

Tip Sheet for Helping Victims of Mass Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic **Target Audience: Victim Service Providers**

The COVID-19 Pandemic brings a great deal of uncertainty to the lives of everyone across the world. Victims of mass violence incidents may be especially vulnerable to extreme feelings of fear and anxiety. The pandemic may cause new symptoms of posttraumatic stress and/or increase distress already being experienced because of a mass violence incident. The purpose of this Tip Sheet is to assist Victim Service Providers in helping victims during this difficult and challenging time.

Sharing Facts about COVID-19

- Calmly share factual information about the virus that includes symptoms, how the virus is spread, how it is being treated and steps being taken to develop a cure.
- Rely on reputable sources of information and share these with your clients. Examples include the Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) and World Health Organization (www.who.int) (NOTE. A more comprehensive list of resources can be found on the NMVVRC website at www.nmvvrc.org).
- Emphasize safety precautions, such as frequent handwashing, maintaining physical distance from others, coughing or sneezing into a tissue or elbow.
- Avoid attributing any blame to a person, cultural group or country.

Understand the impact of COVID-19 on Victims of Mass Violence Incidents

- The pandemic is increasing symptoms of distress - anxiety, worry, depression – for nearly everyone. Victims of mass violence are likely to be especially affected since we know that exposure to a prior traumatic event worsens symptoms of distress.
- Victims may feel forgotten – attention has shifted from a mass violence incident to the pandemic. Commemorative events are being cancelled, which can cause victims to feel especially alone and isolated. It is also a challenge to stay connected to others because of the importance of physical distancing as a healthy safety precaution to slow down spread of the virus.
- Victims may also experience disruption in their cultural practices and rituals which serve to organize, commemorate, comfort, observe, and mourn.

What Can Be Done to Support Victims of Mass Violence Incidents?

- Assess for safety and security
 - Identify any emergency medical needs or other safety concerns.
 - Provide the proper intervention, service or referral.

- Ensure that the victim feels secure in their current environment and if they do not feel safe, ask probing questions to determine what is making them feel uncomfortable and what can be done to help.
- Remind the victim that they can call you if they encounter problems or have concerns.
- Recommend professional help if symptoms of distress become overwhelming, such as interfering with sleep, appetite, excessive use of alcohol or other drugs
- Provide information on who to contact in the event of an emergency, such as:
 - **The National Disaster Distress Hotline:** 1-800-846-8517 (24/7 crisis intervention and support)
 - **Crisis Text Line:** Free, 24/7, confidential text message service for people in crisis. Text HOME to 741741 in the United States.
 - **911/Emergency Room**
- Introduce and/or review coping strategies
 - Deep, controlled breathing
 - Progressive muscle relaxation
 - Positive Imagery
 - Mindfulness
- Introduce Additional Strategies to Cope with the COVID-19 Pandemic
 - Establish a daily routine
 - Limit exposure to social media
 - Reliance on reputable sources of information
 - Daily exercise, healthy eating and sleep routines
 - Reminders to avoid too much alcohol and/or other drug use and to use prescription medications only as prescribed.
 - Remind victims that “social distancing” – really means *physical distancing*
- Remind victims to be especially vigilant regarding scams and fraud, such as email surveys that claim to be from a reputable source or phone calls asking you to share personal information.

Self-Care/Personal Resilience

- Don't forget to take care of yourself. It is important to maintain boundaries, which means delegating to others, saying “no,” and trying to avoid taking on too much by yourself.
- Find that balance between your personal and professional life.
- Maintain connections – both personal and professional
- Use coping strategies, such as controlled breathing and muscle relaxation, and practice every day.
- Practice what you preach by working in exercise, healthy eating and sleep routines, and daily engagement in positive activities.
- Recognize when you need support from others.

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