What Have We Learned From Past Mass Violence Incidents?

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Opinions are those of the author and not necessarily those of OVC or the U.S. Department of Justice.

NMVRC

Readiness · Response · Resilience

National Mass Violence and Victimization Resource Center

Vision:

Victims and survivors of mass violence will have access to first rate, evidence-based information and services throughout the entire recovery process provided by victim assistance and other professionals who are compassionate, well-trained, and respectful of victims' needs and wishes.

www.nmvvrc.org

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Overview of Presentation

- *What are unique elements of MVIs?*
- *What are effective strategies for working with victims and survivors of mass violence incidents (MVIs) from response to resilience?*
- *How do we improve victim-centric planning and response?*
- *What are general strategies for reducing distress in victims and survivors of MVI?*
- *What are some specific strategies for prosecutors and victim service professionals that are consistent with evidence-based psychological interventions?*
- *What are some features associated with positive lessons learned from previous MVIs?*

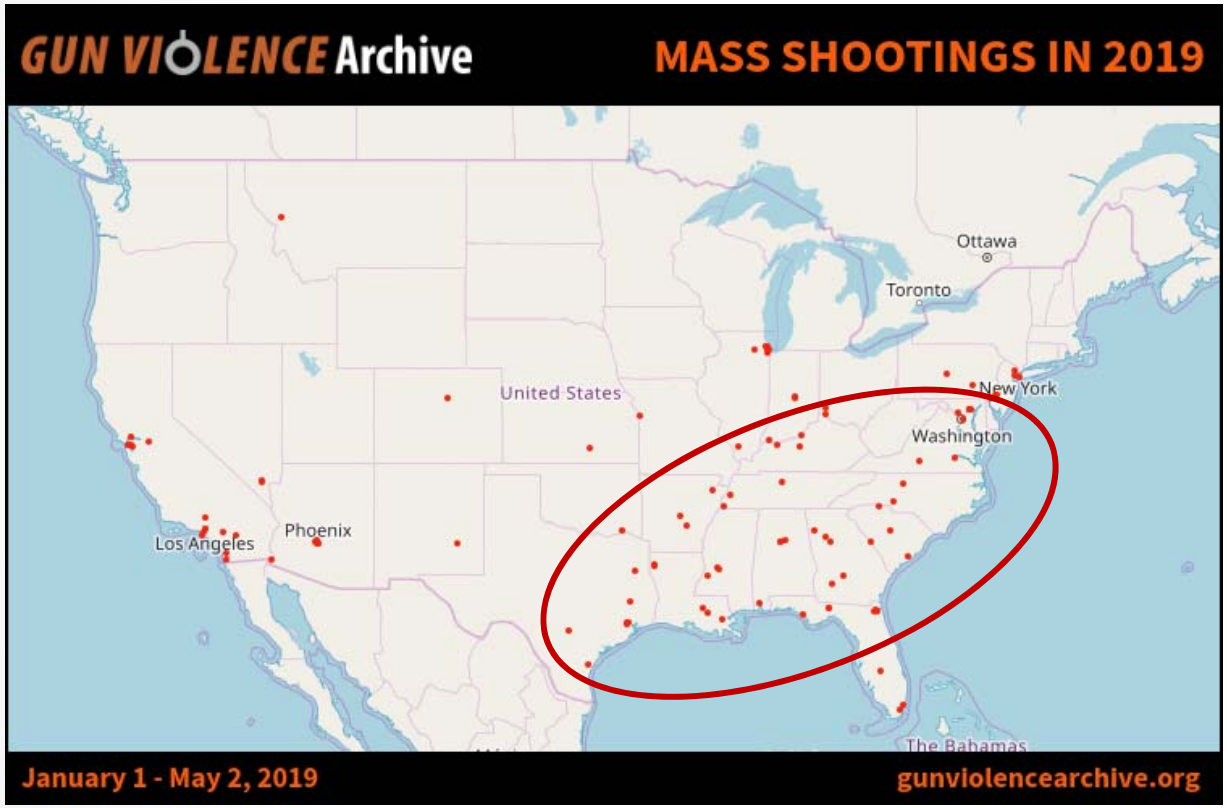
MVIs: A Few Key Facts

- Over 350 mass violence incidents (MVI) occurred in U.S. between 2006 and 2017. One MVI happens about every 11 days.
- Most MVIs involve firearms, but they can also involve bombs, vehicles, knives, fires, poison, etc.
- About 2 out of 3 killers do not survive the incident, meaning that there is usually no trial.
- Although most of the focus is on those who are killed, the number who were injured is also very important.
- MVIs that include victims, survivors, and family members from multiple states and jurisdictions pose special challenges.

