



District Branch/State Association

Office of Corporate Communications & Public Affairs Outreach Toolkit

The Office of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs (CCPA) is the principle APA office for developing and disseminating information to the media.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction	3
II. Talking Points	4
III. Talking to Children about Traumatic Events	5
IV. Template Draft Press Release	8
V. Social Media Tips	10

Introduction

The Office of Corporate Communications & Public Affairs (CCPA) has developed this media toolkit as part of the CCPA's ongoing communications efforts to assist the District Branches and State Associations in educating the media and public on psychiatry, mental illness and other key issue areas.

The toolkit includes talking points and additional resources to help in outreach efforts. *This document is an internal document for APA members use only. Please do not distribute to the media.*

If you would like additional communications information please contact Erin Connors, Associate Director of Media Relations at 518-570-8029 or by email at econnors@psych.org.

Mental Health Resources for Coping with Traumatic Events

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) offers tips and other mental health resources on how to minimize possible mental and emotional effects of trauma caused by a disaster like this.

The effects of traumas and disasters can have tremendous psychological impacts on those who are affected directly and indirectly. Affected individuals may have various stress reactions that present psychological, as well as physical, symptoms. However, there are steps that individuals can take for themselves and their families to mitigate and lessen the psychosomatic impacts felt by the community at large and those involved in the event.

After an event has passed, the APA recommends following these steps to begin coping with the possible devastation and stress that follows such a tragedy:

1. Keep informed about new information and developments, but avoid overexposure to news rebroadcasts of the events. Be sure to use credible information sources to avoid speculation and rumors.
2. Learn what local resources are available to aid those affected by the tragedy and be prepared to share this information.
3. If you feel anxious, angry or depressed, you are not alone. Talk to friends, family or colleagues who likely are experiencing the same feelings.
4. If you have contact with children, keep open dialogues with them regarding their fears of danger and the traumatic event. Let them know that in time, the tragedy will pass. Don't minimize the danger, but talk about your ability to cope with tragedy and get through the ordeal.

5. Feelings of anxiety and depression following a traumatic event are natural. If these symptoms continue, even after order has been restored, or if these feelings begin to overwhelm you, seek the advice of a psychiatric physician in your local community.

For more information on coping with mental illnesses, visit the APA's patient / public education website: www.psychiatry.org/mental-health

Information on coping after a disaster or tragedy is available at <http://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/coping-after-disaster-trauma>

The APA Blog includes several posts about [Coping After Tragedy](#), [Caring for Our Families in Difficult Times](#), [Women, Disasters and Resilience](#), [The Mental Health Impacts of Wildfires](#), [The Impact of Trauma](#).

APA Office of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs

Additional Talking Points

General:

- We are concerned that this tragedy may cause significant distress and pose a potential threat to the mental health of those involved. It is important for everyone to know that psychiatric help is available, and treatment does work.
- As friends, families and coworkers over the coming days and weeks begin to deal with this event, they all need to understand that this type of trauma can have a tremendous psychological impact on those affected. Individuals may have various stress reactions that present psychological as well as physical symptoms. The causes behind such incidents are often complex, and there are usually no simple answers.
- By working together, parents, teachers, advisors, health care professionals and other concerned individuals can develop effective strategies to identify individuals who need help.
- If this is a shooting or violent event –it’s important to point out that most people with mental illness are not violent. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, only 3 to 5 percent of violent acts can be attributed to individuals living with a serious mental illness. In fact, people with serious mental illness are at higher risk of being victims of violence than perpetrators.

Coping After Trauma:

- Keep informed about new information and developments, but avoid overexposure to news rebroadcasts of the event. Be sure to use credible information sources to avoid speculation and rumors.
- If you feel anxious, angry or depressed, you are not alone. Talk to friends, family or peers who likely are experiencing the same feelings.
- If you have contact with children, keep open dialogues with them regarding their fears of danger. Let them know that, with time, healing from a tragedy is likely and hoped for. Don’t minimize the dangers, but talk about your ability to cope with tragedy and get through the ordeal. Avoid subjecting children to overexposure to news of the traumatic event.
- Feelings of fear, sadness and anger following a traumatic event are natural and may persist for days or much longer. If significant symptoms continue, or if these feelings begin to overwhelm you, seek the advice of a psychiatric physician in your local community. For more information on coping with mental illnesses, visit the APA’s patient / public education website: www.psychiatry.org/mental-health.

Talking to Children about Traumatic Events:

Traumatic events such as this are not easy for anyone to comprehend or accept. Understandably, many young children feel frightened and confused. As parents, teachers and caring adults, we can best help by listening and responding in an honest, consistent and supportive manner. Fortunately, most children, even those exposed to trauma, are quite resilient. By creating an open environment where they feel free to ask questions, we can help them cope with stressful events and experiences, and reduce the risk of lasting emotional difficulties. Although these may be difficult conversations, they are important.

There is no “right” or “wrong” way to talk with children about such tragic events. However, here are some suggestions that you may find helpful:

- Create an open and supportive environment where children know they can ask questions. At the same time, it’s best not to force children to talk about things unless and until they’re ready.
- Give children honest answers and information. Children will usually know, or eventually find out, if you’re “making things up.” It may affect their ability to trust you or your reassurances in the future.
- Use words and concepts children can understand. Gear your explanations to the child’s age, language, and developmental level.
- Be prepared to repeat information and explanations several times. Some information may be hard to accept or understand. Asking the same question over and over may also be a way for a child to ask for reassurance.
- Acknowledge and validate the child’s thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Let them know that you think their questions and concerns are important and appropriate.
- Remember that children tend to personalize situations. For example, they may worry about their own safety and the safety of immediate family members, friends and neighbors.
- Be reassuring, but don’t make unrealistic promises.
- Help children find ways to express themselves. Some children may not want to talk about their thoughts, feeling, or fears. They may be more comfortable drawing pictures, playing with toys or writing stories or poems.
- Let children know that lots of people are helping the families affected by the shootings. It’s a good opportunity to show children that when something scary happens, there are people to help.

