



Recovery and Resilience After Community Violence is Possible

Granite State Health Care Coalition Conference
Southern New Hampshire University, Manchester, NH

May 8, 2024

April Naturale, PhD,
VP Vibrant Emotional Health

Introduction

- April Naturale, PhD
 - Vice President of Disaster Services at Vibrant Emotional Health
 - anaturale@vibrant.org



Goals

- **Identify the unique aspects of recovery for survivors of community and mass violence events**
- **Know the signs for high risk survivors**
- **Identify best practices of behavioral health interventions post violence**

POLL

Who is in the audience?

- a) Health care staff (physicians, nurses, NP's), Dialysis, and other healthcare departments
- b) Public Health, Urgent care, and Community Health Centers
- c) Mental health professionals
- d) EMS, Emergency managers, Law Enforcement
- e) Long-term care; Adult Day Care

Mass Violence in the U.S.

The United States faced **649 mass shootings** in 2023, making it the second-worst year for shootings in the nine years since the Gun Violence Archive began recording data—after a set of brutal mass shootings in Maine, California, Texas and Tennessee.

Definitions

Why is this important

- The definition of a mass shooting is an incident in which four or more victims are injured or killed due to firearm related violence¹.
- The formal definition informs what state and federal grant monies will be available to the impacted communities and survivors.

Community Violence Incidents

Descriptions

Community violence is ***exposure*** to intentional acts of interpersonal violence committed in public areas by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim.

Common types of community violence include individual and group conflicts (e.g., bullying, fights among gangs, shootings in public areas such as schools and communities, civil wars in foreign countries or “war-like” conditions in US cities, spontaneous or terrorist attacks).



New Hampshire Hospital

Adult psychiatric facility shooting on Friday November 17, 2023 that resulted in two fatalities (the shooter and the hospital security guard)



Antiterrorism and Emergency Assistance Program (AEAP)

OVC Supports Communities Responding to Terrorist Attacks and Mass Violence [🔗](#)

Terrorism and criminal mass violence leave victims with serious physical and emotional wounds and challenge government officials and communities to respond immediately with appropriate efforts. Victim assistance and compensation providers face the daunting task of coordinating effective and timely responses, providing information and assistance to victims, and working closely with other agencies and victim service

Overview

[Types of Assistance](#)

[Eligibility](#)

[FAQs](#)

What to Expect: Responding to Mass Violence

Contextual Awareness

- Increase in political discussions
 - Prepare neutral reactions for political statements you may not agree with
- Heightened police presence
 - Community may feel further threat from:
 - Local and State Police
 - ICE
 - Other law enforcement agency presence (FBI)



What to Expect: Responding to Mass Violence

Contextual Awareness

- Compounding factors for psychological distress of survivors/community
 - History of traumatic events
 - Immigration status
 - Racial and ethnic identity
 - LGBTQIA+ identity
 - Socioeconomic status
- Continuing psychological distress can be caused by
 - Reason for the violence (i.e., racism, homophobia, etc.) underlying social issues
 - Persistent reminders via social media
 - Lack of help seeking and access to care
 - Realistic fear and grief

What to Expect: Responding to Mass Violence

Contextual Awareness

- Increase in political discussions
 - Prepare neutral reactions for political statements you may not agree with
- Heightened police presence
 - Community may feel further threat from:
 - Local and State Police
 - ICE
 - Other law enforcement agency presence (FBI)



What to Expect: Responding to Mass Violence

Contextual Awareness

- Compounding factors for psychological distress of survivors/community
 - History of traumatic events
 - Immigration status
 - Racial and ethnic identity
 - LGBTQIA+ identity
 - Socioeconomic status
- Continuing psychological distress can be caused by
 - Reason for the violence (i.e., racism, homophobia, etc.) underlying social issues
 - Persistent reminders via social media
 - Lack of help seeking and access to care
 - Realistic fear and grief

What to Expect: Responding to Mass Violence

Emotional and Behavioral Responses

- Anxious energy, nervous, agitated
- A sense of helplessness, fearful, sad or angry
- Feel detached or unconcerned about others
- Feel numb and unable to experience love or joy
- Feel that things are unreal; dissociate
- Feel hopeless about the future