Terrorism or hate crimes key points

- People are targets because of…
  - Who they are - race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identification
  - What they believe - religion, political affiliation, ideology
  - What they do - government workers, company worker, elected officials, law enforcement, military, physicians
  - Where they live - citizen, resident, event participant, congregant, member, customer
- Goals
  - Inspire persistent fear and terror in all members of the group
  - Force them to significantly change their lifestyles and behavior
  - Erode confidence in societal identity, institutions, and customs
  - Spawn social or political change
- Difficult to alter your target status

Mass Shooting Incidents in 2019



105 incidents
122 killed
379 injured

- Retrieved 5/2/19 from https://www.gunviolencearchive.org.

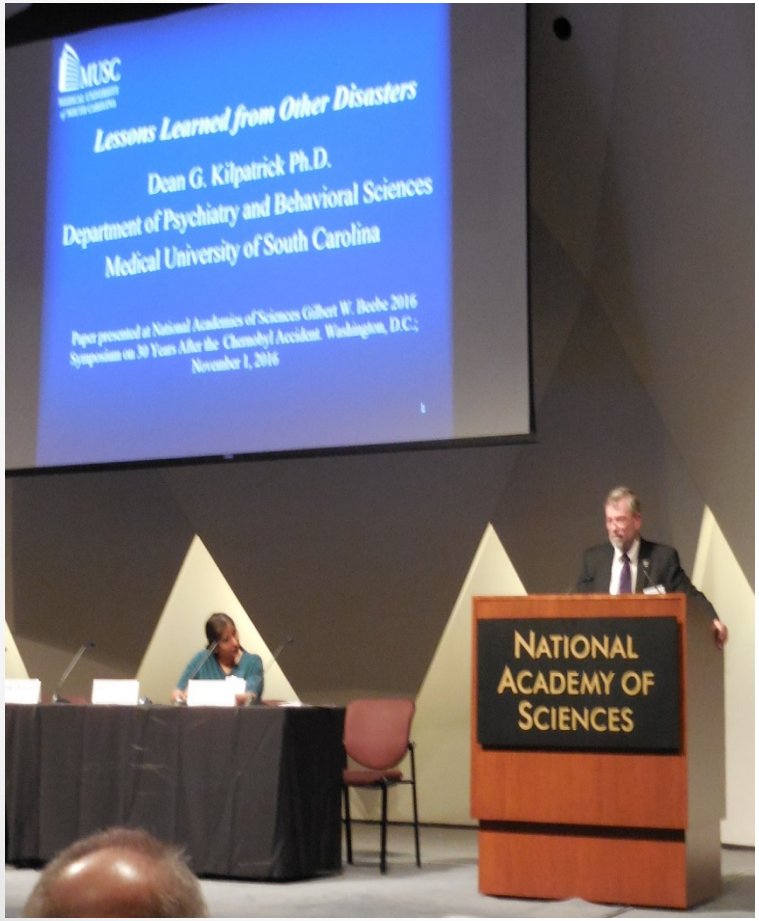
Role of Media Coverage of MVIs

April 27, 2019
Chabad of Poway synagogue
Poway, CA
1 killed, 3 injured

April 28, 2019
2 rural homes
Westmoreland, TN
7 killed, 1 injured

What is the impact of MVIs?

