



9/11 – Coping with Anniversary Reactions

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 were, for most people, profoundly distressing. We are now approaching the anniversary of that catastrophic day. When the anniversary of an event of this magnitude comes along, it sometimes causes a person to experience what is known as an “anniversary reaction”.

What is an ‘anniversary reaction’?

Simply, it is the way in which our mind, body and emotions mark a significant, and in this instance traumatic event.

What can I expect to happen?

It is quite normal for a person to re-experience a flood of emotions/symptoms, though not as intense or disturbing as the actual day. These reactions may be triggered by things such as:

- Sights, sounds, smells that were related to the event (e.g., sirens, smoke, airplane sounds)
- News coverage of the anniversary or related events (e.g., criminal or terrorist acts, memorial services, or reports of people missing or killed)
- Other significant life events (e.g. birthdays, wedding anniversaries) that occur on or close to September 11th
- Other losses/deaths in a person’s life prior to and unrelated to September 11th
- Looking at national or symbolic monuments as potential targets
- Images of the New York City or Washington skylines

What does this mean for me?

- This means you may have a period of increased sadness/tearfulness, irritability, sleeplessness, change in appetite and feelings of vulnerability or guilt.
- Other symptoms may include poor concentration, intrusive thoughts, being easily startled and increased anxiety. You may also find that you have increased your alcohol and/or drug use.
- Your body sometimes reacts to stress as well. You may find that some physical problems, like gastrointestinal distress, headaches or backaches have resurfaced or intensified.
- The duration and intensity of these reactions depends on each person’s individual experience, losses and/or coping strategies.
- Know that if you have been moving along in your recovery process that this is **not a setback!!!**



- Remind yourself that this is a normal, temporary and part of the healing process.

What are some things I can do to help others and myself?

- It is important to stay connected to friends and family for support.
- If you are working with a counselor, know that it is okay to increase the frequency of visits during this period of time. If you are not currently working with a counselor, you might consider calling your Employee Assistance Program. Also, think about taking advantage of any support groups being offered either at work or in the community.
- Sometimes helping others can be the best medicine. You can perform a charitable deed to memorialize the actual anniversary date (e.g., taking part in a fund drive for one of many organizations tied to September 11th, or participating in a candlelight vigil). You can also look into volunteer opportunities in your community.
- It is also okay to plan a **fun** distraction for yourself to aid in getting you through the day, such as having a barbecue with friends, going to the movies or, if you have children, planning a family activity that you would all enjoy.

Remember that everyone heals and mourns differently. Give yourself time to think about what will work best for you!

Your Employee Assistance Program

CCA@YourService is a confidential counseling service, provided at no cost to employees and their family members. **CCA@YourService** can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for in-the-moment emotional support as well as referrals for ongoing counseling and everyday living needs. To get started, call **800-833-8707** or log on to www.mycaonline.com.