other disturbing event provides us with vital and helpful information. News reports can keep us informed about what is happening and things we may need to do.

But too much exposure to media coverage of frightening events can add to our distress and make us and our children feel anxious. Continual reports on burglaries or violent crimes in our community may be as disturbing as accounts of far-off disasters, because the local news stories involve events that may affect us more personally. Below is information on ways to keep media coverage from adding to feelings of stress for you and your family.

Stress reactions to media coverage

Today, with live media broadcasts from around the world and instant news online, news of traumatic events comes streaming into our living rooms and onto our computer screens as never before. The growing use of cell phones that connect to the Internet has made media coverage even harder to avoid.

News coverage can sometimes make audiences feel as if we're really there, and cause us to feel traumatized even if we were not directly impacted by the trauma or tragedy. And for some individuals, the explicit media coverage of high-profile acts of violence may be particularly distressing, causing prolonged feelings of sadness, fear, and anxiety or other stress-related symptoms such as problems sleeping and mood swings.

Taking a break from media coverage

If you are experiencing stress reactions to media coverage or if the news is making you feel anxious, do the following:

Take a break from listening to or watching media coverage of stressful events. Avoid reading news stories about the events or watching news or documentary programs on TV or your tablet or phone. If you've got a news alert on your cell phone from a news app, or are watching a hashtag on Twitter, turn off the alerts. Avoid following the coverage.

Find ways to fill the gap. Following the news can be a habit, so find other ways to spend the time. For instance, go for a walk, spend more time planning and enjoying meals with your family, listen to your favorite music, or read a book.

Take a break from talking about stressful events in the media with friends and relatives.

Talk with a mental health professional if your symptoms persist. Your assistance program can provide help and support.
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Resurfacing feelings of grief and anxiety

Some people may be especially affected by media coverage, including those who have previously experienced a loss or been a victim of a violent crime, natural disaster, war, catastrophe, or personal crisis. Traumatic events may trigger memories of past losses or events, even if they happened many years ago. And they may bring back images of previous traumas, nightmares, and feelings of grief, fear, and sadness. Below are suggestions if you or someone you love is experiencing feelings of grief or anxiety that may be triggered by extensive media coverage of a traumatic event.

Talk with someone you trust about the recent events, and about past losses or experiences that may be affecting you now.

If your work is affected, talk about your fears and concerns with a professional. Your assistance program can provide help and support.

Try to keep to a regular pattern of eating and sleeping. This gives you the strength to cope with stress.

Get as much exercise as possible. Many people find that exercise makes it easier to cope with painful emotions.

Focus on normal routines and activities. Normal routines establish a sense of calm and predictability. As much as possible, stick to your normal routine, and take time to do activities you enjoy.

Make time to practice relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation, or yoga. Search for additional resources on relaxation techniques and managing stress on the LifeWorks by LifeWorks website—there are many articles and podcasts you might find helpful!

Seek support from your faith community. During difficult periods many people find comfort and solace through prayer and attending services in their faith communities.

Media coverage and children

Children who repeatedly see images of violence and trauma on TV or in the news may have continued fears about their own safety and that of their family. They may think violence and crime are widespread and perceive the world to be more dangerous than it actually is. Children who have lost a pet, experienced a separation or divorce, or lost a friend or relative may be deeply affected. You can protect and support your child by doing the following:

Limit exposure to news coverage of disturbing events. Closely monitor what your child is seeing on TV and online. If your child has a cell phone, set clear boundaries for how the phone should be used.

Explain the media events in developmentally-appropriate ways. Talk with your children in ways they can readily understand. Keep your explanations of events brief and factual, and let your child take the lead in voicing his concerns or questions. Very young children, in particular, should be shielded from watching media coverage of violent events.

Be present if your child does watch TV coverage of disturbing events. That way, you can answer your child's questions and talk about concerns—or correct your child if they misunderstand what they're seeing. You don't have to have all the answers, but your reassurance is most important. You might say something like, "Bad things do happen, but most people are good and care about the same things we do in our family." It is important to be present even if your child is a teenager. If your child does not respond to your questions, let him know you are always available to talk if they has concerns or worries.

Take extra steps if the coverage involves a crime or other frightening event in your community. Find out what your child knows or has heard from friends so you can correct any mistaken ideas that they may have picked up.

Monitor the play of young children. Children will often express in play what they can't say in words. Use play and make-believe as opportunities to engage with your child, provide reassurance, and correct any misinformation or mistaken beliefs.

Keep to family routines. Routines help children feel secure and let them know your family is OK and operating as normal. Plan a family outing or activity your child enjoys.

Try, as much as possible, to spend extra time with your child during difficult times.

Assure your children that they are safe and that it is your job to keep them safe. Remind them that there are people in the community and at school who also help to keep them safe, such as police officers, firefighters, and security guards. You might say, "Even if you don't see them, there are always people working behind the scenes to protect children and adults at school and in the community."

Model acceptance and avoid stereotypes. Talk with your child about tolerance and how actions of individuals do not mean an entire country or group of people are bad or dangerous.

Emphasize your family value of caring for each other and others. Point out situations in daily life when people help and show kindness to others.