



# AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



Survivors in the immediate vicinity of an explosion may be struggling with physical injury and experiencing a range of strong thoughts and feelings. When such tragedies occur, people struggle to make sense of the destruction, loss and emotional distress. We know from the survivors of past tragedies that people are resilient ([/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx](http://helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx)) , and, as difficult as it may seem at the time, survivors can and do go on to live fulfilling lives. The information and recommendations in this resource can help survivors take preliminary steps to emotional recovery.

## What you may experience following an explosion

People who have experienced or witnessed a disaster may have an acute stress reaction that can cause some of these thoughts and behaviors:

- Recurring thoughts of the incident.
- Greater sensitivity to changes in your environment or being easily startled.
- Increased desire to stay home or be away from people.
- No longer maintaining daily routines and activities.
- Feelings of guilt, such as "Why did I survive? I should have done something more."
- Feelings of grief and loss.
- Reluctance to express feelings for fear of losing control over emotions.
- Emotional reactions, such as tears or anger.
- Physical reactions, such as restlessness, aches or pains.

## Ways to manage

**Recognize emotional change.** Identify the feelings that you may be experiencing. Understand that they are likely normal reactions to the tragic situation. You will regain a sense of self and feel more grounded with time.

**Take a breath.** Count to 10 before acting on issues and when feeling stressed. Ask yourself if this action is the best for you and your family. This will help you think clearly, control impulses and become more resilient.

**Keep connected.** Social support is a key factor in helping people to successfully survive tragedy. It is okay to reach out to ask others for support or just to spend time with you. Maintaining social networks and activities can provide a sense of normalcy, and offer valuable outlets for sharing feelings and relieving stress.

**Maintain a daily routine.** To the extent possible, keep a daily routine. Having structure to your day can provide you with a sense of stability even when the world around you seems chaotic. Sticking with a routine can be a source of comfort.

**Find positive ways to reduce stress and negative feelings.** Following a tragic event, you may feel the need to turn away from negative thoughts and feelings you are experiencing. Positive distractions such as listening to music, reading a book, exercising or watching a movie can help renew you so you can refocus on meeting challenges in your life. Avoid numbing your unpleasant feelings with alcohol or drugs.

**Recognize strengths.** Recall the ways you have successfully handled past hardships, such as the loss of a loved one, the end of a relationship or a serious illness. Draw on these skills to meet current challenges. Trust yourself to solve problems and make appropriate decisions.

**Maintain a hopeful outlook.** An optimistic and positive outlook can enable you to see the good things in your life and can keep you going even in the hardest times. There are positive things in everyone's life, such as strong relationships, a comfortable home, and communication or activities that bring enjoyment. Taking the time to identify and appreciate the positive will enhance your outlook and help you persevere.

If you are having trouble coping in the aftermath of an explosion, consider seeking help from a psychologist or other mental health professional. Recovering from traumatic incidents can be challenging. Psychologists and other licensed mental health professionals are trained to help people cope and take positive steps toward managing their feelings, behaviors and circumstances.

To find a psychologist in your area, visit APA's Psychologist Locator (<http://locator.apa.org/>) .

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