

# In our dis-unified nation, healing must start from within, says psychologist

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Josh Klapow, Ph.D., a UAB clinical psychologist. Credit: University of Alabama at Birmingham

Our nation is divided, says Josh Klapow, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, perhaps more than any time

since the Civil War. Klapow says partisan politics, the nonstop 24-hour news cycle and ubiquitous social media all contribute to a division that affects families, friends, work environments and all aspects of our social structure.

"From discussions at work, home or places of worship, and from posts on [social media](#), we can be increasingly aware that, in many cases, the views our friends, colleagues and acquaintances

have about politics may not match up with our own," Klapow said.

"Reaction to the recent shooting targeting members of Congress has in some cases widened that gap and threatens to further divide a nation already struggling to determine if this is the new normal."

Klapow says national healing must begin with each one of us, individually.

"Your reaction to individuals with different political views is really about you, not about them," Klapow said. "This is an exercise in how you think, feel and react. Can you find a way to live in this time of national discussion and conflict in a manner that preserves your sense of self along with the relationships that you have come to value?"

"Remember that, in the end, the anger, frustration and irritation you feel is yours alone. You must find a way to deal with it," he said. "Blame whom you like, but only you—and not the political system—can diffuse your own emotions. Refocus, redirect and re-engage in life, and you will find that the anger and frustration will settle and resolve. It may never go away. That's OK, but do not let it consume you. Passion for the country is admirable, but allowing yourself to be consumed by anger will only cause you pain."

Klapow says take time to consider the position of those who disagree

with you, and if you must engage with them, do so with respect. Remind yourself you likely have friends with different religious beliefs, different ethnic backgrounds, and different thoughts about childrearing, sports and a whole host of topics. It is healthy to have friends whose opinions are different from yours. If you cannot handle those differences, the question you need to ask yourself is "why not?"

"We live in a country founded on differing views, but we are creatures drawn to those who are similar to ourselves," Klapow said. "We have an opportunity to embrace differences, navigate challenging interactions, and come out on the other side with the confidence that friendships do not have to be with only those who are carbon copies of ourselves. That is where healing can begin."

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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