

# Fear of public places after mass shootings? Tips to overcome anxiety

November 13 2018, by Matthew Oates

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

It's a scene that's become all too familiar in American culture.

People enjoying a night out or simply going about their day. There is a

common denominator: They're in a crowd.

Suddenly, there's a pop. Another pop. And then more in rapid succession. People begin scattering when they realize that a horrible event is happening.

With each new mass shooting at a school, restaurant, house of worship or other public place, people – of any age—can become numb to the news of the event. Or they can watch the news footage repeatedly, become fearful and begin to dread going out in public.

Susan Kersey, a clinical assistant professor at the Purdue University School of Nursing and director of the Psychiatric/Mental Health Nurse Practitioner Program, provides these tips to combat any anxiety tied to [mass shootings](#), natural disasters or issues of public [safety](#).

- Reduce your exposure to media. "It's a 24/7 cycle that sends a message that you are not safe. It begins to make you think that you aren't safe out in the world," Kersey said.
- Take control of the situation, such as knowing your surroundings, and entry and exit points. "We can't control what other people do. You can control what you do."
- Take a safety class through a local law enforcement agency or workplace. "You can prepare yourself for events and know how to respond and keep yourself safe."

Aspects include reviewing workplace safety measures or working with others to implement changes in your workplace. "Following up with safety policies helps to replace fearful thoughts with, 'I've done everything I can to prepare for an event.'"

If a person is still facing anxiety, Kersey said to use cognitive behavioral therapy techniques to help control the anxiety. A person can counter the

thoughts with evidence that it would be extremely rare if something were to happen directly to you. Another exercise is to take three deep breaths and remind yourself, "I am safe. I can handle what comes my way."

One's upbringing, genetics and temperament can also affect how one responds to an event that is experienced firsthand or those who watch or read about the event through trusted media sources.

"If you have personally experienced a tragic event – even for the short-term, you should ask for help. You should seek out a therapist who has experience helping trauma survivors," Kersey said. "Most people with anxiety experience fear. Most people are resilient."

If the [anxiety](#) persists, Kersey encourages people to seek help and talk to professionals about the issue. "You don't have to suffer alone. There is help for you."

Provided by Purdue University

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