What We Know from Our Studies of Over 35 Thousand Crime and MVI Victims



- Most victims do not develop MH problems, but many do.
- Many victims recover; many do not.
- Social support is protective factor; prior victimization is risk factor.
- Most with MH problems do not seek MH treatment.
- Increases risk of:
    - Mental health problems (e.g. PTSD, grief, depression, substance use, suicide)
    - Health concerns, health risk behaviors, and health problems
    - School and job performance
    - Fear-related restrictions in behavior

Factors that Impact Response

- Prior trauma history
- Multiple prior losses
- Low social support
- Multiple life stressors
- Poor coping skills
- Genetics

Higher Risk for Problems

Incident Exposure

- Greater proximity to the attack
- Seeing or hearing the events
- Physical injuries
- Acquaintance with the deceased
- Perceptions of life threat, injury threat, danger
- Peritraumatic dissociation
- Repeated exposure to media reports

The 3 R's

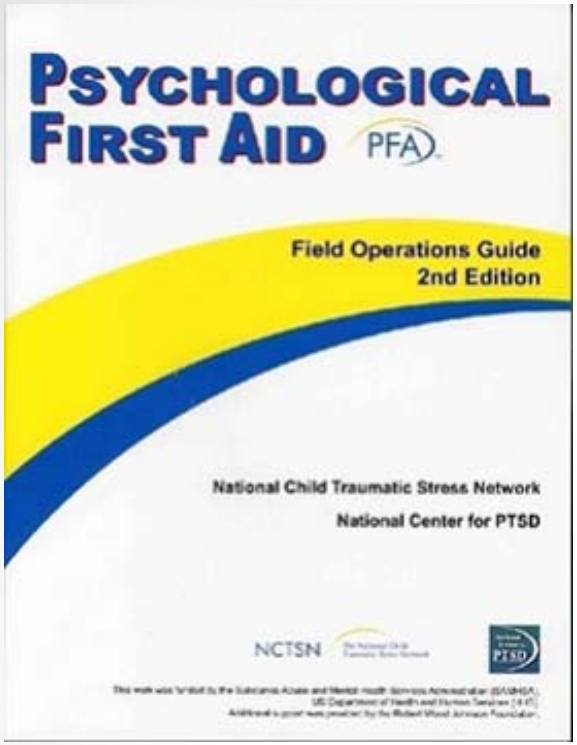
Response

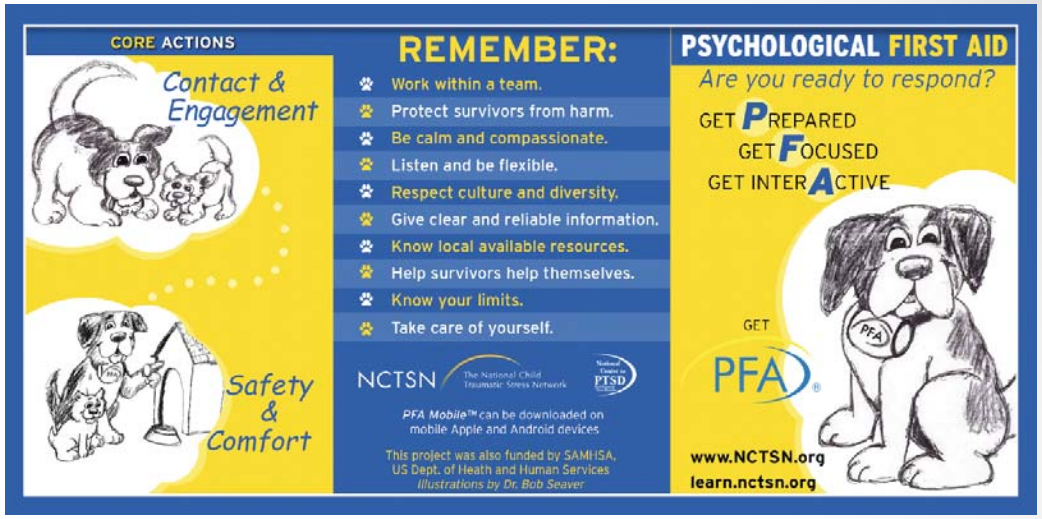
Recovery

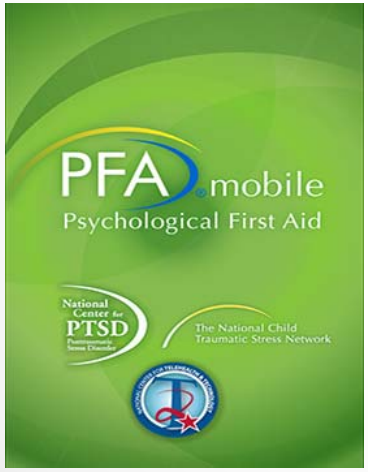
Resilience

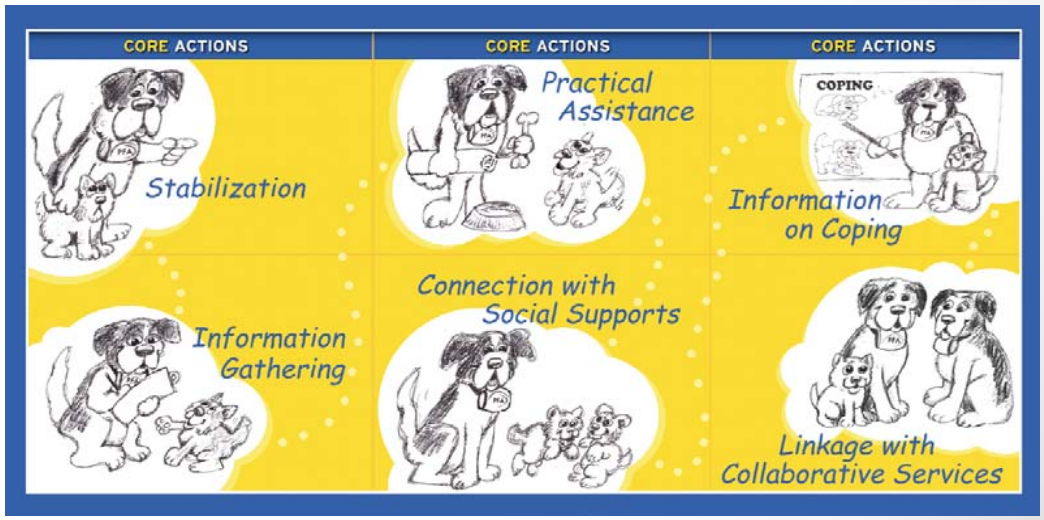
The 1st R---Response

- Rapid, immediate help
- Help to the broader affected community
- Triage needs
  - Physical safety
  - Medical care
  - Physical needs – Housing, food, clothing, transportation, funds
  - Problem-solving
  - Communication with loved ones
  - Information
  - Emotional support and psychoeducation
- Provide information - use of traditional and social media
- Self-help resources - websites, apps, media, schools, churches, organizations, person to person
- Layperson delivered programs - PFA, SPR



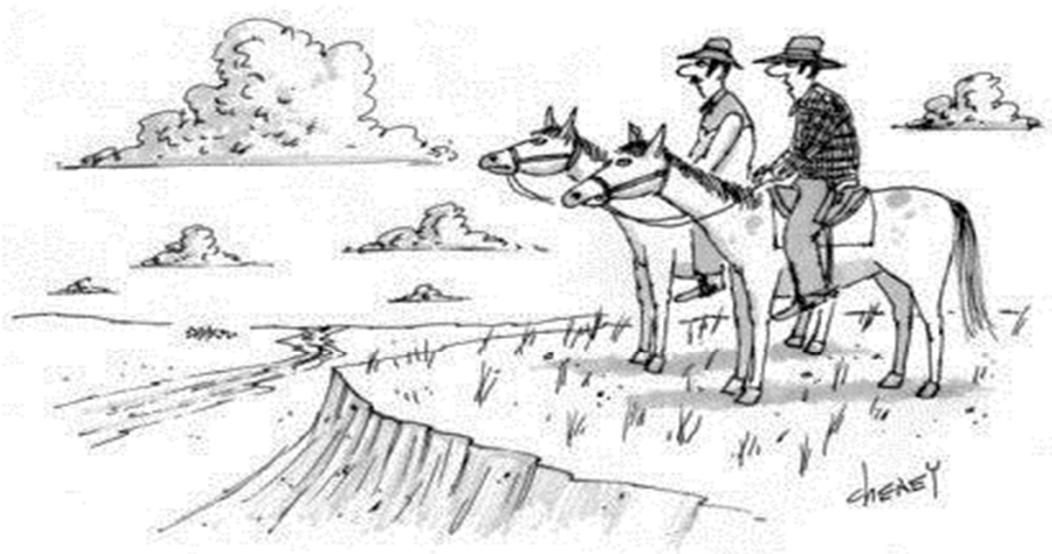






www.nctsn.org

Cautions



"Hard to tell from here. Could be buzzards. Could be grief counsellors."

