A LifeCare® Guide

Coping After September 11th

The sudden, unexpected events of September 11th made an overwhelming impact on all Americans. For those directly affected, there were physical injuries and emotional trauma. For many others across the nation, there were no visible signs of physical injury, but the attacks have had an emotional impact that may continue for years. Not surprisingly, the anniversary of the attack may cause painful memories to resurface for many of us. This guide is intended to help you prepare for and cope with the emotions you may experience surrounding the anniversary, and take care of yourself and your loved ones.

Note—This guide provides basic information only; for more information, please refer to these other guides in the LifeCare® education series:

- *Grief and Bereavement*
- *Helping Others Cope With Grief*
- *Helping Children Cope With Grief*
- *Coping With the Threat of Terrorism*
- *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*

Coping With Resurfacing Emotions

Contrary to popular belief, grief is not a series of stages that must be worked through. Rather, it is an ongoing process that affects us differently—or more strongly—at different times. Certain triggers, such as the anniversary of September 11th, can bring back strong feelings of grief—sometimes taking us by surprise. For those who witnessed the attacks or knew someone who died, the grief may be even more intense. And, even if you felt that you had overcome your reaction to the attacks, the anniversary of September 11th may trigger reactions anew.

Are You Suffering From Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to a terrifying event or ordeal in which grave physical harm occurred or was threatened. Events such as September 11th may cause a person to re-experience the ordeal in the form of:

- Flashback episodes
- Memories
- Nightmares
- Frightening thoughts

People with PTSD may also experience emotional numbness and sleep disturbances, depression, anxiety, and irritability or outbursts of anger. Feelings of intense guilt are also common. If you experience any of these symptoms, consult a doctor or mental health professional.

Some of the emotions you may experience include:

- Recurring thoughts or nightmares about the event
- Difficulty sleeping or changes in appetite
- Anxiety and fear, when exposed to events reminiscent of the trauma
- Feelings of depression, sadness and low energy
- Difficulty focusing on work or daily activities
- Spontaneous crying, feelings of despair and/or hopelessness
- Avoiding activities, places or even people who remind you of the event
- Feeling emotionally "numb," withdrawn, disconnected or different from others
- Feeling extremely protective of, or fearful for the safety of loved ones
- Renewed anxiety about additional terrorist attacks. For more information, please refer to *A LifeCare® Guide: Coping With the Threat of Terrorism*.

When painful memories of September 11th arise, remind yourself that your feelings are normal. If you are finding it difficult to cope or know someone who is having trouble coping, contact your physician or other health care provider or one of the agencies listed in the "Helpful Resources" section of this guide.

Helping Children Cope

Be aware that when children recall the event, they may respond differently depending on age, personality and maturity level—as well as how directly he or she was involved with the tragedy. Children who were directly affected by the incident may suffer from severe anxiety or trauma—and may need professional help. For more information on helping children cope with grief and/or the anniversary of September 11th, please refer to other guides in the LifeCare® education series.

Coping With the Anniversary of September 11th

Knowing that you may be experiencing renewed feelings of grief around the anniversary of September 11th, you can prepare and plan for ways to take care of yourself during that time. Consider the following suggestions:

- Focus on the positive. If the media coverage surrounding the anniversary is too difficult for you to watch or read, focus instead on the healing process and the sense of community and patriotism that the tragedy has fostered.
- Expect that it may take time to cope with your feelings. Allow yourself to grieve or feel sad if necessary, and seek support from family, friends, co-workers or religious organizations.
- Seek professional help. If you are unable to cope on your own, seek professional help from your doctor or a mental health professional. Also, many people now have counseling as a part of their health benefits through work. Employee Assistance Plans (EAPs) are available to help you and your eligible family members resolve a variety of emotional and personal problems. Check with your employer to find out if your organization offers this benefit.

Remembering Those Who Were Lost

Perhaps the most significant part of the anniversary of September 11th is remembering the victims of the attacks—including the heroes who sacrificed themselves to help others. The following tips may give you ideas for finding a way to memorialize those who were lost:

- Decide how you want to spend the day. Think about starting new rituals that you can do by yourself or with your family. For example, lighting a candle or planting a garden.
- If you lost a loved one in the attacks, remember the person in a special way. Discuss how you're feeling with friends and family members. Talking with others can help you cope. For more information on coping with the loss of a loved one, please refer to *A LifeCare Guide: Grief and Bereavement*.
- Attend a memorial service or other ceremony that your community may hold to observe the day. The "Helpful Resources" section at the end of this guide offers information on events taking place to memorialize September 11th.
- Consider helping others. Volunteer, organize a blood drive or food drive in your community, workplace, school, etc, or spend time with someone who may have lost a loved one that day.
- Donate money or gifts to charity in the name of victims of the tragedy.
- Observe a moment of silence with your family and/or co-workers in memory of those who were killed.

Grieving As Time Goes On

As time passes, the healing process continues, but the effects of September 11th will continue to be felt. Over time, however, the intensity of the impact will lessen. This doesn't mean you

stop remembering the events or mourning those who were lost, but feelings of security, calmness or simply everyday happiness that may have receded during the past months may slowly become accessible again. Try to remember that the memory of the event or lost loved ones does not disappear with your decreased feelings of grief. Instead, realize that you have grown from the loss and gained an invaluable awareness of how precious life really is.

Helpful Resources

Remembering September 11th

The following resources detail events honoring victims of September 11th:

Gates of Sorrow
http://www.9-11sculptureproject.org/index.shtml

This nonprofit group is organizing and overseeing the "Gates of Sorrow" Sculpture Project that will honor those lost on September 11th. A 50 ton, 47 foot high sculpture is being constructed out of steel taken from the World Trade Center. After a stay in New York City beginning on the one-year anniversary, it will be taken to cities all across America. Visit the web site for more information.

The Points of Light Foundation
http://www.pointsoflight.org/usa.cfm

The Points of Light Foundation is a campaign to mobilize volunteers in response to September 11th. Anyone looking to volunteer in honor of those lost can participate in the initiative. Volunteer projects across America will be dedicated and identified with each individual lost on that day. Volunteer projects must be registered between June 1, 2002 and September 11, 2002, and completed by December 31, 2002. Visit the web site for more information.

United in Memory:
9-11 Victims Memorial Quilt
http://www.unitedinmemory.net/

Designed after the AIDS Quilt, this quilt will have one square for each of the persons lost in the September 11th attacks. The name of every victim will appear on a square when the quilt is completed. The quilt will travel across America beginning on August 30th in New York City and remaining for the one-year anniversary. After being displayed in New York, the quilt will continue on to Washington, D.C. and the rest of America. Visit the web site for information, schedule of events, and how to participate.

Coping With Grief

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

American Psychological Association
750 First Street, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
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
Information Hotline: 866-438-4636
TDD: 800-526-1417
http://www.redcross.org

American Red Cross operators are staffing the hotline 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide callers with access to national and community resources for assistance with anxiety about terrorist threats.

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
5600 Fishers Lane, Room 7C-02
MSC 8030
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.

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.

Project Liberty
New York State Office of Mental Health
New York City Field Office
330 Fifth Avenue, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10001
866-270-9857
http://www.projectliberty.state.ny.us/

Project Liberty offers information and provides free counseling services to anyone affected by the World Trade Center disaster and its aftereffects.

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