Understanding Your Reaction
When Tragedy Strikes

The events that unfolded at an Orlando nightclub in the early morning of June 12, 2016 have impacted all of us. We may find it hard to believe that such a horrible tragedy could happen in a place where we go to have fun. Despite being hundreds of miles away, we feel sorrow for the families that have lost a loved one. We worry about the safety of our family members. We ask questions and want to place blame. We are sad, confused, worried, and angry.

The severity of our reaction to the events depends on the closeness of our connection to the tragedy. In this day and age, technology and the ability to constantly find the latest news allows everyone to feel a connection to the victims, survivors, and community impacted. While we may have many different reactions, we are also unique in our responses. Learning that our reactions are normal under the circumstances is important. No two people grieve alike. There isn’t anything another person can do to change the event or can say to make it better for someone who is grieving. What we can do is understand, empathize, and listen.

Things we can do to take care of ourselves as we seek to care for others:

• Monitor exposure to the media. TV and the Internet can constantly bombard us with information about the tragedy in Florida. Too much exposure can cause our emotions to become overly stimulated and impair our ability to function and interact with others.
• Accept that in tragic events there are no easy answers or rational explanations.
• Recognize that in any grief reaction we are likely to experience a wide range of intense emotions including anger, guilt, and fear.
• Maintain the routine of daily living. A routine brings structure and order to our lives in the midst of emotional confusion and events that are out of our control. This includes exercise, eating and sleeping patterns, and our connections to those around us.
• Access support systems. Talking with others who share your values and concerns will assist in the process of healing. This might include connecting with your spiritual community or gathering with a group of friends for the purpose of mutual support. If you sense that you are unable to function in the routines of your daily life, consider contacting Optima EAP for support and direction.

As we care for others, remember:

• Each individual is unique. Your experience may not be the same as theirs. It is tempting to impose what is working for you onto someone else. Listen to them and support their needs.
• When dealing with children allow them to express their fears. Answer questions reassuringly but honestly, and don’t avoid difficult questions. Staying calm and focused on your children’s responses will help you be more effective at reassuring them of their safety.
• Encourage self-soothing and resilience. Try to help others come up with ideas about how they can help themselves feel better when they experience anxiety or fear. Reminding them of times when they have successfully dealt with difficult situations can empower them.

Traumatic experiences such as the one that occurred in Orlando, Florida change the way we view the world and how we live in it. We are called upon to create a new sense of normalcy. Life cannot be the same after such an event, but the human spirit has remarkable resiliency.

Optima EAP is available to provide assistance with the types of challenges we can all face in work or home life. If you are currently faced with a challenge, or would like to talk to someone about how the tragedy in Florida is affecting you, please call us to schedule a confidential appointment with one of our licensed or clinical professionals.
1-800-899-8174 or 757-363-6777

Visit us online at OptimaEAP.com for additional topics and information.