

10 Tips for Coping with Disaster

By Daphne Lurie, Ph.D.



The news from Orlando this weekend was heart-wrenching. Many of us are deeply concerned about the tragedy, and want to show our support for Orlando and for the LGBTQ community. “Are there ways to be helpful?” and “how can I manage my stress?” are two very natural questions to ask. Below are some suggestions for feeling useful and for coping at this challenging time. Some recommendations come at the suggestion of the [American Psychological Association](#), so I offer a tip of the hat to this worthwhile organization.

- 1) **Gather reliable information.** We feel better when we have clear information than when we are left to hear reports of the news from others. Access your news from a reliable source, or multiple sources, and focus on facts rather than on opinions on the ground.
- 2) **Limit your news intake.** While it can be tempting to try and learn everything there is to know about the attack in Orlando, it’s also important to know when to stop. Limit your news intake to avoid feeling overwhelmed. For example, consider reading or watching updates for ½ hour in the morning, then another ½ hour when you get home at night.
- 3) **Be patient.** This tip may be quite difficult. The first few days after a crisis, in particular, are often marked by chaos. Communication can be difficult, clarity about the extent of loss involved may not be available and you may not know how to help. Try and be patient as facts gradually surface about the extent of damage involved and what is needed.
- 4) **Try to connect.** If you have loved ones currently in the Orlando area, you can certainly try to connect with them. Hearing that familiar voice or receiving a reassuring e-mail, text or Facebook post can help you to feel better. However, be prepared for the possibility that they may not respond to you immediately. They may be trying to manage their own stress, gather information and obtain local support themselves.
- 5) **Engage in self-care.** At times of stress, and particularly when we are concerned about others, it’s easy to neglect our own needs. However, maintaining a consistent routine and keeping up with healthy practices like eating nutritious meals every day, getting enough sleep and taking time to exercise can help you cope with this crisis and be more effective with those you care about.

- 6) **Accept practical support.** Similarly, at times of crisis, it's important to let others help you in any ways that they can. If you are too worried about friends, family or your community to be able to focus on cooking a balanced meal—allow your friends to cook for you, bring you groceries or walk your dog.
- 7) **Accept emotional support.** It's not only the practical support we need at such a time—we also need to be able to share our concerns, our frustrations and our hopes for the best with others. Now is the time to let your colleague, your neighbor or your best friend reach out to you. Know that they are unlikely to feel burdened at such a time—they may feel honored to be able to help.
- 8) **Pitch in.** Whether you want to give blood, donate money or reach out in other ways—taking action will likely feel better than waiting. Attached is a link to local and national sites where you can give and receive support: <http://intranet.scripps.edu/california/counseling/> Scroll down to the second half of the page for details.
- 9) **A reminder about resilience.** As concerned or discouraged as you may feel about what happened in Orlando, remember that the human spirit is built for survival and resilience. Remind yourself, as well as those you love, that they will likely be able to recover from this and that you will be there for them. Do not be surprised if they express a range of reactions, from disbelief to grief to anger. Help them to recognize that their feelings are normal and that, in time, they will likely be able to feel like themselves again.
- 10) **Seek out professional support.** If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed by the attack in Orlando, have difficulty concentrating at work or getting enough sleep, consider the possibility of counseling. TSRI's Counseling and Psychological Services department offers free, confidential counseling to all benefits-eligible employees and their families. Know that we are here to help you through this crisis and with any concerns you may have.

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*TSRI benefits-eligible employees may schedule an appointment with a CAPS counselor
by contacting CAPS administrative assistant Holly Wheeler at x4-7297 or hollyw@scripps.edu.*