

# Coping with the anniversary of the London terrorist incidents

## Anniversary of a traumatic event

Traumatic events can alter our perception and experiences of time. People can experience a past trauma as an incident that just happened or is still happening. A first anniversary following a traumatic event is a marker of time that has passed since the event as well as a reminder of it.

Anniversaries can lead to an increase in memories, dreams, and feelings about the traumatic event as well as thoughts about the impact that it had on your life and on the people close to you. These feelings may be more intense than usual.

It is important to be aware that these reactions are both *normal* and *understandable* and do not necessarily mean that you are getting worse.

The anniversary of a traumatic event can be a challenging time and it may therefore be helpful to think about the best way to look after yourself.

## Marking the anniversary

Although the terrorist incidents in London affected a group of people, different people will have different needs and preferences for coping with this depending on their individual needs and stage of their journey.

For some people, attending an organised event may feel like an important way to mark the day. For others, this can feel too difficult or it may not fit with their personal preference.

People may have their own ideas about how they would like to mark the anniversary. Some people want to avoid anything to do with the anniversary. Although in the short term this may feel safer, it could become stressful trying to avoid and block it out when it is likely that thoughts and feelings will be present regardless. In fact this may use up more emotional energy than acknowledging the anniversary, on your own terms, and in a way that feels right for you.

## What can I do to help me cope with the anniversary?

- ❖ Be aware that this is likely to be a difficult time and you may experience a number of different feelings.

It is important not to compare your own reactions to those of others, including close family members. We are all unique in how we respond. Try not to over-analyse why you might be feeling a certain way, instead acknowledge that these feelings are present and look for a helpful way for you to cope. Remember these feelings are normal, so be kind and compassionate towards yourself.

## ❖ Identify helpful ways to manage distress.

What helps you to feel comforted and soothed?

- ✓ Spending time with people you feel close to, such as family or friends, and sharing memories and feelings with them may be more helpful than trying to deal with them on your own.
- ✓ Engaging in relaxing activities such as going for a short walk, listening to music, or reading may help you to feel more calm and relaxed. Try not to plan too much for the day. You are likely to use up a lot of emotional energy which can be mentally and physically exhausting.
- ✓ If you want to have other people around you check if they are available. Be aware that you can change your plans throughout the day based on how you feel. Put your needs first. Do you need to take a moment away from people to reflect or recharge? People will understand if you let them know what you need.
- ✓ You may want to engage in an activity that helps you to remember loved ones you have lost, for example, looking at pictures, sharing happy memories about them with others, doing things that they might have enjoyed, or something in their memory. Remember this may feel too difficult for you right now, so only do what feels right for you.
- ✓ Do not hesitate to contact professional help from your GP, A&E or the Samaritans if you feel that you are struggling to manage and are in need of urgent help.

Difficult emotions are not easy to manage and you may be tempted to block them out or use strategies, such as drinking too much. These strategies can offer some short term respite, but are likely to make it harder for you to cope in the long term. Remember, experiencing difficult, upsetting feelings is a normal part of the process of learning to cope with your experience. These reactions are temporary and will usually subside within a few days or weeks.

## After the anniversary

It might be helpful to reflect after the anniversary on how you felt and whether there were things that helped you, or made it harder for you to cope with your feelings.

Although over time your needs may change you are likely to encounter more anniversaries, dates and events that will bring back memories of the attack and it could help to develop awareness of what helps you to cope with them.

Remember that you can always seek help and support. It is never too late to deal with the impact of this event.

## Psychological Trauma Outreach and Support Service for London Terrorist Incidents

For further information about the service or to self-refer yourself or a family member please contact:

Psychological Trauma Outreach, Screen and Support Service for London Terrorist Incidents

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