

News Release

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It Began as an Ordinary Day

Tampa, Florida (August, 2012). There are dates when society at large can remember exactly where they were and what they were doing: the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the sudden death of Princess Diana, September 11, 2001, the Columbine or Virginia Tech shootings and now July 20, 2012. Most people awoke to hear of the tragic murders of twelve innocent people and what was later to be determined the 58 others who were seriously wounded at a theater in Aurora, Colorado. For these individuals and their families, their town and this country it began as a normal day and culminated in a normal event – going to the movies. And then for days we viewed and read reports of what occurred with continually evolving pieces of information and, at times guesses as to what happened. And we found ourselves experiencing a wide range of emotions from shock and disbelief to anger to sadness to not feeling secure as we tried to make sense of something so irrational. We began to ask ourselves where we and our families could be safe since we have witnessed similar acts in the workplace, in school, in transportation and now in a social event. Fortunately such tragedies and senseless acts of violence rarely occur but when they do we are all impacted in some way. We are certainly reminded of how fragile life is and how quickly it can be lost or changed- sometimes for the lifetime of the victims. We are left to question ourselves in terms of how we should feel and act. We have to deal with concepts of unfairness and justice and laws. We often look for someone or someplace to blame. But ultimately we have to deal with what we are feeling and take care of those we love.

Such events leave most people with a sense of confusion and fear and we can be impacted emotionally, cognitively,

behaviorally and physically. And yes, these changes occur even when we do not personally know the victims. Something is taken from us when we experience such tragedy – and we often have to try and explain to those who may be too young to understand. Parents, grandparents, and other family members need to be aware that children, too, can be affected by hearing or seeing such events and not be as able to process the impact it is having. We often feel like we are on an emotional roller coaster. For example, we find ourselves getting angry and then feel guilty because we feel that way. We want to do something but wind up feeling helpless. It is critical that we learn effective and healthy strategies to help ourselves and others cope with our natural negative emotional responses. This is critical because how we express and sort out our feelings impacts their resolution and our ability to move forward. How able we are to both experience and express our emotions will be determined by our resilience, degree of vulnerability, current stressors, positive support systems and our coping strategies.

How Can You Help Yourself and Others

- ◆ **First, limit the amount of exposure you have to the event in terms of not watching the reports over and over**
- ◆ **Utilize your support system: talk with those with whom you can be open and honest and with whom you don't have to try and figure out the right way to say something. This is not the time to talk with someone who will debate you on certain issues.**
- ◆ **Allow children to express their feelings freely concerning the event. Remember that given their particular age, children may not be able to make sense of what happened or even be able to identify or verbalize their feelings. Also remember that an adult sometimes begins to provide explanations or information when the child has a much simpler question. An example is when two children were talking about where they were born. One child ran in to ask their mother, "Mommy where did I come from?" The mother thought she had to begin a lesson about "the birds and the bees" when her child stopped her and said, "No mommy, Joey was born at Tampa General – where did I come from?" So follow the child's lead when responding**

to concerns and/or fears. It is important to be mindful of a child's developmental stage when talking about the facts surrounding the event.

- ◆ **Find relaxing activities to do such as going for a walk, reading a book, or spending time with family and friends. Most importantly, give yourself a break from the over exposure to news stories covering the tragedy.**

Specialists who help individuals deal with traumatic effects have long recognized that such large scale traumas trigger emotions regarding their own past personal hurts. So if you find yourself becoming overly anxious or fearful, excessively tearful, wanting to isolate yourself, experiencing significant changes in sleep or appetite, consider reaching out to a professional so you can effectively re-establish balance in your life. Remember that when traumatic events are not appropriately addressed, one can experience long-term effects..

Remember that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a benefit available to all contracted organizations' employees and dependents and provides confidential free professional assistance 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. Remember that you or a dependent may contact the EAP regarding any concern that you might have – you don't have to wait until a problem becomes big to seek help. Above all, keep in mind that concerns develop over time but the way you address them can be changed. We have all been exposed either directly or indirectly to traumatic events that can affect us emotionally, cognitively, behaviorally and physically. This is not the time to "tough it out." So, if you find yourself struggling with such a community or personal event – help is a phone call away.

Call: (813) 870-0392 (Hillsborough County), (727) 576-5164 (Pinellas County), or (800) 343-4670 (out of area toll free).