

Guidelines to Help Students, Parents and Educators Respond and Cope with the Virginia Tech Shootings

This article contains guidelines to help educators, students and parents respond and cope with the shootings at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Tips for educators

- Communicate clearly the security measures in place and the resources available for people who need help.
- Since individuals contemplating violent acts often communicate their intentions to friends and classmates, help students develop a plan for what to do if they hear someone planning a violent act.
- Advertise the support services available at the student mental health center and religious centers.
- Develop special training for key personnel—resident assistants, student health center staff, campus police, sororities and fraternities—on how to respond to this tragedy and help students cope.
- Provide culturally relevant resources (e.g., bring in ministers and others from the faith community).

Tips for students

- Develop a personal plan to ensure your safety in a similar situation.
- Use reliable sources to keep up-to-date on developments and information.
- Limit television viewing. It can be difficult to process images and messages in news reports.
- A range of emotions are normal following tragic events—ranging from depression, anxiousness, anger and “numbness.”
- If you feel depressed, anxious or angry, talk to friends, family, ministers or others around you. Likely, those around you are experiencing similar feelings.
- If you feel overwhelmed by your emotions, seek help from your school mental health center.

Tips for parents

- Encourage your child to develop a personal safety plan.
- Educate yourself on the disaster and communication plans at your child's school.
- Keep dialogue open with your child—let him or her know that you are there for them to talk through their feelings.
- Encourage your child to take action regarding their school's safety by sharing their concerns with university officials.
- Recognize that college-aged students may minimize their concerns outwardly, but may become argumentative, withdrawn or allow their school performance to decline. Allow them room to react as they feel appropriate.

If you or your child feels overwhelmed by emotions—such as depression, anxiety or anger—seek help or support from a mental health professional. For help, call the toll-free number on this site to speak with an employee assistance professional.

Source: Mental Health America