

10 Tips for Coping with Tragedy



Without a doubt, the news from Paris is heart-wrenching. Many of us are deeply concerned about the tragedy, and some of us have friends and family in the region whom we may feel quite powerless to help. “Are there ways to be helpful?” and “how can I manage my stress?” are two very natural questions to ask. Below are some suggestions for coping and for feeling useful at this challenging time. Some recommendations come at the suggestion of the [American Psychological Association](#), so I offer a tip of the hat to this worthwhile organization.

- 1) **Gather reliable information.** We feel better when we have clear information than when we are left to hear reports of the news from others. Access your news from a reliable source, or multiple sources, and focus on facts rather than on opinions on the ground.
- 2) **Limit your news intake.** While it can be tempting to try and learn everything there is to know about the attacks in Paris and their aftermath, it’s also important to know when to stop. Limit your news intake to avoid feeling overwhelmed. For example, consider reading or watching updates for ½ hour in the morning, then another ½ hour when you get home at night.
- 3) **Be patient.** This tip may be quite difficult for those of you who have a loved one in Paris. The first few days after a crisis, in particular, are often marked by chaos. Communication can be difficult, clarity about the extent of the impact may not be available and you may not know how to help. Try and be patient as facts begin to surface about what happened and what is needed.
- 4) **Try to connect.** If you have friends or loved ones currently in Paris, you can certainly try to connect with them. Hearing that familiar voice or receiving a reassuring e-mail, text or Facebook post can help you to feel better. However, be prepared for the possibility that your loved ones may not be able to communicate with you immediately. They may be trying to gather information, manage their own stress and help others.
- 5) **Engage in self-care.** At times of stress, and particularly when we are concerned about others, it’s easy to neglect our own needs. However, maintaining a consistent routine and keeping up with healthy practices like eating healthy meals every day, getting enough sleep and taking time to exercise can help you cope with this crisis and be more effective with those you care about.

- 6) **Accept practical support.** Similarly, at times of crisis, it's important to let others help you in any ways that they can. If you are too worried about friends or family to be able to focus on cooking a balanced meal—allow your friends to cook for you, bring you groceries or walk your dog.
- 7) **Accept emotional support.** It's not only the practical support we need at such a time—we also need to be able to share our concerns, our frustrations and our hopes for the best with others. Now is the time to let your colleague, your neighbor or your best friend reach out to you. Know that they are unlikely to feel burdened at such a time—they may feel honored to be able to help.
- 8) **Pitch in.** Your local news sources: newspapers, radio stations, and charitable organizations like the Red Cross (called the Croix Rouge in France) may be able to inform you and your community about practical ways to help. Whether you organize your colleagues to make financial contributions, send letters of support, or reach out in other ways—taking action will likely feel better than waiting. If you have teenagers or young adults at home, encourage them to help, as well. This can be an opportunity to teach them the value of community and volunteerism.
- 9) **A reminder about resilience.** As concerned or discouraged as you may feel for your loved ones or for the city, remember that the human spirit is built for survival and resilience. Remind yourself, as well as those you love, that they will likely be able to recover from this and that you will be there for them. Do not be surprised if they express a range of reaction, from disbelief to grief to anger. Help them to recognize that their feelings are normal and that, in time, they will likely be able to feel like themselves again.
- 10) **Seek out professional support.** If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed by the attacks in France, have difficulty concentrating at work or getting enough sleep, consider the possibility of counseling. Hampden-Sydney College offers free, confidential counseling to all current students. Know that we are here to help you through this crisis and with any concerns you may have.

To schedule an appointment with Counseling Services at H-SC, please call (434) 223-6411.
