



Family Values

Trauma Over Time

Bruce Strade, Chief Operating Officer, Lutheran Community Services Northwest

We are a traumatized nation. We are a grieving nation. The events of September 11, 2001 have left an indelible mark on our psyche and in some respects wounded our souls. Although we all share in the grief and are daily affected by the aftermath of the terror and tragedy, each one of us will respond in our own way. For some, the repercussion is especially difficult because it either taps into previous trauma or connects us closely to the event through the loss of a relative, friend or even relative or friend of a friend. The fact that we observed the events again and again and revisit them through news reports and special editions of magazines keeps the disaster fresh in our minds.

The symptoms of trauma include:

- Feeling sad and bursting into tears for no reason at all;
- Difficulty sleeping, at times accompanied by nightmares or waking up in the middle of the night;
- Isolating yourself and not wanting to be around people;
- Getting angry or overreacting to a situation;
- Distancing yourself from your feelings, operating in a fog at times or pretending everything is ok when it is not;
- Doing things that are unlike you, such as forgetting things, wearing two different kinds of socks, calling people you know well by the wrong name, etc.
- Experiencing an increase in relationship problems;
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs, smoking or addictive habits; and
- Becoming abusive to self or others.

No one symptom by itself (with the exception of the last one) is a cause for alarm. Rather it is the combination of symptoms that should serve as clear reminders that you are experiencing the effects of stress. One thing is certain--we all are and we will continue to be for a long time into the future!

The following are some things that you can do to help yourself through this extended period of pain, sorrow and stress:

1. **Take good care of yourself.** Eat nutritional meals, exercise, get enough sleep, relax, play and occasionally pamper yourself.
2. **Talk about what you are experiencing.** Share with the people you care about and develop support groups that you can rely on.
3. **Listen to what others are saying.** Knowing that others are experiencing similar effects can be helpful. At least we know that we are not alone. Pay special attention to your children, because they are hurting too.
4. **Pay attention to your spiritual needs.** Give yourself time for meditation and prayer. Regularly attend worship. Let your pastor know what your needs are and how they can be addressed within the worship life of your congregation.
5. **Get involved in helping others.** Being able to contribute and make a difference is important. You are not helpless. There are things you can do.
6. **Get help, if needed.** Do not hesitate to seek counseling or join a support group. It's a good thing to do.
7. **Trust that God is in charge.** Even though there are times when it may not seem that way, take the leap and trust. That's faith.

May God bless your efforts and bring us all closer together in this process.

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