

It's Okay Not to be Okay

Reactions to the anniversary of a traumatic event can be varied and can occur days, weeks, or even months before the date arrives. You may feel that you have healed from the trauma and that the anniversary will not impact you, however, you may still experience the following reactions:

Isolation

You may become more withdrawn and want to avoid anything associated with the trauma.

Heightened Anxiety

It might be difficult to focus on work, family, or other areas of your life as the anniversary approaches, and you could feel anxious and edgy. You may experience more anger or aggression than is typical and you may not recognize why.

Negative Thoughts

You may feel very negative about the future or there may be feelings of guilt or shame.

Flashbacks

Memories of the event may intensify and become more vivid. It may feel as if you are reliving the event. It is possible that you may feel physical responses to the flashbacks as well.

All of the above symptoms are very normal and expected on the anniversary of a traumatic event.

Communication Is Essential

Family, friends, and loved ones can be wonderful support during this time. If your support system was not at the event with you or they are responding in a different way, there are some things they can do to be there for you. First and foremost, it is important for them to know that there is no timeline for healing.

One of the things we hear the most in counseling is loved ones asking,
“When are you going to be ‘over’ this?”

Trauma is not something that we get over, the goal is to learn to live a full and rich life even though this happened in your life!

It is also important for us to tell our loved ones what we need:

- Do we want to talk about our experience or not talk about it?
- Do we want to be surrounded by them or grieve/think/be alone?
- Do we want to be touched/hugged/etc. or is touch difficult?

Tell them if you want them to participate in any remembrance events with you or if you need a different support system (i.e., others who were at the event with you). Remember that even if your family and loved ones were not at the event with you, they may be impacted. Communication and coming together on an anniversary like this one is essential for all of us.



Coping Strategies

Talk to Family, Friends, Loved Ones, and Fellow Survivors – We know that talking about your traumatic experience can help with healing. It can help us to look at the event in a new light and allow us to see how far we have come. Speaking with fellow survivors can be one of the most helpful activities that we can do. There is support available through United Resiliency.

Replace Bad Memories

We actually call this having a “corrective experience.” This includes visiting memorials, attending remembrance events, and reconnecting with other survivors. This can be very healing and helpful.

Talk to a Professional

There are trauma trained professionals ready, and willing to help during this time. The United Resiliency program can assist in scheduling for an appointment with a Therapist. Please reach out to our Helpline and you can be connected to help at 517.853.1075.

Care for Yourself

It may sound basic, but one of the first things that we learn in disaster mental health is making sure that basic needs are met. That includes hydration (lots of water), rest (if not sleep), and eating. It is also important to balance time at remembrance activities with quiet, reflective time.