- "Experts" of every sort; many uninvited
- Victims and victim programs from other MVI towns
- Purveyors of information, training, programs, interventions, treatments, materials
- Scam artists – fake GoFundMe, telephone donations

Be Prepared for Deniers and Conspiracy Theorists Following MVIs

(Photo source: Mark Ralston /Getty Images)

- **Sutherland Springs Baptist Church Minister was confronted by man who claimed: shooting was a hoax; offered $100,000 for proof of death for "any supposed victims"; called the Minister a demon, lair, and profane names.**
- **Rev. Pomeroy's 14 yr. old daughter was among the 26 killed.**
- **Mrs. Pomeroy said, "It's been a nightmare."**

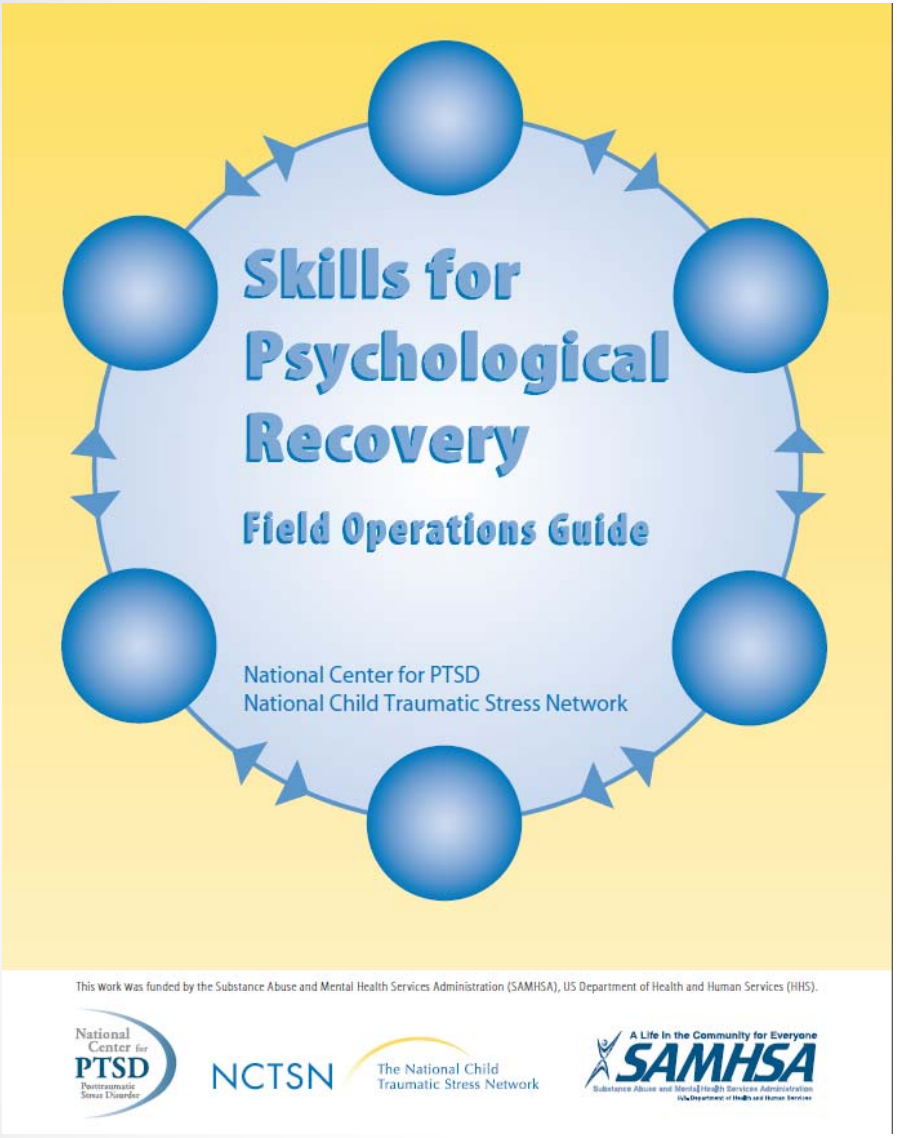
Deniers and Conspiracy Theorists Following MVIs, cont.

