

Coping With the Threat of Terrorism

Since September 11, 2001, the U.S. government has been issuing warnings to the public when they receive information about potential terrorist threats. This guide is intended to provide basic information on coping with the anxiety induced by terrorist threats and periodic warnings issued by the FBI against potential terrorist actions.

Note—This guide provides basic information only; for specific information, contact your physician or other health care provider as well as the agencies listed in the “Helpful Resources” section of this guide.

Managing Anxiety Associated With Terrorist Threats

While it is normal to have stressful feelings in response to uncertainty, the best defense is to be cautious and aware of your surroundings and report any suspicious behavior to law enforcement authorities. To help ease your fears, remember that U.S. and local governments are doing everything they can to protect Americans—and, in the event of an emergency, the government will notify us how to respond. Here are some additional tips, adapted from the American Psychological Association, on reducing anxiety and stress:

- ♦ **Remain calm.** Although threats of terrorism can be alarming, do not panic. There is nothing to indicate that our immediate safety is in jeopardy. One aim of terrorism is to induce widespread fear and anxiety—try not to let terrorists undermine your ability to pursue your normal activities
- ♦ **Keep to your normal routine.** Go about your life as normally as possible, unless specifically instructed otherwise. For example, if your workplace is closed due to threats, heed those warnings and stay home.
- ♦ **Limit your exposure to news media.** Listen regularly to reports from the government and reliable news sources, but try to limit it since overexposure to news may heighten your anxiety.
- ♦ **Focus on the facts.** Get your information from trusted, reliable sources, such as government agencies, and do not listen to rumors or fabricated stories about what could happen. This can only fuel your imagination and fears.
- ♦ **Follow safety guidelines.** Be sure to follow all safety and security measures that are in place to protect citizens. Whether you are at your workplace or a public outing, make sure you are aware of security measures and guidelines intended to protect you. In the event of a public emergency, federal, state and local law enforcement agencies will inform the public about the actions individuals need to take.
- ♦ **Report suspicious behavior.** While it is wise to be on the lookout for any suspicious activities or behaviors, use your best judgment. Report suspicious activities at the workplace to your employer, and report suspicious activities outside of the workplace to the local authorities.
- ♦ **Take steps to maintain your health.** Eat a well-balanced diet, exercise regularly to reduce stress, don't smoke, cut back on alcohol consumption and get enough sleep—all these steps will help maximize your body's ability to deal with your anxiety.
- ♦ **Engage in activities to keep your mind occupied.** Distract yourself from the fear and threat of terrorism by engaging in activities like crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, writing, drawing or other hobbies that interest you.
- ♦ **Use humor to your advantage.** Humor can significantly reduce stress. Inject humor into your day and remember to laugh. Surround yourself with people who are effectively managing their lives and maintaining a positive attitude and sense of humor.
- ♦ **Seek help if you need it.** Finally, and perhaps most importantly, stay in tune with your body and mind and try to prevent and combat stress by recognizing those factors that contribute to it. If you feel you can no longer manage the stress and anxiety on your own, ask if your employer offers an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or contact a mental health professional for help.

Helping Children Cope

Children's reactions to stressful events vary; however, there are similarities across all ages when their life is impacted by uncertainty and terrorist threats. To help your child cope with his or her feelings, the following tips may help:

- ♦ Try to keep daily life as normal as possible and stick to regular routines. Children find routines comforting.
- ♦ Stay positive. Talk about how the government is doing everything it can to keep us safe.
- ♦ Be honest and share your fears and concerns while reassuring your child that responsible adults are in charge.
- ♦ Keep bedtime routines consistent. If your child is having trouble sleeping, allow him or her to share a room with a sibling, use a nightlight, sleep with a special toy or stay with you until he or she falls asleep.
- ♦ Look for nonverbal indicators that your child may be having difficulty coping, such as facial expressions or posture and play behavior, as well as your child's verbal tone or content.
- ♦ Spend extra time with your child, if possible. When you don't know what to say, many times simply hugging your child will help.
- ♦ Ask your child about his or her feelings. Explain that it is normal to feel confused or scared. Acknowledge that the possibility of a terrorist attack is scary, but assure your child that you will do everything you can to protect him or her.

Note—If you or your children have been directly affected by a tragedy (e.g., suffered the loss of a loved one), anxiety about potential threats may be more extreme—and you may need to consult with a mental health practitioner.

Helpful Resources

The following organizations can provide additional information on coping with anxiety:

American Psychological Association

750 First Street N.E.
Washington, DC 20002
800-964-2000
202-336-5500
<http://www.apa.org/>

This nonprofit organization provides information and referrals to state associations that can help you find local clinical psychologists.

American Red Cross

431 18th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20006
202-639-3520
<http://www.redcross.org>

The American Red Cross offers information on preparing for a terrorist attack and homeland security advisory system recommendations.

National Anxiety Foundation

3135 Custer Drive
Lexington, KY 40517-4001
606-272-7166
<http://www.lexington-on-line.com/naf.html>

This site includes information on anxiety as well as links to other related resources.

National Institute of Mental Health

Public Inquiries Office
6001 Executive Boulevard, Room 8184
MSC9663
Bethesda, MD 20892-8030
301-443-4513
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

Part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), this is a research institute that offers general publications on mental health disorders, including anxiety.

National Register of Health Care Providers in Psychology

1120 G Street N.W., Suite 330
Washington, DC 20005
202-783-7663

This organization provides listings of psychologists according to geographic area and specialty.

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