- Children learn from watching their parents and teachers. They will be very interested in how you respond to this tragedy. They also learn from listening to your conversations with other adults.
- Don't let children watch too much television / news coverage with frightening images. The repetition of such scenes can be disturbing and confusing.
- Children who have experienced trauma or losses in the past are particularly vulnerable to prolonged or intense reactions to news or images of the traumatic event. These children may need extra support and attention.
- Monitor for physical symptoms including headaches and stomachaches. Many children express anxiety through physical aches and pains. An increase in such symptoms without apparent medical cause may be a sign that a child is feeling anxious or overwhelmed.
- Children who are preoccupied with questions or concerns about the tragedy should be evaluated by a trained and qualified mental health professional. Other signs that a child may need additional help include ongoing sleep disturbances, intrusive thoughts or worries, or recurring fears about death. If these behaviors persist, ask your child's pediatrician, family physician or school counselor to help arrange an appropriate referral.
- Although parents and teachers may follow the news and the daily events with close scrutiny, many children just want to be children. They'd rather play ball, games or climb trees.

OFFICE OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS - TEMPLATE PRESS RELEASE

For Information Contact:

Contact Information

For Immediate Release:

Date

**[Name of DBSA] Provides Mental Health Resources for Those Impacted by
the.....**

[City, State] – The [DBSA] expresses concern for those affected by

As the potential mental health impact of this situation increases for our local communities, the [DBSA] offers tips and resources on how to minimize possible mental and emotional effects of trauma caused by the.....

This tragedy can have a tremendous psychological impact on all those directly and indirectly affected. It is normal to experience a wide range of mental or emotional reactions, from sadness, stress and anxiety to more severe mental illness such as post traumatic stress disorder, ongoing anxiety disorders or depression.

“This is a very difficult time for everyone involved. Our immediate concerns are for the safety and well-being of those affected and volunteers who are helping with this tragedy,” said [Insert DB Representative] “Traumatic events affect survivors, emergency workers and the friends and relatives of victims who have been involved. As psychiatrists, we understand this may cause significant distress and pose potential threats to the mental health of all those involved. It is important for everyone to know that help is available and treatment does work.”

[(Optional) Add paragraph on local or state initiative or other helpful information.]

The [DBSA] and the American Psychiatric Association recommend following these steps for coping in the days following this traumatic event:

1. Keep informed about new information and developments, but avoid overexposure to news rebroadcasts of the tragedy. Be sure to use credible information sources to avoid speculation and rumors.
2. If you feel anxious, angry or sad, you are not alone. Talk to friends, family or peers who likely are experiencing the same feelings.
3. If you have contact with children, keep open dialogues with them regarding their fears of danger. Talk about your ability to cope with tragedy and get through the ordeal.
4. Feelings of anxiety and sadness following a traumatic event are natural. If these symptoms continue, even after order has been restored, or if these feelings begin to

overwhelm you or your child, seek the advice of a psychiatric physician or other mental health professional in your local community.

For additional information about mental health issues including PTSD, anxiety and depression, visit the APA's public education website at www.psychiatry.org/mental-health and <http://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/coping-after-disaster-trauma>.

For information on the [DBSA] and additional resources, visit [Insert website].

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose physician members specialize in diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at www.psychiatry.org.

Social Media Tips

- **Use credible information sources** to avoid speculation and rumors. Be especially careful about this on social media, since anyone can create an account and spread false information. Sometimes an account may look like an official account but is not.
 - A blue check-mark next to an account name on Twitter means that Twitter has verified that it is the actual person or organization. However, an organization may be official, but not have a blue check mark, like the APA account—in this case, check their timeline and other profile information to make sure it is the official account.
 - **Do not retweet/share any new information that you have not checked across multiple reputable sources.**
- Unfortunately, some people like to take advantage of events to harass others online. It is best not to engage with this kind of rhetoric. There is no argument to be won, as people who initiate this kind of harassment are not there for thoughtful debate, but only to hurt others.
- **Find out what hashtag other reputable organizations are using** to talk about the issue. Use this if you'd like your content to be seen in the context of others posting about the event. Make sure the central conversation around the hashtag is one you want to be part of. Sometimes hashtags are used sarcastically or have the meaning skewed in other ways. (It is OK not to use a hashtag.)
- If you're unsure about what to say, the talking points included in this kit work well for social media content. Here are some **sample social media posts to tailor for your use**:
 - Our thoughts are with those impacted by the recent tragic events.
 - Even for people not directly affected, a traumatic event like this can have significant impact. Coping after tragedy apapsy.ch/cope-tragedy
 - Tragic events have psychological impacts on adults & children. How can we help children cope w these experiences? apapsy.ch/children-disasters
 - Intense feelings are natural, but can be overwhelming. What can you do to practice self-care after tragedy? apapsy.ch/cope-tragedy
- **Check scheduled posts.** If you use any social media scheduling software, check the content that you have scheduled. Make sure that there isn't anything that may seem insensitive or offensive about the incident that will be automatically posted.
- If posting that you are available to help, share a link or phone number where people can reach you and/or be sure to check your social media regularly to see if anyone in need has responded.