



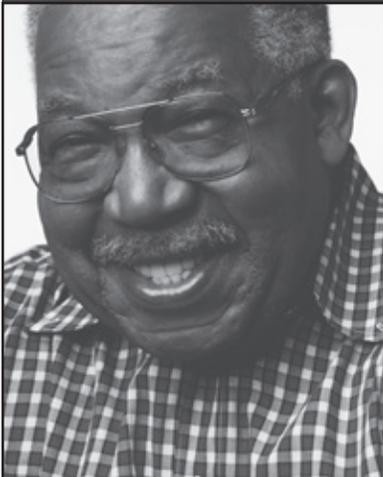
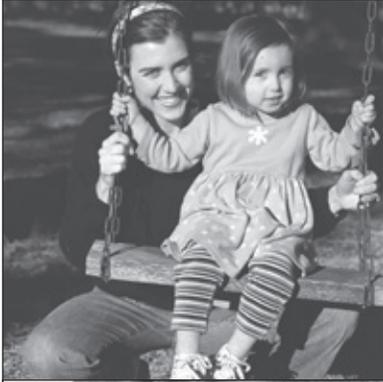
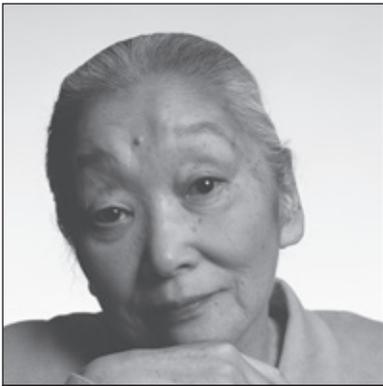
## Reactions to the Anniversary of a Disaster: The Ongoing Recovery Process

As the anniversary of a disaster or traumatic event gets closer, many people who experienced the event say that feelings of nervousness and fear come back. How a person responds to long-lasting grief that comes from heavy losses is often called the anniversary reaction. The anniversary reaction can cause days, weeks or even years of anxiety, anger, nightmares, flashbacks, depression or fear.

The good news is that positive reactions can also come from the anniversary of a disaster or traumatic event because it provides an opportunity for emotional healing. A person can use this time as a chance to work through their natural way of grieving by recognizing, accepting, and paying attention to the feelings and issues that come up during their anniversary reaction. These feelings and issues can help a person look at the event in a different way and figure out where it fits in their hearts, minds and lives.

It is important to point out that not all people who have been through a disaster or a traumatic event have an anniversary reaction. Those who do, however, may be bothered by the reaction because they did not expect or understand it. For these people, knowing what to expect ahead of time may help. Common anniversary reactions for people who have been through a disaster or traumatic event include:

- **Memories, Dreams, Thoughts, and Feelings:** Some people may have trouble with replaying memories, thoughts and feelings from the event and not being able to stop. They may keep reliving the event or see images and scenes from the event over and over again. They also may have repeating dreams or nightmares. These reactions may seem as real on the anniversary of the disaster or traumatic event as they were at the actual time.
- **Grief and Sadness:** Some people may experience grief and sadness because of the loss of income, their job, a home or a loved one. Even people who have moved to new homes may be homesick or feel a sense of loss on the anniversary of a disaster.
- **Fear and Anxiety:** Fear and anxiety may reappear around the time of the anniversary, which can lead to jumpiness, acting surprised and paying extra attention to personal safety. These feelings may be especially strong for people who are still working through the grieving process.
- **Frustration, Anger and Guilt:** The anniversary of a disaster or traumatic event may stir up feelings of frustration and anger. Those who experienced the event may be reminded of the possessions, homes or loved ones they lost. They might remember the time taken away from their lives or the frustrations of dealing with all the hard-to-manuever processes involved, all while going through the slow process of rebuilding and healing. People also may feel guilty about their own survival. These feelings may be stronger for people who are not done recovering financially and emotionally.



- **Avoidance:** Some survivors of a disaster or traumatic event try to protect themselves from having an anniversary reaction by staying away from things that remind them of the event and trying to treat the anniversary as just an ordinary day. It can help even these people to learn about common reactions that they or their loved ones may face, so they are not surprised by reactions that happen.
- **Remembrance:** Many people who have been through a disaster or a traumatic event find comfort in crying, remembering and participating in the fellowship that the anniversary of the event offers. They see it as a time to honor the memory of those they have lost. They might light a candle, share favorite memories and stories or attend a worship service.
- **Reflection:** Anniversaries of a disaster or a traumatic event offer a chance for reflection. It gives people a chance to look back, recognize how far they have come and give themselves credit for overcoming the challenges they faced. It is a time for survivors to look inside themselves and to recognize and appreciate the courage, strength, and resourcefulness that they and their loved ones showed during the recovery process. It is a time for people to look around and pause to appreciate the family members, friends and others who supported them while they recovered. It is also a time when most people can look ahead with a renewed sense of hope and purpose.

Although these thoughts, feelings and reactions can be very upsetting, it helps to understand that it is normal to have strong reactions to a disaster or traumatic event many months later. Recovery takes time and it requires physical, emotional and spiritual rebuilding. However, with patience, understanding, and support from family members and friends, you can come through a disaster or traumatic event stronger than before.

#### **Where can I find help?**

For additional assistance, contact your local public health department, community mental health center, a counselor or a mental health professional.

The information in this fact sheet was adapted from a publication by the Center for Mental Health Services of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.