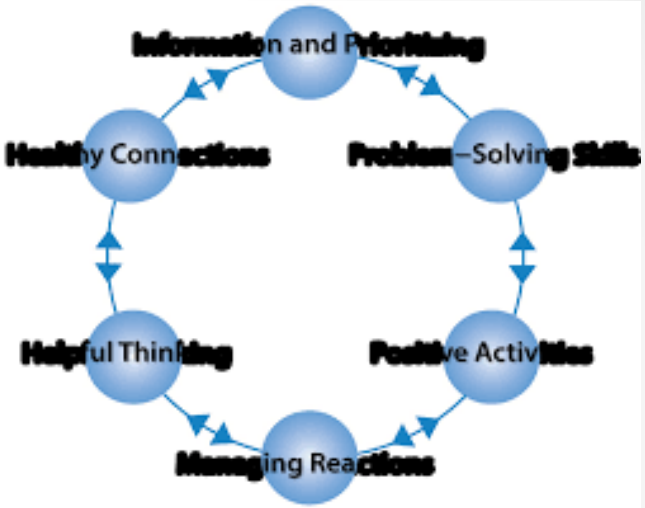
- **Headline reads "Sandy Hook conspiracy theorist gets prison time for threatening victim's family" (source: The Guardian)**
- **The father of a boy who was killed in the 2012 shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut has filed another defamation lawsuit against conspiracy theorists who accused him of being an actor.**
- ***Unfortunately many, many more victims and communities that experienced MVIs have had to deal with conspiracy theorists in-person, on television/radio shows broadcasts, and frequently via on-line posts & videos; all of which greatly compound their trauma and grief.***

The 2nd R---Recovery

- Goals
  - Resume everyday activities
  - Process and resolve issues related to the events
  - Facilitate effective grieving processes
  - Recalibrate to a new normal
  - Seek a future orientation
- Assess and triage needs for ongoing mental health and other support services for all victims and the community

This time frame can be from the first few weeks to a several months.





www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/SPR/SPR_Manual.pdf

What about Grief? The DOs

- DO acknowledge the loss
- DO use name of the deceased
- DO allow crying no matter how long it has been since the death
- Do endure a bit of silence if needed for her/him to compose her/his self
- DO normalize feelings and thoughts
- DO discuss different grief reactions and different time frames for grief
- DO talk about good memories of the deceased

What About Traumatic Grief? The DON'Ts

Don't say:

- **"I understand" ….. "I know what you are going through"**
- **"Give it some time"… "time will heal"**
- **"He/she is in a better place"**
- **"God has a plan"**
- **"You are not the only one"**
- **"You should…..move on, it's been a year"**
- **"You need to be strong and put on a happy face so you won't worry others"**

The 3rd R--- Resilience

- Provide ongoing services and activities
  - Establish Resiliency Center
  - Case management, community coordination
  - Coordinated, evidence-based support and treatment services
  - Commemorative services for the anniversary
  - Planning for trials

This can be from 4-6 months and lasting for the long-term

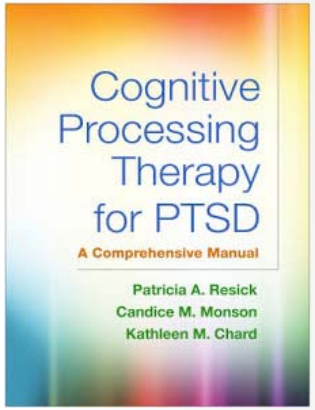
Evidence-based trauma treatments

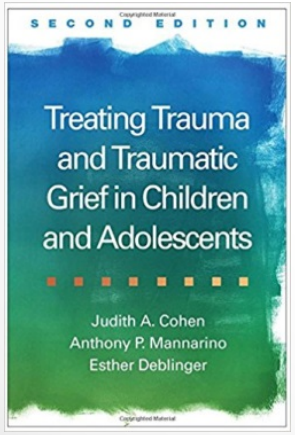
Adults

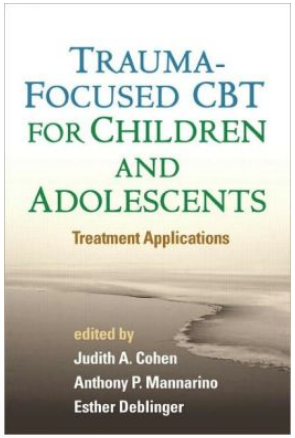
- Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE)
- Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)
- Complicated Grief Therapy (CGT)

