

COPING TACTICS: IMMEDIATELY AFTER AN OVERDOSE FATALITY

Normalize reactions: It is very important to convey the fact that it is normal to experience strong emotions in response to being exposed to a sudden death. You can discuss potential reactions in advance, for example, by pointing out that it can feel traumatic to be involved in or to witness a resuscitation attempt, especially when the outcome is that the person dies. Another natural—albeit distressful—aspect of coping with a fatality is having an empathic response to the shock, trauma, and grief other people are experiencing as the situation unfolds.

Step away from the scene:

- Do this literally by physically going to a safe space.
- “Stepping away” can create a sense of safety and calm even if:
 - You are able only to step back a short distance to remove yourself from the immediacy of the scene
 - You must step away only “in your mind” by moving your mental focus away from the intensity of the troubling scene

Breathe mindfully: Take three or four deep and deliberate breaths while concentrating on the awareness in your body that you are breathing (as air moves in and out, notice your chest and abdomen rising and falling).

Scan your body:

- Sit in a chair, relax and be still
- Begin at the soles of your feet, take notice, and say to yourself, “I notice the soles of my feet touching the floor.”
- Move your attention slowly up your body, taking notice at each stop along the way and saying to yourself things like:
- “I notice my butt sitting on the chair” ... “I notice my back being supported” ... “I notice my arms at my sides and my hands in my lap” ... “I notice my chest moving with each breath” ... “I notice the temperature of the air on my face” ... “I notice the weight of my head” ...

Visualize a safe place:

- Close your eyes.
- Visualize a place, real or imagined, that is guaranteed to be a safe place for you.
- Relax your body—and focus on keeping the scene in your “mind’s eye.”
- Immerse yourself in being present in that place (imagine seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting).
- Stay in the scene for 5 or 10 minutes, relaxing your body as you picture it.
- Slowly end the visualization.

Practicing affirmative self-talk:

- “It is OK to feel as distressed as I feel: I am OK.”
- “This intensity will subside: I am making it through this.”
- “This is part of my work. My work has real purpose and meaning.”

- “Of course I feel distraught: A person just died.”
- “I am doing my best, and it is good enough.”
- “This is awful, but it is a reality that this does happen.”