



Understanding and Tolerance on Order for the September 11 Anniversary

It is now one decade since the tragic events of September 11. For some, the date is a powerful reminder of loss. For others who may have long-since shelved their feelings, the anniversary may break through defenses and produce unexpected feelings of grief or despair. Even many years later, an anniversary can elicit powerful and strong emotions.

People will have different needs and different ways they want to commemorate this anniversary and there is no one way that works best for all. Everybody deals with the anniversary of a tragedy in their own way.

Some people need to visit the site of the tragedy, a grave, or a memorial. Some will need to visit a place of worship and pray for their dead. Others will look for solace in quiet times with friends, family, or others who the tragedy touched. Some will need to express themselves in a public manner while others prefer to mourn in private. Still others may want or need to avoid any public acknowledgement whatsoever. No particular commemoration is better than any other. We must respect the methods people choose to deal with their grief. Their personality, culture and background may suggest different paths for expressing grief.

As the anniversary approaches, and in its wake, we should be alert for the potential effect that this anniversary may have on others, particularly those who have lost loved ones or colleagues on 9/11 or those who were in close proximity to events. But because this was an event that touched so many, even those who did not have a direct relation to events may feel a rekindling of emotions, a sense of loss, or a remembrance of a personal tragedy. People who have lost loved ones to war or to other violent events may also be profoundly touched.

It is not unusual for people to experience behavioral changes for several weeks before and after an anniversary. Withdrawal, angry outbursts, emotional tirades, crying spells, overwhelming sadness, lack of attention to detail, loss of interest in school or work activities and poor treatment of friends, co-workers and family members are fairly common around anniversary times. Grief is not processed according to a schedule; it can and does resurface. Never tell a grieving person that they should be over it by now. Never tell them that they just have to let go and move on. Understanding, patience, and gentle support are the most helpful responses.



There is the potential for some misunderstanding or conflict between people who feel the need to talk about or share the anniversary in a public way and those who want to keep things private. There is so much media saturation that some can feel angry or overwhelmed by the publicity. Those who have largely "moved on" may feel angry or unsympathetic to those who feel the need to memorialize events. Work to foster tolerance in those around you and help people see that there is no right or wrong way to experience this anniversary.

But while giving people space to grieve, be alert for those who experience particularly intense, difficult, long-lasting or significantly disruptive grief reactions. While post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) generally surface right after a traumatic event, some people may experience a secondary reaction or delayed onset that is triggered by memory. If you observe someone getting "stuck" in their grief, or if you observe someone who experiences significant life disruption due to prolonged sadness or preoccupation with the events, the person should be offered or encouraged to accept professional assistance. That's one of the things your EAP is particularly good at helping people with.

At this tough time, open your heart, extend a hand, lend an ear. And be ready with your EAP telephone number just in case.

1-800-666-5327 or 1-800-252-4555