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Center for  
Prevention Programs  
and Partnerships

# Mitigating Harm from Violent Visual Content: CP3 Prevention Resource



## Mitigating Harm from Violent Visual Content: CP3 Prevention Resource

In the wake of an act of targeted violence or terrorism, individuals and communities may be exposed to violent images, videos, and other disturbing content. This material may appear in media coverage or be shared online. Individuals or violent extremist groups may share this content for various purposes to include promoting or glorifying violence.

Decades of psychological research show exposure to violent media and content – whether by children or adults – may result in harmful outcomes.<sup>i</sup> While individuals react differently to visual materials, some people may experience an increase in stress, anxiety, worry, or fear when exposed to violent content. For example, studies of people who viewed the 9/11 terror attacks on live television found an increase in psychological and physical health complaints for these individuals years after the event.<sup>ii</sup>

Academic research suggests that, in rare cases, viewing violent content may inspire individuals to attempt their own violent attacks. Case studies of violent extremist offenders in the United States show these individuals frequently viewed large amounts of disturbing content online, which may have contributed to accelerating their violent behavior.<sup>iii</sup> Viewing the content of successful violent attacks may also encourage individuals to imitate these actions, such as individuals who watched televised airplane hijackings in the 1970s and 1980s and later attempted to conduct similar attacks.<sup>iv</sup>

By recognizing the consequences of violent content in the media and online, communities can take proactive steps to reduce potential harm and build resilience. This Prevention Resource provides practical, evidence-based guidance to help protect communities, families, and individuals, while also decreasing the likelihood of violence. Targeted violence and terrorism are often preventable—everyone has a role to play in preventing violence—and the federal government has [many resources available](#) to support partners across the country.

It is normal to experience a wide range of emotions after an act of targeted violence or terrorism. To help individuals cope with these incidents, and the graphic imagery and content publicly shared afterward, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration offers the following [coping tips](#) for traumatic events and disasters:



Reach out to friends  
and family



Head outside for  
physical exercise



Limit consumption  
of news and social media



Eat healthy



Engage in community service



Maintain routines



Prioritize sleep



Ask for help

*IF THERE IS AN EMERGENCY, CALL 911. If you are concerned about a friend or loved one, do not wait. Seek professional help.*



## Best Practices to Mitigate Harm from Violent Content After an Act of Targeted Violence or Terrorism

For individuals:	For parents and those who work with young people:	For community leaders and mental health professionals, social service providers, local government officials, and law enforcement:
<p>Before watching the news or using the internet, prepare for the possibility that you may see graphic content. The element of surprise may increase the harm caused by this content, and prolonged exposure can <a href="#">increase the likelihood</a> of stress and trauma.</p>	<p><a href="#">Offer</a> youth a safe space to talk about what happened in age-appropriate ways. Answer their questions with simple, direct, and honest responses. Provide appropriate reassurance and support.</p>	<p>Plan and prepare for public safety challenges following an act of targeted violence or terrorism, including an increase in circulation of graphic violent extremist content. Identify <a href="#">community-based resources</a> that promote resiliency before a violent event occurs.</p>
<p>Violent propaganda may include text or images manipulated to foster hate-fueled violence.</p> <p>Seek out the facts by verifying news sources, especially in the immediate aftermath of a violent incident when circumstances may be unclear.</p> <p><a href="#">To fact check information</a>, investigate the source material, and verify claims with credible sources such as major news outlets.</p>	<p>Media can be <a href="#">difficult for youth to navigate alone</a>.</p> <p>Limit the amount of exposure to media coverage and discussion in social media a child interacts with, employ age-appropriate online safety measures, limit exposure to graphic content, and build healthy media and online skills. <sup>v</sup></p>	<p><a href="#">Offer additional support</a> to marginalized communities or groups that may be victimized because of the event.</p> <p>This might include increased security precautions, direct outreach by local officials, and access to mental health, social service providers, and educational resources.</p>
<p>To <a href="#">cope during challenging times</a>, maintain healthy physical habits like eating well and getting exercise. Invest in mental wellness activities like meditation, and mental health support, if needed.</p>	<p><a href="#">Take time away</a> from media. Turn off the televisions, computers, and phones and spend time connecting as a family and community.</p>	<p>Recognize that professionals may experience high stress or trauma if their job requires prolonged exposure to violent media or graphic online materials. <a href="#">Take steps</a> to attend to mental and physical health. Reach out to colleagues during stressful events to lend support.</p>



## CP3 Resources:

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3) supports a comprehensive approach to targeted violence and terrorism prevention.

- Engage with DHS CP3 [Regional Prevention Coordinators \(RPCs\)](#), covering all 50 states and territories, to help establish and support prevention efforts at the local level. RPCs help to deliver CP3's trainings, connect prevention practitioners and build networks that can support local prevention frameworks.
- Locate federal resources to prevent targeted violence and terrorism through the [Prevention Resource Finder](#), including community resources, grant funding opportunities, information sharing platforms and more.
- Connect with the [Prevention Practitioners Network](#), a national network of interdisciplinary professionals dedicated to preventing targeted violence, terrorism and their impact.
- [Screen Hate](#), a CP3 funded initiative, offers tools, information, and resources for parents and concerned adults to help guide media and online activities by teens and young adults who may be exposed to hateful and violent ideologies.

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<sup>i</sup> Bender PK, Plante C, Gentile DA. The effects of violent media content on aggression. *Curr Opin Psychol.* 2018 Feb;19:104-108. doi: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.04.003. Epub 2017 Apr 12. PMID: 29279205.

<sup>ii</sup> Interview with Roxanne Cohen Silver, Ph.D., Twenty years after 9/11, what have we learned about collective trauma? With Roxane Cohen Silver, PhD (apa.org)

<sup>iii</sup> The Use of Social Media by United States Extremists | START.umd.edu

<sup>iv</sup> Terrorism and the Mass Media | Royal United Services Institute (rusi.org)

<sup>v</sup> [Healthychildren.org](#)