

# Living with Threats of Violence

We all hope to live an idyllic life in a world that's full of satisfaction, acceptance, kindness, and joy. Unfortunately, we don't live in an ideal world. And all too often we're reminded of this in the face of cruelty, loss, and tragedy, or when danger looms or disaster strikes. In these moments, strong reactions are normal. Threats of violence in particular can bring about intense fear and concern. While there is no way to know what will happen or how it will affect you, there are some things you can do to cope with threats of violence and persevere through the potential effects.

## Dealing with the Stress

With acts of violence on the rise, along with the pervasive news coverage of such incidents, we are exposed to it just about every day on TV, the radio, and social media. Being barraged with such issues may cause us worry, anxiety, and fear can increase our stress levels.

In general, stress is the feeling associated with any change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological pressure. It's the body's natural response to any demand or problem that requires attention or action. A more intense form of stress known as traumatic stress is experienced during or after an event in which people may be in danger of being seriously hurt or killed, such as a severe accident, natural disaster, mass shooting, terrorism, war, or an assault.<sup>1</sup>

When stress is left unchecked or boils over, it can lead to serious health problems. The following tips can help you cope during these stressful times:

- **Take care of yourself first.** Eat healthy foods and get enough sleep.
- **Exercise regularly.** Physical activity relieves stress and promotes well-being.
- **Budget your time.** Prioritize your tasks. Over-committing yourself will cause stress.
- **Balance work and play.** Plan time to relax and escape from your regular routine.
- **Prepare yourself for stressful events.** Develop coping strategies that ground you.
- **Practice relaxation, such as breathing exercises, imagery, and meditation.** Find what works for you.

## Overcoming Anxiety

It is not uncommon to feel anxious and apprehensive because of the threats of violence. The nervous feelings will come and go; however, being in a constant state of feeling anxious can quickly become overwhelming and may get in the way of your daily life. Below are some helpful tips to assist you in overcoming anxious feelings:

- **Engage the coping mechanisms listed in *Dealing with the Stress* section.**
- **Limit your exposure to the news and media.**
- **Volunteer;** doing something nice for someone else can improve your frame of mind.
- **Limit caffeine after lunchtime;** too much can make you feel edgy and anxious.
- **Avoid nicotine and alcohol;** they both contain chemicals that can cause anxiety.
- **Talk to someone if you start to feel overwhelmed;** reach out to a friend, family member, doctor, religious advisor, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), or other mental health professional.

<sup>1</sup> National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/coping-with-traumatic-events/index.shtml>

## Trauma and Sleep Problems

Sleep disturbances are common among those who have experienced trauma. Here are some examples and tips for addressing sleep issues:

### *Difficulty falling or staying asleep*

- You may experience a **continued state of hyper-arousal or watchfulness**. Falling asleep can be difficult when you feel that you must stay alert to protect yourself and others from danger.
- You may find that you **can't stop thinking about the traumatic event** or worry about not being able to fall asleep.
- **Distressing dreams or nightmares**—usually about the event or some aspect of it—are typical and can cause restlessness and interrupt sleep.
- **Night terrors** are also common and can be frightening for the person having them, as well as anyone who's present. The terrors may involve screaming or shaking while asleep, and the person may appear awake but is not responsive.

### *Addressing sleep issues related to a trauma*

Focus on meditative thinking—distract yourself by concentrating on your breathing or start counting as a way to concentrate on something neutral. You might visualize a place that is calming and dear to you.

If sleep problems continue, and you think it may be related to a traumatic event, talk to your doctor. During your assessment, be sure to mention any physical or emotional problems that could be contributing to your sleep disruption. Your doctor may also recommend that you talk with a therapist.

## Trauma Dos and Don'ts

Individuals exposed to traumatic physical or psychological events can develop a trauma response over time. The effects are both physical and emotional. The following suggestions may help someone suffering from the effects of a trauma to feel better faster and reduce the probability of long-term post-traumatic stress reactions:

### **DO**

- Get enough rest
- Eat well and exercise regularly
- Talk to someone about the incident
- Take time for leisure activities
- Follow a familiar routine
- Spend time with family and friends
- Attend support meetings
- Do one thing at a time
- Expect the experience to bother you
- Seek professional help if emotional symptoms persist
- Seek medical assistance if physical symptoms concern you

### **DON'T**

- Drink alcohol excessively
- Numb yourself with drugs or alcohol
- Increase caffeine intake
- Withdraw from friends, family, or significant others
- Avoid leisure activities
- Stay away from work
- Take on new or major projects
- Pretend everything is okay
- Make major decisions or life changes

## Resources Are Available

### *Crisis and Emergency Line*

Comprehensive source of locally curated social services for when you are in a crisis, or are worried about someone who might be, and don't know where to turn.

Dial 211

### *Crisis Text Line*

Free and confidential support 24 hours a day throughout the U.S.

Text HOME or HELLO to 741741

### *Disaster Distress Helpline*

Sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), this helpline connects people affected by any disaster or tragedy to a trained professional from the closest crisis counseling center within the network.

1-800-985-5990

### *Employee Assistance Program (EAP)*

You can find additional information, self-help tools, and other resources from your EAP. Confidential help from licensed counselors is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at no cost to you.

1-800-222-0364

### *988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline*

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, and offers prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones.

Call or text: 988

Chat: [988lifeline.org/chat](https://988lifeline.org/chat)

### *Veterans Crisis Line*

This helpline is a free, confidential resource available 24/7 for Veterans of all ages and circumstances.

Call: 988 (then press 1)

Text: 838255

Chat: [veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat](https://veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat)



800-222-0364

[foh4you.com](https://foh4you.com)