

Script – Print – Coping with the trauma of gun violence

The recent school shooting in Nashville was the 130th mass shooting this year, according to a tracker from the [Gun Violence Archive](#).

For people around the country, news of yet another shooting stirs feelings of anger, fear and frustration. While many people are resilient and are able to move past these horrific events, the vivid images and details tend to uproot any sense of safety for so many others.

That most certainly can be the case for those directly impacted by the gun violence, whether it be a survivor, family member, or first responder.

Therasa Yehling is the manager for the OSF Strive Trauma Recovery Center at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center in Rockford.

“This is an issue that is going to affect someone the rest of their life,” she says. “They will have to learn how to manage it like any other disease, and it can affect them not only emotionally but physically.”

OSF Strive is a program for survivors of violent crime who are experiencing post-traumatic distress but are not receiving other mental health care. That includes people struggling with symptoms of anxiety, depression or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after a trauma such as gun violence, assaults, domestic violence, armed violence or robbery in which they are the victim or witness. There are OSF Strive locations in Rockford and Peoria.

But you don’t have to be directly impacted by gun violence to feel some type of effect. Yehling says most people feel some sense of attachment due, in large part, to the amount of information available to the public through various media outlets and social media.

“For anybody who hears about these stories – take, for instance, 9/11,” says Yehling. “We weren’t all there, but it certainly impacted us thanks to constant media feed. I think after a while, people were like, I need to turn this off. So sometimes not seeing what’s in the media is important.”

In addition to putting some limits on the amount of news you consume, Yehling encourages people to focus on positive activities like listening to music, cooking, gardening or whatever helps you feel better.

- Pay attention to a range of feelings you may experience during these tough times.
- Take time to focus on self-care such as eating, sleeping, and exercise.
- Stay patient with people who are experiencing their own grief.
- Stay in touch with family and friends
- Seek professional help

Yehling recommends creating an emotional safety plan, which means knowing who you can call on when you’re feeling triggered by the events, or finding an in-person or online support group.

“It's okay to talk to somebody if you're not feeling right,” says Yehling. “If you're feeling off, you don't know how to put it to words, go talk to somebody. Maybe they'll help you sort that out. It's just when you're not able to function the way you used to, or it's just worse than it's ever been before.”

The most important thing to remember, Yehling adds, is there is no time limit when it comes to the healing process – especially for those who've been touched by gun violence. And it's okay to set boundaries and limits on what you can and cannot do to help yourself on any given day.

“Do what you can to manage this,” says Yehling. “Don't be afraid of it, and have that acceptance that you are fine. It's the event. Seek the help that you need and go for it. If you learn to manage the symptoms like anything else, you can live a very good life. It can be done.”

For more information, contact [OSF Strive](#).