

How to Cope with the Anniversaries of Tragic Losses

By Lou LaGrand

With the increase in violence and the many tragic losses that occur nationally, there is an increased need to consider how to deal with the anniversaries of these events. This is especially true if you have had a loved one who was a victim of violence or you know someone who will be deeply affected by the anniversary.

The anniversary date of any death commonly brings sadness and sorrow. However, the recall of what happened to the loved one in a violent attack often brings a flood of deep emotion that can last for days. Here is a way that you can prepare yourself or suggest to others what they can do to prevent unnecessary suffering on that particular day.

1. Several days ahead of time discuss the way you are feeling about the approaching anniversary. Here is the time to educate your support system about what you feel you can and cannot do on this day. Suggest times you would like to get together with others and where you would like to be. Also, make it clear what you feel you will not be able to do at this time.
2. Structure your day. Make a schedule of your day from the time you wake up until you retire in the evening. Include doing things that give you a feeling of control, especially the things you do well. List your chores, places to visit, where you will eat, and when you will treat yourself to a favorite food. Stay away from reminders that may come through the media and do not isolate yourself.
3. Try to be with friends and or relatives as much as possible. Being with those you love can be very helpful. In structuring your day, plan on having coffee with friends in the morning and seeing other relatives and friends in the afternoon. Be open and willing to talk about the event. Especially focus on the help you received and the good deeds done by others that day.
4. Express emotion. It is not unusual to have feelings very similar to those you experienced on the actual day of the tragedy. Don't suppress them. Let them come out. Allow yourself to cry, if that is what you feel like doing. Be with those who understand your need to let your emotions out.
5. Talk about and celebrate the life of your loved one. Plan time to remember the person either publicly or privately. You may want to create a ritual of remembrance, have a church service, or visit a favorite place the loved one liked. Let a balloon go with a message to your loved one or find another way to honor the person.
6. Symbolically represent his or her presence. In your home you may want to light a candle or display an object that belonged to or is associated with your loved one. Use it as a tribute to his or her place in your heart and your recognition of all of the good things you received from having known or been loved by this person. Say this out loud (if you are alone) as you place the symbol in its special place.
7. Be sure to include some exercise in your day. Because of the anxiety and tension the day often generates, a good way to reduce the physical effects is to engage in some form of exercise. Walk by yourself for at least twenty minutes or get a friend to walk with you at your local park or in the mall. If you have light weights (2-5 pounds) do three sets of ten repetitions in mid-morning (before coffee) and the same in the afternoon.

Remember, it is normal to experience various emotions as you go through your day. Again, the emphasis is on normal. There is nothing wrong with you because you feel sad.

And be aware that all family members and friends will respond differently. Some will show little response, others will be more demonstrative. Allow your emotions to unfold naturally and your intuition to be your guide. You know better than anyone else what is right for you.

And don't be afraid to change your schedule if you feel you need some time alone or need more time with a best friend. As you successfully move through your day confidence will increase and you will emerge strengthened with the knowledge that you have lived through a difficult time.