When Tragedies Happen: Some Self-Care Strategies

Sometimes when we are faced with an unexpected, tragic life events, it can be extremely overwhelming. Whether it is a nationally or locally publicized tragic event, an act of violence, a natural disaster & its aftermath, or receiving bad news about a loved one, including death, tragic or declining health condition, loss of a relationship, unexpected negative news often causes significant distress and an emotional reaction. Reaching out to talk to a friend, loved one, or professional during these times can make all the difference.

Here are some self-care methods to help you or a friend get through such times:

◊ **Stop, breathe, and tell yourself:** “This is hard and I will get through this 1 step at a time.” When an unexpected event or crisis occurs, we are faced with dealing with a new reality and it takes time to cope with the emotions and feeling you may be having, and incorporate what happened into your everyday life. Identify the steps you need to take first, write them down, and focus on each step one at a time...if you look at everything you have to do, you will become overwhelmed. Remember you can only do 1 thing at time and focus exclusively on that 1 thing. Remember you are not alone with this. and reaching out to a friend or other trusted person/professional is an arms-length away. Talking to a Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff psychologist can be helpful.

◊ **Acknowledge to yourself, what you are feeling.** All feelings are normal so accept whatever you are feeling. Once you recognize, name, and accept your feelings, you feel less out of control. You can then find a comfortable place to express your feelings. During periods of extreme stress and grief, it is very hard to hold back your feelings, particularly your tears and anger. This is normal so describe this as grieving or sadness or anger...you are not falling apart...you are grieving or feeling angry-sadness. It is important during this time of intense feelings to reach out for support to a trusted person or professional.

◊ **Find someone who listens and is accepting.** Look for the brightest light in the darkest night. Cry, talk, hug, and just rest in the company of someone safe, someone you trust. Consider getting professional help, if you need it. Sharing our stories is how we begin to accept whatever happened and integrate it into our new reality. It may be that we just need to let go of our expectations of how things should be and talking about your feelings and beliefs is the beginning of that process.

◊ **Maintain your normal routine as much as possible.** Making everyday decisions...deciding to get dressed, do the dishes, or go to work, for example, gives you a sense of control and feels comforting as it is a familiar activity. Be realistic with what you can do and remember everything right now will take you longer to do. Avoid making major decisions based on the stress you feel right now.

◊ **Allow plenty of time for a task.** You will not be as productive as you normally are. Accept how much you are able to do right now and recognize it will not be this way forever. During periods of extreme stress, prolonged stress or after a crisis, your ability to concentrate and focus on tasks is diminished and it will take time for your concentration to return so give yourself extra time and...be gentle and accepting of yourself with what you can do.
◊ **Get enough rest and sleep. Sleep at least 6 hours and not more than 9 hours.** If you are having difficulty sleeping, listen to peaceful, slow music and/or do progressive relaxation just before you go to sleep. Sleep is how our body heals and strengthens our immune system. If you have continued difficulty, consider seeking help from a CAPS staff or other mental health professional.

◊ **Make healthy choices: Eat regularly and Avoid alcohol and other drugs.** Skipping meals, particularly breakfast, contributes to fatigue, mood swings, and poor concentration. Healthy choices (foods not high in simple sugars or caffeine) maintain your blood sugar and therefore your energy and concentration. Making healthy choices also includes avoiding alcohol and other substances during these times. Try other more healthy ways to cope with this challenging time, listed on this handout.

◊ **Know your limits.** Some problems are beyond our control. If something cannot be changed, work at accepting it for what it is. Resist the urge to fix the unfixable or try to control the uncontrollable. Remember, adjusting to change takes time. If you are holding on to something and need to let go, journal about it, or talk about it with a professional or someone you trust.

◊ **Identify or create a nurturing place.** A nice view, finding a favorite spot on campus, rocking in a rocking chair, listening to soothing music are important components to a nurturing place. Twenty minutes of time in this space can reduce both your physical pain and anxiety. It is like giving yourself a hug. Music and nature sounds nurture our being and lifts our spirits.

◊ **Escape for a while through meditation, a book, a movie, or taking a short trip**

◊ **Practice relaxation or meditation.** Go to your nurturing place and listen to guided relaxation tapes. Time spent in meditation or prayer allows your mind and body to slow down and let go of the stress. Take a mental vacation in the midst of stress by relaxing your body, shutting your eyes and visualizing yourself in your favorite vacation spot or quiet haven.

---

**You are not alone. CAPS is here for you.**

**Consider seeking professional help.** Many people find counseling to be very helpful with the healing process. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers individual counseling, consultation (includes phone and email), and therapy groups. “Let’s Talk”, our consultation service, is another option to speak with a CAPS staff on campus. **All services are free and confidential.**

---

**Contact us or Just Stop by:**

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
400 Patroon Creek Blvd., Suite 104
During the Academic Year, we are open
From 9AM and 4:30PM,
Monday through Friday and
9-4:00 PM during Winter and Summer Intercession

518.442.5800
consultation@albany.edu

We are located near the uptown campus.
Free Shuttle Bus service from 2 locations:
Social Sciences and Collins Circle.

Look at our website for self-help resources,
iOS apps, and much more:

---

**Let’s Talk**

Speak with a CAPS Staff.
On-campus Locations.
No appointments necessary.

Locations and Times on our website
Closed during Winter and Summer Intercession
albany.edu/caps

**You can also call the**

**Middle Earth Peer Assistance Hotline**

A Peer Resource: “Students Helping Students”

518.442.5777

During the Academic Year: M-Th: 1PM-12AM,
Fridays & Weekends: 24 hours
CLOSED during winter and summer intercession