

Survivor-to-Survivor Tips for Recovery and Resiliency

“Being impacted by a mass violence incident can leave a wound that is hard to describe, a sense of searching for something, and challenge the way you feel about yourself and the world.” ~Amy O’Neill



Emotional Honesty & Self-Compassion

- **Put Yourself First** - Don't hide or feel the need to protect others from your pain. Your individual experience matters. People (including family) may say the wrong things because they don't understand; try not to personalize it but acknowledge how it makes you feel.
- **Let Go of “What Ifs”** - Feeling helpless can lead to unanswerable questions and unhelpful thoughts: “*I should have...I could have...Why didn't I...?*” Be kind to yourself.
- **Survivor’s Guilt Won’t Help You Heal** - It only takes more from you. Don't shame/blame yourself for not having lost more or for needing acknowledgment of your experience.
- **Self-Compassion Heals** - Treat yourself with the same kindness you would offer another.
- **It Takes Time to Understand** what you are thinking and feeling and feelings may change - be patient with yourself



Trauma Awareness & Personal Healing

- **Acknowledge All Injuries** - Trauma affects both body and mind. There is no right or wrong way to suffer, and both forms of impact are equally important to acknowledge.
- **Avoid Comparing Your Experience to Others and Judging Yourself.** You are not to blame for what happened to you. Self-compassion is essential.
- **Past Traumas May Resurface** - Personal histories matter, and previous traumas may be reawakened, complicating your healing.
- **Understanding Your Emotions Takes Time and Effort.** Talk to others who understand this kind of trauma. Therapists, survivors, and/or support groups can help you navigate this complex journey.



Connection & Support

- **Social Support is Essential** - Who can you talk to? Who can you trust with your feelings? Find someone, even if it is a professional.
- **Peer Support Can Be Helpful** - Survivors overwhelmingly endorse peer support because it:
 - » eases the loneliness of survival; connecting with others can be life-changing.
 - » provides a safe space to share your story. Seeing how others cope can offer you guidance.
 - » reminds us that there is *HOPE*.



Growth, Meaning, & Moving Forward

- **Recovery Isn’t Always “Bouncing Back”** - Growth happens by working through the pain, not by avoiding it.
- **Find What Heals You** - Yoga, meditation, journaling, running, crafting, singing, faith—any activity that brings you peace can be helpful or therapeutic. There is no “wrong door.”
- **Honor Those You’ve Lost** - Share their stories; they must be told.
- **Trauma Can Be Transformational** - The journey is full of fear, sadness, anger, and loss; but over time, healing happens, and there is a way to make meaning from it all.
- **It’s Okay to Be Okay** - If you reach a place where you don't need help, that's okay, too.
- **No Matter What, Keep Going** - Never quit, never give up.

Amy O’Neill, DHSc, LPC, is a survivor of the Boston Marathon Bombing and is dedicated to supporting others on their journey to healing. Through her experience and interactions with victims and survivors, Amy has gained deep insight into the resilience of the human spirit and the diverse ways people heal. Passionate about sharing practical strategies for recovery, she created this tip sheet to offer encouragement and guidance to fellow survivors navigating their paths of resilience to recovery.

This tip sheet was created by Amy O’Neill and reviewed by Heather Martin.