

Anniversaries and Trigger Events

The anniversary of a disaster or tragic event can renew feelings of fear, anxiety, and sadness in disaster survivors. Certain smells or sounds, such as smoke or sirens, can also trigger emotional distress. These and other environmental sensations can take people right back to the event, or cause them to fear that it's about to happen again. These "trigger events" aren't associated with any particular day on the calendar and can happen at any time.

What's more, special occasions like birthdays or holidays can also be difficult for families who have been displaced from their homes due to a disaster. It's hard to celebrate if you're facing financial difficulties or living in temporary housing.

Some people start anticipating the anniversary (or special occasion) days, weeks, or even months before it occurs. It's normal to have fears and concerns about how that day will make you feel. The following tips can help you or a loved one cope with renewed stress as an anniversary approaches or when trigger events suddenly occur.

Be aware that special days may be difficult. It's common for some stress and other emotional reactions to happen around the anniversary of an event. Simply recognizing that your feelings are normal will help. Dealing with some of your losses and the new realities you're facing after a disaster can be challenging. Try not to be too hard on yourself.

Be gentle with yourself. Show yourself the same kindness and patience you'd give to others during this time. Allow yourself to feel angry or sad and recognize that these emotions are natural.

Participate in activities that you enjoy. This may be different depending on the individual. Some people like to reflect in solitude while others may prefer spending time with family and friends for support. Some of these activities may include: singing, prayer, meditation, attending a spiritual service, going to the movies, or just getting together with loved ones to share a meal.

Talk about your losses if you need to. If you want to talk about your losses since the disaster, you can. If you want to talk about the future, you can do that, too. Be sure to share your thoughts and feelings with someone you trust. That can be a friend or family member or a health care professional.

Draw on your faith/spirituality. For many, faith and other spiritual beliefs are a source of strength and comfort every day, and most especially during difficult times. Reach out to your faith adviser, spiritual community, or anyone that you feel comfortable talking with about your beliefs to support and console you.

New Directions is here for you.

We're available to support you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Accept kindness and help from others. Support from family and friends is essential to healing. It's often difficult for people to accept help because they don't want to be a burden to others, or don't want to appear weak. Allow the people in your life to show their care and concern.

Help others. For some people, volunteering is a healthy way to heal and they get a great deal of satisfaction from helping others. Some activities can be as simple as donating food, clothing, and other item.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline/anniversaries-triggers>

(02/04/2019)

New Directions is here for you.

We're available to support you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.