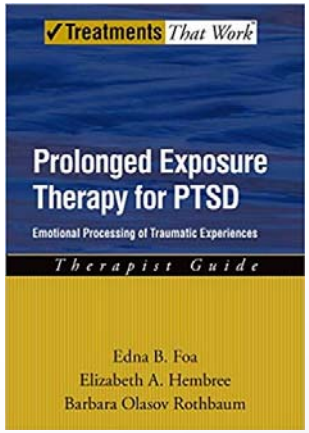
Children and adolescents

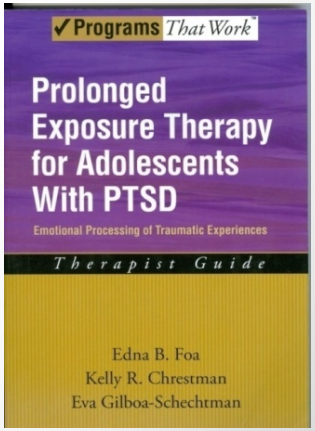
- Trauma-Focused Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)
- Child Traumatic Grief components (CTG)











Resource Websites

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Search

ABOUT MASS VIOLENCE | RESOURCES | MEDIA | TRAINING | ABOUT US

Home > Resilience Tools

RESILIENCE TOOLS

The path to recovery is different for every victim of a mass violence incident. Self-help resources may be useful as a way to begin your own healing process or to provide help to a child or someone close to you. These resources are not a substitute for treatment from a health care professional, but they may help you learn important skills and coping strategies.

1 COMMON TRAUMA REACTIONS

People may have a variety of reactions after a mass violence incident. These reactions may be experienced by:

- Victims who were directly affected by the incident
- Family, friends and others who are closely associated with a victim
- People who witnessed or heard details about the incident

The following tip sheets can help you understand common trauma reactions that people may have after a mass violence incident.

2 COPING TIPS

NCTSN - NATIONAL CHILD TRAUMATIC STRESS NETWORK

For Teens: Coping After Mass Violence

Provides information for teens regarding common reactions to mass violence, and tips for self-care and connecting with other victims.

Read This

www.nmvvrc.org

NCTSN

OUR MISSION is to raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families and communities throughout the United States.

