

# Student Journalist Perspective: Self-Care Practices for the Newsroom

## A DART CENTER TIP SHEET FOR STUDENT JOURNALISTS

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**As a journalism student, it's important to practice self-care strategies as you cover traumatic events. Just as your sources can undergo trauma, so can you as the journalist.**

Whether you are a reporter, editor, photographer, videographer, designer, programmer, and/or web master for your campus publication, you can experience traumatic stress during a news event. It's important to have self-care practices and strategies in place to help you during these difficult moments.

### HAVE AN OPEN NEWSROOM CULTURE

To operate with a "trauma-informed" self-care mindset, encourage your newsroom colleagues to speak openly with one another and feel able to do so without sharp criticism or backlash.

### TRAUMA AWARENESS – EDUCATE

Ask your advisor or editor to schedule a time for the newsroom to learn about trauma, traumatic stress, PTSD, and the effects of covering traumatic news events. By educating yourself, you will be better prepared when a traumatic event occurs and know how to practice self-care strategies that will help you do better work as a journalist, and take care of yourself personally.

### EMERGENCY CONTACT LISTS

Create an emergency contact tree for your newsroom. This emergency contact tree should lay out the protocol of who to call during a traumatic news event. This should be accessible to everyone on staff via print copy (you might create a business card with basic information that news staff can keep in their wallets) and digitally. Create back-ups of these lists in case the master list is lost or not accessible.

### CHECK IN OFTEN

Before you go out to cover the traumatic event, talk with your editor/advisor and newsroom colleagues about the protocol for checking in while out reporting. Assess the potential risks you may be facing and discuss them with your editor/advisor. It's critical to be in regular contact with your editor/advisor and others in the newsroom. Find out when your editor/advisor would like you to check in and how often as well as through which method (phone call, email, text message, etc.). This will let everyone know that you are ok and safe while you are out doing your newsgathering work.

### SELF-CARE PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES

Knowing how to take care of yourself physically and mentally is important both during chaotic events and on a regular, daily basis. The more you practice self-care techniques, the easier it will be to deal with a traumatic event and related stressors.

#### More resources:

- [Self-care Primer](#)
- [Self-care Tips for the News Media](#)
- [Reporters Without Borders: Journalism Handbook \(see chapter 9\) \(PDF\)](#)
- [Self-care Amid Disaster](#)
- [Finding a Therapist](#)

Here are some self-care practices you can implement right away:

- Eat regular meals. Improper nutrition can impact your ability to work effectively.
- Get a full night's rest. Lack of sleep can affect your ability to work effectively and be able to concentrate and make the right decisions.
- Try deep breathing. The practice of breathing can help calm and ease any tension you may have or experience.
- Exercise (run, walk, yoga, etc. – whatever exercise you enjoy doing). This can help to relieve any stress you may be experiencing.
- Take several breaks throughout the day.
- Keep in touch with family and friends and talk with them about your experiences.
- Write your thoughts and ideas down in a journal.
- Acknowledge your feelings and emotions. Don't keep them bottled up.
- Talk with your editor/advisor or other friends in the newsroom about your experiences.
- Engage in activities you enjoy (dinner out with friends, playing sports, talking with family, etc.)

There may be other activities not on this list that you enjoy. Do whatever puts you in a relaxed and calm state of mind. The best exercise is the exercise you do. Be a role model to your colleagues in the newsroom by employing a consistent set of self-care practices.

It's also important to know your limits. If you realize that covering a traumatic event has become too much for you, inform your editor/advisor that you need to take a break. Your editor/advisor can assign the work to another staff member. Never tough it out if you feel that you are beyond your limits.

## **BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR TROUBLE SIGNS**

You may not undergo traumatic stress yourself, but you may notice that another student journalist is suffering. Pay attention to any trouble signs they may be showing while covering a traumatic event or after being exposed to such an event:

- Sleeplessness
- Upsetting dreams
- Intrusive images or thoughts of the event
- Avoidance of reminders of the trauma or feeling numb
- Feeling that bad things are about to happen
- Being jumpy and easily startled
- Anger
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling 'hyper'
- Physical reactions such as sweating, rapid heartbeat, dizziness or nausea when reminded of a traumatic event

If any of your peers are showing any of these signs, find a way to have a conversation with them and offer a listening ear. Keep an eye on them and see if these signs dissipate over time. Talk with your editor/advisor and let them know of your concern and the trouble signs you have observed. If they show signs of distress for several weeks or months after such an event, you should refer them to your editor/advisor and perhaps a trauma specialist.

## **YOUR IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY, THE CAMPUS**

Remember that the adrenaline and chaos that comes from traumatic events can throw you off, and you should try to remain centered to the best of your ability throughout the experience of covering a traumatic event. How you cover the story, how you interview sources, and the way you present the story to the public can have an impact on those affected by the event greatly as well

as the general public. Remember to be ethical, humane and respectful when carrying out your reporting.