



Support for trauma in the aftermath of a shooting

The aftermath of a shooting can be a time of extreme confusion, helplessness, and fear. Part of the trauma associated with shootings is that they often occur without warning in environments we rarely think of as at risk: churches, schools, workplaces and entertainment venues.

You may be struggling to come to terms with how a shooting could occur and why such a terrible thing would happen. Those are difficult questions to answer, and ones you may never satisfactorily comprehend. But beyond searching for the shooter or shooters' motivation, it's important to identify and manage your trauma in order to gradually lessen the emotional impact of the event and build your resilience moving forward.

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Emotional distress after a shooting can impact many people:

- **Survivors.** Injured victims as well witnesses and bystanders.
- **Friends and family.** Just knowing that someone close to you has been involved in a shooting can cause distress.
- **First responders.** These individuals may be professionals, but they (and their families) are not immune to the effects of emotional distress.
- **Community members/neighbors.** People who live in the neighborhood or who work in the affected community may also at risk.

Stages of healing

According to a 2017 research bulletin compiled by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), people may often experience three stages of healing in the aftermath of a shooting: the Acute Phase, the Intermediate Phase and the Long-Term Phase.

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The Acute Phase occurs immediately after the incident. Shock, denial, disbelief, and helplessness are often indicators of the Acute Phase. Being made aware that resources, assistance, and support systems are available can be a huge comfort and relief at this point. A sense of community and inclusion rather than isolation is also helpful.

The Intermediate Phase can cover the next several days or even weeks. This stage is often characterized by anger, anxiety, fear, lack of focus, depression and difficulty sleeping. In this phase, professional trauma-informed care is vitally important to help rebuild confidence, hope, optimism, and a sense of being in control.

The Long-Term Phase can take place several months after the event. By this time, many shooting incident survivors and/or witnesses may have progressed to the point where they no longer need ongoing mental health support. Others may still relapse into occasional periods of negativity. Then there are those who continue to suffer from severe trauma like flashbacks and chronic anxiety. More specialized mental health care may be advisable in such cases.

If you have been impacted in any way by a shooting incident, professional support and assistance is available. Wherever you are in the three stages of healing, if you feel you need support, don't be afraid to reach out and ask for it. A licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can assist you in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward.

Recovering from such a tragic event may seem difficult to imagine. Persevere and trust in your ability to get through the challenging days ahead.

Support

Optum Idaho's 24/7 Member Access and Crisis Line: 1-855-202-0973 (TDD/TTY services at **711** for the hearing impaired) or visit **[optumidaho.com](https://www.optumidaho.com)**.



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