The Latest

Major Events

Trauma Types | Trauma Treatments | Trauma-Informed Care | NCTSN Resources

www.nctsn.org

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

PTSD: National Center for PTSD

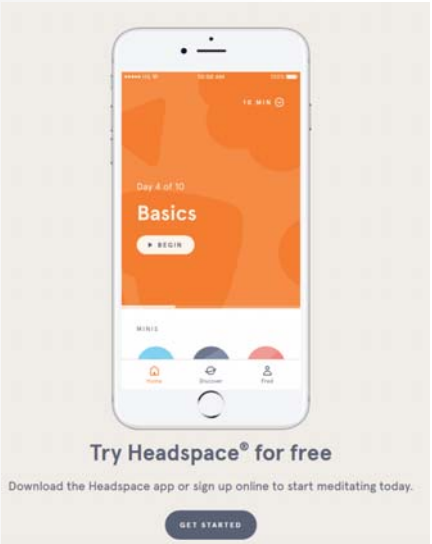
PTSD Basics

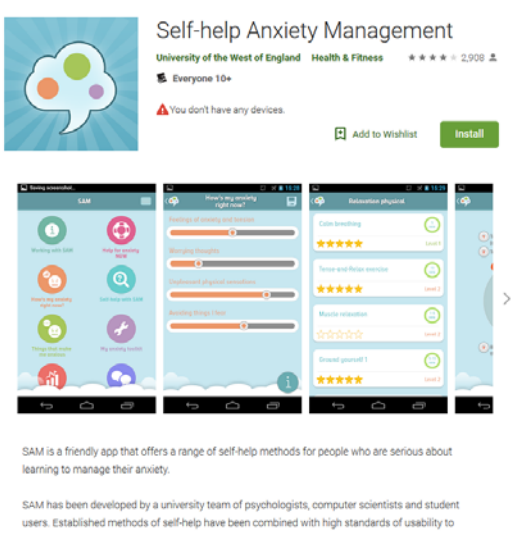
QUICK LINKS

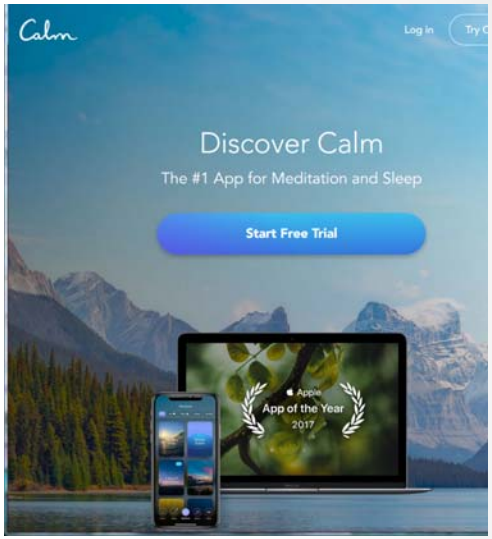
What is PTSD?

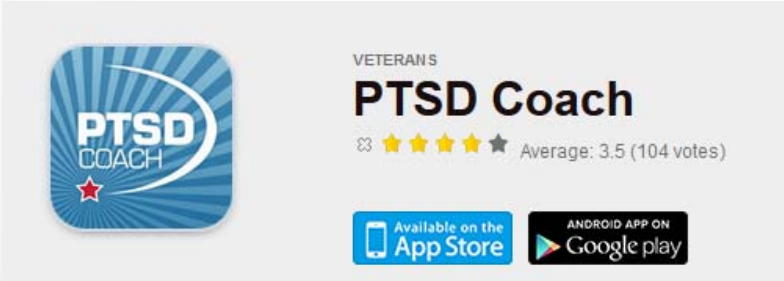
www.ptsd.va.gov

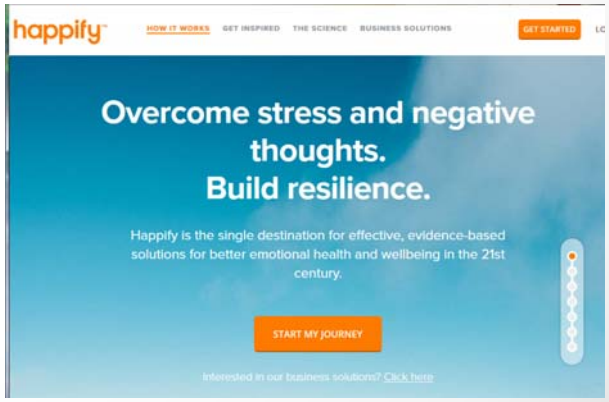
Self-help Mobile Apps









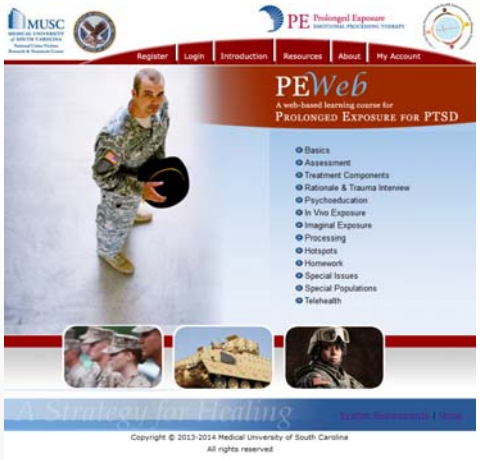


Professional Training Websites

www.musc.edu/tfcbt2

www.helping-heroes.org

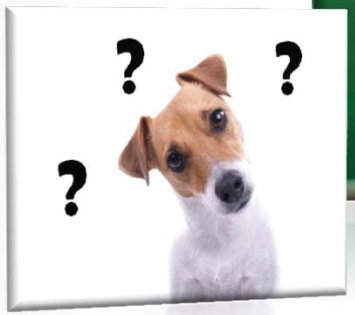
www.musc.edu/cvweb



pe.musc.edu

www.musc.edu/cpt

Questions and Comments



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