What to Expect: Responding to Mass Violence

Physical Reactions

- Experience a pounding heart, rapid breathing, sweating, or severe headache when thinking about the disaster
- Have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, sleeping too much
- Have an upset stomach, eat too much or too little, or have other gastrointestinal problems
- Have a worsening of chronic medical problems

What to Expect: Responding to Mass Violence

Cognitive Reactions

- Mental exhaustion
- Constantly on guard, jumpy and alert, startle easily
- Have trouble concentrating, experience confusion
- Elicit poor judgment, poor decision making
- Exhibit denial of emotions or lack memory of events

What to Expect: Responding to Mass Violence

Spiritual Reactions

- Questioning the meaning of purpose; of life; of work
- Doubting current religious and other closely held beliefs
- Anger at God/Higher power
- Pervasive hopelessness



Unique Reactions to Mass Violence

Communities impacted by incident of mass violence have a longer recovery trajectory

Legal involvement can prolong everything

Grief associated with loss can be very intense in first year and remain for extended periods of time to varying degrees



Grief is often an underlying concern where community violence has occurred

Reactions Unique to Crime Victims

- Humiliation (especially around interpersonal crimes)
- A sense of responsibility for another's death
- Survivor guilt and self blame
- A sense of being unworthy of assistance
- An inability to make sense of the randomness of the crime
- Exhibit denial of emotions or lack memory of events
- Frustration and anger with the legal system

Unique Reactions to Mass Violence

Individuals have a harder time making meaning of a random act of violence; The sense of safety in their daily life is disturbed;

Their view of their world changes;

Legal processes are complex, time consuming and can be frustrating

What to Expect: Responding to Mass Violence

The 5 Domains and RED FLAGS

Behavioral Signs

- Anger and Irritability
- Deep sadness/depressive like symptoms
- Hyperactivity or Lethargy
- **Sleep Problems**
- **Intrusive flashbacks and nightmares**
- Substance Misuse
- Appetite Changes

Physical Signs

- Muscle Twitching/Tightness
- Panic/Increased Heart Rate
- Headaches/Stomachaches
- **Hyperarousal**

Emotional Signs

- Sadness/Crying/Grieving
- Distant/Unfeeling/**Numbness and dissociation**
- **Serious Avoidance**

Cognitive Signs

- Confusion/Inability to Follow Instructions or focus

Spiritual Signs

- Questioning Faith
- **Endless Search for Meaning**
- Hopelessness
- Making Changes

Red Flags

Victims may have difficulty verbalizing that something bad happened. Responses look different in everyone, but the unique features are signs that you **wouldn't normally see** in that person.

High emotion in **anyone** is a common sign. It can come and go and subside for a time with calming, focusing and distraction.

Look for **physical and nonverbal signs** like crying, confusion or sudden difficulty hearing or seeing

Pay attention to body language

Best Practices

Psychoeducation

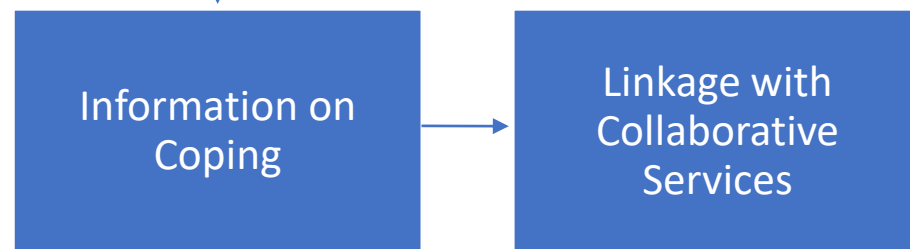
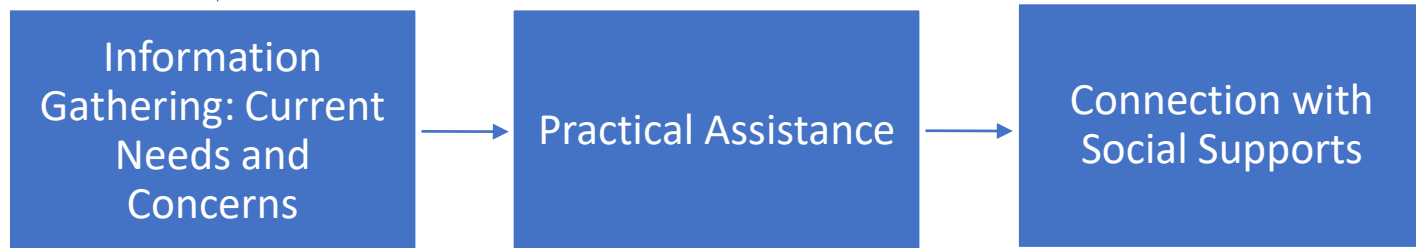
- Help survivors understand their reactions & the situation
- Help survivors identify, label and express emotions as is appropriate to the culture
- Share what we know from other survivors (Peers Support)
- Share what signs of distress to expect
- Identify what helps the most from the individual's and their community's experience

