

## Create a media buffer

It happens with every major tragedy. The news is on every channel, and people all over the world feel the strange but familiar tug to watch images of something they don't really want to see. The impulse is natural, as is the networks' desire to satisfy it.

Although we often criticize those who slow down to examine car wrecks, we are probably *designed* to do so. Seeing the evidence of something startling or tragic helps us to adapt to it, just as seeing a body lying in state helps us confront the reality of a death. Could this natural impulse pose a problem, however?

During depression and times of great stress our usual defenses against the news – our ability to watch and not be deeply affected – are weakened. You may see a story of a bus crash and feel an emotional impact – as though members of your family had been on the bus. Though this empathy can be a source of insight into the seriousness of the world's problems, it can also be debilitating. It helps no one for you to be immobilized with grief or horror in front of the television.

What should you do? Eventually, it will be a good idea for you to be able to watch or read at least some of the news. But during times of great personal difficulty you have so little energy that it should be spent on helpful activities. For this reason, it may not be necessary for you to spend that energy on the news, at least for now – provided that you instead spend that energy on more productive activities that are likely to have a stronger positive effect in the long run. Examples include completing the small tasks of life, exercising, bringing about lifestyle change, and seeing other people.

Some find it helpful to switch media. They want to be informed, but find that the vivid and emotional imagery of television news is too much for them. Rather than avoiding the news altogether, they switch to newspapers or a weekly newsmagazine. The latter have the advantage of reporting only the major stories and omitting the endless coverage of fires, car accidents, and trials that seldom has lasting significance or usefulness.

Have you found it more difficult than usual to tolerate news media during the last while?

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Do you often find that what you see in the news actually helps or changes something about your behavior or your life? When was the last time this happened?

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If you find the media troubling, which types are most difficult for you?

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If you were to cut back on your news or media exposure, how would you like to spend the time instead?

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What would be the first step to take in limiting your media exposure?

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