

# STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING REACTIONS

## Racial Targeting and Acts of Violence: Strategies for Coping

When targeted violence or harassment occurs, a variety of emotional, mental, and physical reactions can occur. We can experience a range of emotions from fear to anger to grief. We might experience racing thoughts or difficulty focusing. Physical symptoms might include crying, restlessness, or exhaustion. This handout offers some strategies to manage difficult reactions during this difficult time.

### Addressing fears for safety

- › **Get reliable information.** One of the best ways to manage fear, especially when there is an act of violence, is to understand what is being done to protect your community. The more we know about the current situation, the more effective steps we can take to minimize our risk. Be sure to get information from a reputable source. Keep up to date with and follow directions from state and local authorities.
- › **Be aware of your surroundings.** If you are in a situation where there is potential for violence or you feel targeted, it's important to remain vigilant. Places of business, public streets and sidewalks, and public transit have been identified as particularly high risk areas for harassment. Pay attention to your surroundings. Have a plan for seeking help if needed.
- › **Ask for immediate support** or intervention from bystanders. Connect with others in-the-moment, perhaps over video chat, where others can provide emotional support.
- › **Try to remain calm and connected with your body.** When faced with any kind of threat, our hard-wired stress response kicks in. Connecting with your body helps you stay calm in the moment. Focus on your breath, staying in the present moment rather than relying on your impulse to fight, flight, or freeze.
- › **Always put safety first.** While it may be tempting to react to a suspicious look, a racist comment, or something else, ignoring it and walking away may be the best response. Walking away does not condone the racism. It is your choosing to prioritize your own safety. Seek emotional support afterwards from those who understand. If you notice others are being targeted or harassed, consider how you could respond without endangering your own safety.

### Managing difficult emotions

- › **Allow your feelings.** You may feel grief, anger, anxiety, exhaustion, or something else. You may just feel numb. These are all normal reactions. If you have a tendency to hold your feelings in, talking about them with people who care about you can help you process them. Give yourself permission to vent feelings of anger in healthy ways. Allow yourself to grieve and cry if you need to. Some people find it helpful to let feelings flow out on paper or address them in a creative way, such as painting or music.
- › **Turn to others for support.** Being alone with your thoughts and emotions means there is no other voice in the conversation. Others offer different perspectives, while giving you a chance to talk about how you feel. This can bring comfort and help you move forward. It can be especially helpful to talk to others who've shared a similar experience.

- › **Many find that supporting others** and investing energy into making a difference can change their emotional temperature. Even small moves can help release the paralyzing sense of helplessness. This could be lending a hand with donations or something more personal. Doing helpful things and offering kindness to others can open your heart and renew your spirit.
- › **You may want to try relaxation techniques** such as deep breathing or meditation. These gentle techniques can help calm the physical symptoms of anxiety and slow down racing thoughts.

## Mental coping strategies

- › **Minimize your exposure to news media.** Media stories can be an ongoing reminder of distressing events and trigger renewed fears that this could happen to you or a loved one. Try to limit watching replays of the events. While it's important to stay informed, remember that constant exposure may add to feelings of distress.
- › **Lean into your routines as much as possible.** When there is escalated violence, life can feel chaotic. The structure and predictability of doing daily tasks can help us to feel grounded.
- › **Bring thoughts to the present.** You might find it hard to focus on the present if you're imagining what might happen or recalling past experiences of discrimination. Being able to reset to the "here and now," a mindfulness technique, can help. Take time in the day to stop and take a few slow, deep breaths. Bring your attention to the present. Notice the world around you using all your senses. Allow yourself to just be in the moment.
- › **Focus on what you do have control over.** The images we see, the stories we hear, and our own thoughts can increase our anxiety. Try to bring your focus to what you can control. Or how you might respond in a meaningful way, such as volunteering or making a donation.
- › **Intentionally shift your thoughts to a neutral focus** if you notice thoughts or feelings are becoming overwhelming. This may be doing a physical activity, reading words of inspiration, connecting with others, or something else. Taking time out doesn't mean you don't care, but it can help bring stress levels down in the moment.

- › **Balance your thoughts.** When feeling overwhelmed by tragic events, it's easy to think of the world as a very dark place. It may help to focus on ways that people support one another. For example, reading stories of volunteers escorting elderly individuals of Asian descent to keep them safe, or the outpouring of financial support following the uptick in violence. Adding some balance can help you manage emotions.

## Take care of yourself

- › **Be good to yourself, physically and emotionally.** Do what you can to make sure you get enough sleep to feel well rested. Work to maintain a healthy diet and regular meals. Remember that exercise and being physically active can reduce stress. Avoid overuse of alcohol and/or substances.
- › **Give yourself a break.** It may be hard to focus and concentrate during these times. Your energy level may be low. Be patient with yourself. Don't overload your schedule. Give yourself a little more time to do tasks.

## Resources

### Stop AAPI Hate

[stopaapihate.org](https://stopaapihate.org)

Report hate incidents and keep updated on advocacy efforts in the AAPI community

### Asian Americans Advancing Justice

[advancingjustice-aaajc.org](https://advancingjustice-aaajc.org)

Learn more about what you can do to support the AAPI community.

### Hollaback

[ihollaback.org](https://ihollaback.org)

Free bystander intervention training and resources on anti-harassment.

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