Psychological First Aid Action Steps

**Best
Practice:**



**Do
No
Harm**



Best Practices

- Listen carefully, be empathic and fully present; remember how helpful supportive silence can be
- Let survivors tell you what they need
- Stay calm; do not rush things
- Encourage contact with friends and relatives
- Find a personal way to honor the deceased
- Suggest engagement in faith activities or groups where appropriate; Connect with a spiritual representative
- Suggest attending grief support groups

Promote Coping and Self Efficacy

- What is good vs. negative coping
- What has helped in the past
- What do we know about physical & emotional coping
- Help survivors create a strategy

Ritual, Meditation/Prayer, Mindfulness, and Spirituality



Prevent Hopelessness Isolation Suicide

Promote HOPE



Reinforce hope through simple activities and planning

Encourage forward thinking:

Ask “What are you going to do later? Tomorrow?”

What NOT to Do: Responding to Mass Violence

- Do not prompt survivors to replay gory details or tell their story over and over-that can be retraumatizing
- Do not say pat phrases “you’ll be ok’ “ they are in a better place” “you can handle this” or anything that is inauthentic
- If you say something that upsets people, do not feel sorry for yourself. Follow with an honest response, e.g. ‘I expect it does seem useless to say I am sorry for your loss. I just want to express that I am here to listen or help you through this maze of services or to listen if you need it...sometimes there are just no right words.’

What to Expect as a Health Care Provider and a Responder V!brant Emotional Health

Be Aware of the *Kick* of the Traumatic Exposure

- Always ask where you are most needed, do not assume
- Check in with yourself before, during and after
- Take a breath before entering the survivor's space
- Work within your skills and knowledge
- Recognize that turf battles are more common especially with LE
- Make extra effort to work with others rather than in competition

Mass Violence in the U.S. Who?

- Mass shootings are generally premeditated and often well planned in advance
- Perpetrators are likely to be angry, vengeful individuals who seek retribution for a perceived harm done by some person, group or institution
- Mass shooters are often immediately assumed to be people with mental illness who 'snap' which is inaccurate in the majority of cases

Mass Violence in the U.S. Why?

- Research indicated the availability of assault rifles exacerbate the problem, but their existence and availability are not the cause of it
- Fierce individualism, idea of vengeance and might = right
- Fear: financial, health, change in social structure
- Distrust/Alienation: government, othering / racism xenophobia, blaming
- Political, religious and social divisions fueled by hate speech

Mass Violence in the U.S. What can we do?

Recovery requires:

- Revisiting our core values
- Engaging in individual and community social supports at every age level
- Reframing our perception of 'others'
- Focusing on our strengths and ability to care for and to care about each other

Wrap Up

- For a full list of our resources and references, visit:
<https://tinyurl.com/cectresources>
- Join our cadre
 - <https://cectvolunteers.force.com/s/interest>
- Contact us at: crisisemotionalcare@vibrant.org
- April Naturale, VP Disaster Services, Vibrant Emotional Health
Anaturale@vibrant.org

Resources



- **Call or text 988** Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
- Chat 988lifeline.org
- Disaster Distress Helpline 1-800-985-5990
- Call the SAMHSA treatment locator: 1-800-662-4357

We the
Resilient
Vibrant!

We the
Resilient
Vibrant!

We the
Resilient
Vibrant!

WE THE RESILIENT

A Conference on Disaster Behavioral Health
and Building a Truly Resilient Community.

Vibrant
Emotional Health



Join us in Nashville, TN from
Tuesday, October 1st to
Friday, October 3rd, 2024

Scan the QR code or visit
<https://vibrantdbhcon.org/> to learn more!