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APA Offers Resources for Coping with Mass Shootings, Understanding Gun Violence

Includes advice on how to talk to kids, call for public health approach to gun problems

Constant news reports about the shooting in Las Vegas can cause stress and anxiety for people, leaving them with questions about the causes of and solutions to gun violence. Resources on the American Psychological Association's website can help people with both issues.

One [APA resource offers tips](#) for managing feelings of distress in the aftermath of a shooting. "You may be struggling to understand how a shooting could occur and why such a terrible thing would happen. There may never be satisfactory answers to these questions," it says. "Meanwhile, you may wonder how to go on living your daily life. You can strengthen your resilience – the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity – in the days and weeks ahead."

Talking to children about the shooting isn't easy but parents or teachers shouldn't completely shield them from violence or tragedies. APA [offers a series of tips](#) to parents and other caregivers on how to guide the conversation in a proactive and supportive way. "The conversation may not seem easy, but taking a proactive stance, discussing difficult events in age-appropriate language can help a child feel safer and more secure," according to the [resource available](#) in the APA Help Center.

Parents should also watch for signs of stress, fear or anxiety.

For those who feel too overwhelmed to use the tips provided, APA suggests consulting a [psychologist](#) or other mental health professional.

"Turning to someone for guidance may help you strengthen your resilience and persevere through difficult times," it says.

There is no single personality profile that can reliably predict who will use a gun in a violent act, according to a report issued by the APA in December 2013 entitled [Gun Violence: Prediction, Prevention, and Policy](#). There is, however, psychological research that has helped develop evidence-based programs that can prevent violence through primary and secondary interventions.

Written by a task force composed of psychologists and other researchers, the report synthesized the available science on the complex underpinnings of gun violence, from gender and culture to gun policies and prevention strategies.

"The skills and knowledge of psychologists are needed to develop and evaluate programs and settings in schools, workplaces, prisons, neighborhoods, clinics, and other relevant contexts that aim to change gendered expectations for males that emphasize self-sufficiency, toughness and violence, including gun violence," according to the report.

Gun violence is estimated to cost hundreds of billions of dollars a year in medical, legal and other expenses, not to mention the psychological toll. That is why the government needs to approach it as a public health problem, according to APA acting Executive Director for Public Interest Clinton Anderson, PhD, writing in a blog post entitled [No Silver Bullet: Why We Need Research on Gun Violence Prevention](#).

Resources for Coping with Mass Shootings

Page -2-

“Some have argued that we need to focus on policies that prosecute criminals and prevent those individuals who have been found to be a danger to themselves or others from obtaining a firearm,” wrote Anderson. “While these policies have merit, they are clearly not fully effective, and do not address the roots of violence in our society.”

No one policy will prevent gun violence, writes Anderson. “It will take a multi-faceted approach. Funding research that explores these horrific, impulsive acts can help us all inform and adapt our policy approach.”

In another [blog post](#), clinical psychologist Joel Dvoskin, PhD, warned against unfairly stigmatizing the mentally ill by immediately jumping to the conclusion that most shooters have a mental illness.

“Too often, even the most well-intentioned among us believe that most mass shootings are carried out by those with untreated mental illness,” he wrote. “What the perpetrators seem to have in common is the experience of extreme situational crisis.”

Additional resources:

[Talking to Kids When They Need Help](#)

[7 Ways to Talk to Children and Youth about the Shootings in Orlando](#)

[Helping Children Manage Distress in the Aftermath of a Shooting](#)

[How Much News Coverage is OK for Children?](#)

[Gun Violence Prevention](#)

[APA Initiatives to Prevent Gun Violence](#)

To learn more about stress and mind/body health, visit www.apa.org/helpcenter and follow @APAHelpCenter on Twitter. To find out more about NPA visit www.nebpsych.org and follow us on Twitter at @NEPsychAssoc.

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The Nebraska Psychological Association is the only statewide organization dedicated solely to represent the interests of psychologists and psychology across Nebraska. NPA membership includes 40% of the licensed psychologists in Nebraska, and is an affiliate of the American Psychological Association. NPA promotes the independent practice of clinical and consulting psychology; the highest standards of ethical & effective practice; the dissemination of evidenced based practices; the application of psychological resources to address social problems; and the education of government entities, elected representatives and the public on the practice and science of psychology. NPA holds scientific and professional meetings, conducts continuing education programs, and advocates on behalf of psychology in the Nebraska Legislature. NPA's Central Office is located in Lincoln, NE.

The American Psychological Association, in Washington, D.C., is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States. APA's membership includes more than 134,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives.