

CHAPTER NINE

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THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE DISASTER: MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND INTERVENTIONS

An anniversary, by definition, is the recurrence of an event or the reawakening of feelings surrounding an event that took place in the past. An anniversary may also be a commemorative celebration of an important date.

Anniversary remembrances occur consciously and unconsciously, and are a part of our biology, psychology, history, and culture.

DERIVATION OF ANNIVERSARY REACTIONS

Biologically, all animals have a fine tuned awareness for signals of danger. Sights, sounds, smells, or other reminders of a threatening event usually evoke a memory of the threat and alertness for present danger. These sensitivities help to explain the "trigger reactions" of disaster survivors. Situation, sights, or sounds that remind people of the disaster experience can evoke a stress response. For example, earthquake survivors frequently become anxious when a truck rumbles by, rattling windows.

Besides having acute alertness for danger, animals including humans have an exquisite sensitivity to the changing of the seasons. Mating, nesting, foraging, and hibernating all take place in response to cues from the environment: changes in light/dark cycles, temperature, smells. Many ancient human traditions and rituals have evolved around times of the year or change of the season: rites of Spring, celebrations of the harvest, festivals of light in the darkness of the winter solstice. It is not surprising, then, that the normal stimuli associated with the "time of year" can evoke memories of an event, a heightened sense of anxiety, and reawakening of feelings associated with the event.

Many disaster survivors report restlessness and fear with the return of the season in which a disaster occurred. For example, when the annual storm seasons will likely bring anxiety to people who have survived a hurricane the previous year. A woman whose neighbor was killed in a massive mudslide reported ten years later that she still gets jitters when it rains (Johnson, 1992).

Psychological literature discusses "anniversary reactions" as the individual's response to unresolved grief resulting from significant losses (Cavenar, Spaulding, and Hammett, 1976; Pollock, 1970). From a psychodynamic perspective, Szekely (1978) describes the death of a close relative or friend or other "historic" event as leading to a modification of an individual's self-image. The change converts the event into a type of "monument" in the individual's personal history. These unconscious, timeless, and permanent self- and object-representations have a temporal character that is associated with feelings of longing or hopeful expectancy. Szekely describes two predisposing conditions for the generation of anniversary reactions: strain/trauma and unfinished mourning.

Disasters in which individuals have experienced intense trauma and significant losses contain both predisposing conditions. For individuals who have experienced core losses, such as the loss of a loved one or the loss of a home and all the artifacts of one's history, mourning is still in progress at the one-year anniversary. It takes much longer than a few months to truly begin to make peace with the past and turn to the future. In their study of loss and mourning, Zunin and Zunin (1991) found that the lives of the bereaved may still be strongly affected a year and a half to three years later.

Some individuals may experience complicated or "pathological" bereavement with an intensification, a prolongation, or an inhibition of normal grief. In these cases, anniversary reactions can be used in clinical treatment as an opportunity to work through incomplete mourning (Cavenar, Spaulding, and Hammett, 1976; Pollock, 1970).

For normal people dealing with the abnormal situation of disaster, the anniversary can also provide an opportunity for emotional healing. By recognizing, allowing, and attending to the feelings and issues inherent in the anniversary reaction, an individual can make significant steps forward through the natural process of grief.

Formal recognition of anniversaries is part of human history and culture. Some anniversaries are of a happy nature: celebrations such as birthdays, weddings, historic events, and religious holidays. Anniversaries of such occasions prompt joyous memories and feelings. Some anniversaries are of a commemorative nature, in remembrance of tragic events or losses. Examples include the anniversary of a loved one's death or a day of honor for many who have died, such as Memorial Day.

Many cultures and religions have established traditions and rituals for grief and mourning, during which the first year is a formalized period of mourning. For example, Judaic law has established specific stages of mourning. There are guidelines for appropriate activities regarding marriage during the mourning period, the amount of grief to be shown, and the type of garments to be worn. In many cultures, the 1-year anniversary of the death ends the formal period of mourning.

Pollock (1972) hypothesizes that cultural mechanisms and traditions have been derived from the awareness of the intrapsychic needs of the individual. They arise from the need to achieve psychosocial equilibrium through institutional regulations. In other words, religious and cultural belief systems regarding mourning and anniversary processes have evolved from the normal and natural psychological processes.

Similar to culturally prescribed response to major loss, most communities stricken by disaster develop formal mechanisms to commemorate the anniversary of the event for one or more years. Depending on the meaning of the event to the community, anniversary remembrances may continue to take place for many years. Survivors of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake still meet at 5:12 A.M. each April 18 to remember the anniversary.

DISASTER ANNIVERSARY REACTIONS

Not all disaster survivors experience anniversary reactions. However, many people do, and are troubled because they did not expect the reactions and do not understand them. It is important for disaster mental health personnel to be familiar with commonly experienced anniversary reactions in

order to provide anticipatory guidance and public education about the normalcy of the reactions.

Frequently reported anniversary reactions among disaster survivors include the following:

Memories, dreams, thoughts, and feelings

At the anniversary of the 1985 Appalachian floods, an older woman reported that she simply couldn't keep her mind off the flood during the weeks approaching the anniversary. She reported remembering things she hadn't thought about for months. Parents may find their children suddenly talking about the disaster again. Adults and children alike may experience dreams about the disaster or other disturbing dreams.

For many people, the memory and feelings that occur on the anniversary are vivid. On the tenth anniversary of the 1982 flood and mudslide disaster in Marin County, California, fire Battalion Chief Brian Waterbury remembered the search operation he had led. For 25 hours firefighters near hypothermia searched in driving rain for a woman who was missing in the rubble of her mudslide-ravaged home. Looking back, the chief recalled the numbness that gripped his stomach when her body was unearthed. "The same mental pictures keep coming back, even though it's been ten years ago. It seems like it was almost yesterday to me. . . . I still have the vision, recall that feeling, the frustration of searching so hard, that feeling of hope, only to have it dashed at the end. There's still a certain amount of pain" (Johnson, 1992).

Grief, sadness, and regret

Individuals who lost loved ones frequently find that the anniversary of the death stimulates feelings of grief and pangs of longing. "She loved to ride her bicycle to the store and back with me. It would tickle her to death that she could outrun me," said a Hurricane Hugo survivor at the storm's anniversary. "But her bicycle's put up now. Nobody's been on it since she's gone." His youngest granddaughter had died in a fire sparked when Hugo's winds blew down power lines (Greene, 1990).

In their book on condolence, Zunin and Zunin (1991) include a letter from Princess Alice written to her mother, Queen Victoria, on the anniversary of the death of her father, King Albert.

Darmstadt,
December 11, 1866

Beloved, precious Mama,

On awakening this morning, my first thoughts were of you and of dear darling Papa!
Oh, how it reopens the wounds scarcely healed, when this day of pain and anguish returns! This season of the year, the leafless trees, the cold light, everything reminds me of that time!

The grief associated with the loss of a home can also intensify at the time of the anniversary. People living in temporary dwellings may experience a rekindling of sadness over the loss of their home and the lack of a permanent replacement.

Even people who have rebuilt their homes or found new dwellings to rent frequently feel a sense of loss at the anniversary. One fire survivor explained that their new home resembled the one they lost. However, they would still go to certain parts of the house, expecting to find what was there before. At the anniversary of the fire, they particularly thought back on what was gone.

People who have been forced to relocate to another locale may experience intense homesickness. "I miss the island terribly," said a survivor of Hurricane Hugo one year after the storm. He was forced to move off Pawley's Island after the hurricane. "I don't know the tides like I used to, and I miss seeing the moon every night. And I miss the smell, and the changing seasons that were so evident on the island" (Greene, 1990).

Besides memories and mourning of lost loved ones, homes, and communities, people may also grieve for belongings they lost, especially precious keepsakes they wished they could have saved. At the anniversary of the 1990 Santa Barbara, California wildfire one woman lamented that all she took with her as she escaped the wind-whipped blaze were her bills. She deeply regretted not picking up some cherished mementoes nearby. Family photographs, bibles, baby books, a deceased son's military awards, a grandfather's birth certificate, the family piano, 27 years of Christmas decorations--these are the things people think about with longing at the time of the anniversary. "A house is just concrete and glass," observed a survivor at the one-year anniversary. "It's the other stuff that has memories . . . those are the things that you really miss" (Schultz, 1991).

For some survivors, life during the first year after the disaster is simply too busy for them to grieve. One year after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake in California, many people expressed relief at the waves of grief that were occasioned by the anniversary. Many people reported having been so busy with the paperwork and practicalities of rebuilding, they had not yet given themselves time to "let down" and mourn their losses. After one year, things were far enough along on a concrete level for them to take time to deal with their feelings. "This is the first time since the earthquake that I've been able to cry," said one San Francisco resident as she wept at the one-year anniversary commemoration. "I've been numb for so long" (Seligman, October 18, 1990).

Fear, anxiety, and stress

For many individuals, symptoms of fear and anxiety begin to recede a few months after the disaster, only to resurface around the time of the anniversary. Some report a resurgence of jumpiness, startle responses, and vigilance about safety.

For individuals who were severely traumatized, the fear may not be significantly diminished by the end of the first year, and the anniversary rekindles it even more. One six year-old boy who narrowly escaped the flames of the 1990 Painted Cave Fire in Santa Barbara, California still panicked one year later every time he heard a siren (Schultz, 1991). During Hurricane Hugo, a mother had to tie her family to a high railing to keep them from being swept away by rising floodwater. "I'm still scared," said her eight year-old son, looking back a year later. "I almost drowned in that storm. I just can't help it" (Greene, 1990).

Crisis counseling services in northern California experienced an upsurge of calls in the week preceding and following the one-year anniversary of the Loma Prieta earthquake. Many survivors reported anxiety when traveling on bridges or under freeway overpasses. "People still feel shaky;

their nightmares are coming back," reported an Afterquake Project counselor. "They're not sure what they can do. They feel more vulnerable" (Seligman, October 17, 1990).

Frustration and anger

The anniversary can also reawaken resentment and anger about the disaster. One flood survivor remarked at the time of the anniversary "I keep remembering things that weren't fair." Survivors may remember the things that irritated them, the things they lost, the time taken away from their lives, frustrations with the bureaucratic aspects of the recovery process, impatience at the slowness of rebuilding and healing. Many homes are still not rebuilt at the first anniversary. Owners of nearly one-half the structures destroyed in the 1990 Santa Barbara, California wildfire had not submitted applications for permits to rebuild at the first anniversary (Schultz, 1991). In the aftermath of the East Bay (CA) Firestorm of 1991, only 12% of homes destroyed in the city of Berkeley were under reconstruction at the one year anniversary and none had been completed (Wee, 1992). A Red Cross worker commented on the stress level in Santa Cruz, California a year after the Loma Prieta earthquake: "The whole year has been very strange. People realize a year has gone by and they are not fully recovered, financially and spiritually" (Samuelson, 1990). For some people, this anniversary-time reflection, is an impetus for people to seek mental health counseling and support. Disaster mental health programs often report an increase in calls for service at the time of the anniversary.

Survivors may experience anger and resentment at the losses dealt them, and at their real or perceived inability to rebuild their lives or recoup their losses. A 91 year-old woman's apartment was demolished in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. Her husband of 50 years died shortly after that. She reflected at the one-year anniversary: "My husband couldn't stand all this. It was too much for him. The terrible shock, the loss of things, the terrible problem of where to go next, and then to fill these empty rooms, the furniture he had to seek out and try to buy and get here. Of trying to replace everything, the lamps, the toaster, everything . . . all nerve wracking. He had latent leukemia for three or four years but he was doing very well and then the leukemia became virulent . . . We were minding our own business. The earthquake was not on our agenda . . . we lost everything" (Drewes, 1990). One Santa Barbara fire survivor stated that he had many things on his life agenda that he would have preferred doing that year other than selecting toilets and bathroom fixtures for the house he was rebuilding.

For one Santa Barbara couple, the one-year anniversary of the fire brought up a sense of failure. They had disagreed about whether to rebuild their home after the fire. She wanted to move away from the area, while he insisted on rebuilding. One year later, reconstruction was far behind that of their neighbors, primarily due to ongoing differences between the man and his wife at every stage of the reconstruction. Their relationship had deteriorated, each blaming the other for creating problems. The woman felt isolated, sad, and depressed. The man, who was retired, did little besides work on the new home.

Avoidance

Many survivors welcome the cleansing tears, the commemoration, the reflection, and the fellowship that the anniversary of the disaster can offer. However, some survivors attempt to "ward off" anniversary reactions by avoiding reminders and making efforts to treat the anniversary as just an

ordinary day. A young man who lost his father in the collapse of the Oakland, California Cypress Structure freeway after the 1989 earthquake was asked how he planned to spend the day of the anniversary. "I see no sense in celebrating an earthquake," he said (Chiang, 1990). Even if people prefer to treat the anniversary as "just another day," it can be useful to educate them about the common reactions that they or their loved ones might encounter. Then, they will not be taken by surprise or feel they are having a "setback" if reactions occur.

Reflection

Recovery from disaster takes place on many levels. It involves rebuilding physically, emotionally, and spiritually. For most people, the anniversary is a landmark point in the recovery process. It takes time for humans to integrate an event of such magnitude into their life experience. By the one-year anniversary, enough time has passed for people to have developed some perspective on the event and its place in their hearts, minds, and lives.

Based on recollections of the disaster, survivors often confront the haunting question "What would I do differently if I had to go through it again?" They often do so in hopes their answers might help others who confront such a situation. Unanimously, survivors recommend preparedness planning. They discuss eliminating hazards from the home and neighborhood environment. They emphasize purchasing adequate insurance and recommend videotaping every room in the house, including contents of drawers and closets, for insurance purposes. Survivors warn of the importance of having safety equipment and disaster supplies. They underscore the importance of duplicating essential documents and photographs and storing copies off-site. They agree on the importance of keeping photographs and mementoes in one place in the home so they can be easily evacuated. And they unanimously advise having a family plan for evacuation and a designated site to meet each other if separated.

Many people also reflect on ways in which, despite the losses and trauma, their lives have changed for the positive. A disaster causes a reassessment of values and beliefs. Many people can recognize the challenges they have overcome, and acknowledge the courage, stamina, endurance, and resourcefulness within themselves. They often reflect with appreciation on the loved ones and friends who have helped them through. Survivors may feel grateful for deeper and more meaningful relationships. In reaching the anniversary of the earthquake, people achieve an important transition: that of seeing themselves no longer as "victims," but truly as "survivors."

"It took away a certain part of my history and a certain part of my life, and you just don't rebuild that in a year," said a survivor of the 1990 Santa Barbara, California fire. But he also gained a new perspective on himself and what is important in life in the wake of the fire, he said. "It really got me to take a look at how I was living my life before. It amplified some things that needed correcting. It really turned my life around . . . Without the fire, I wouldn't have half of what I have right now." A film maker and artist by trade, he was inspired to create a video documentary of the fire and its survivors. The video was shown at a local theater on the anniversary of the fire as a benefit for the Red Cross. It has since won two major awards.

Another survivor reflected on his neighborhood before and after the disaster: "We weren't nearly as close before the fire," he said at an anniversary block party on his street that had been destroyed. While many homes were yet to be rebuilt, neighbors gathered and reminisced as they ate cake

decorated with rubble and a chimney sending out colorful plumes of smoke. "This has been the best part of the fire. The fences came down and we became friends," he said (Malcolm, 1991).

The reflection occasioned by the anniversary often becomes a landmark point in the recovery process. It allows people to sharpen their perspective on the event and its place in their hearts, minds, and lives. It allows people to look back over the past year, recognizing how far they have come and the challenges that have been surmounted. It is a time for survivors to look inward, to recognize and appreciate the courage, stamina, endurance, and resourcefulness of themselves and each other throughout this process of recovery. It is a time for people to look around and appreciate the loved ones and friends who have helped them through the healing. It is also a time when most people can look forward. In reaching the anniversary of the disaster, most people recognize that they have achieved an important transition: that of seeing themselves no longer as "victims," but truly as "survivors."

ANNIVERSARY INTERVENTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

The goals of disaster anniversary mental health activities are as follows:

1. To educate survivors about common anniversary reactions.
2. To help survivors acknowledge and discuss issues and feelings still unresolved since the disaster or brought up the disaster anniversary.
3. To encourage survivors to view the anniversary as an opportunity for another step toward healing and closure of the disaster experience.
4. To allow survivors to reflect on changes in their lives since the disaster, to see the experience through the perspective of time, and to encourage a sense of mastery and survival.
5. To educate those not directly affected by the disaster about the reactions that may occur for survivors, and to encourage outreach and support to survivors.

Community education

Mental health programs should begin to plan for anniversary activities and interventions at least two months before the anniversary date, with more lead time if community activities such as commemorations, presentations, or conferences are planned.

The psychological and emotional impact of the anniversary may be quite intense and unexpected for survivors. Starting about a month before the anniversary, public education about anniversary reactions should begin. Anticipatory guidance, normalization and support can greatly diminish the anxiety involved with anniversary reactions. Education helps the survivor to understand that these "aftershocks" are not setbacks, but are natural and normal aspects of healing. Often, people feel embarrassed or uncomfortable about the intensity of their feelings around the time of the anniversary. They need reassurance that these feelings are normal. Mental health staff can emphasize the ongoing importance of people reaching out to each other to provide support and

encouragement.

Education can also help people to plan for the anniversary and how they wish to spend the day. Encouraging people to talk about their memories as well as their present thoughts, feelings, and concerns about the disaster is helpful. It is also important for mental health to encourage people personally to recognize, articulate, and appreciate their own survival strengths and accomplishments.

Although there may still be much physical and emotional rebuilding to be done, the survivors have made it courageously through a long and harrowing year. It is important to help people to look toward the future with realistic optimism.

The media is a useful tool for educating the public about anniversary reactions. At the anniversary of large scale disasters, the media usually rerun stories of the disaster. They usually provide a retrospective look at how far individuals and the community have come in their recovery in the year since impact. Media coverage of the disaster anniversary floods the area with images of the past as well as predictions for the future. Sometimes, media coverage may reactivate responses and feelings about the disaster, and it may be wise to limit exposure, especially for young children. However, the media's interest in the anniversary provides a natural occasion for disaster mental health education. Mental health should utilize the opportunity to provide press releases, news conferences, or interviews about the psychological aspects of the anniversary.

Fliers and brochures can be developed and distributed to the public. They can provide information about common anniversary reactions and suggestions about ways to cope. They can also encourage people to see anniversary reactions as a step toward healing. In addition, special educational materials, consultation, and training can be provided for organizations serving survivors, such as churches, medical clinics, or disaster agencies. For example, written materials can be sent to schools and to parents with suggestions about commemorative activities for children.

Crisis counseling and support groups

Disaster mental health crisis counseling programs often report an increase in calls to their hotline or intake phones in the weeks preceding and following the disaster anniversary. Many callers found that phone counseling, education, and support provided them with an understanding of their anniversary reactions, and the phone call was all that was needed. For others, the anniversary reactions provided an impetus to become involved in ongoing counseling.

People already being seen in individual counseling or support groups should be educated about common anniversary reactions and given the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and feelings about the anniversary. Sometimes, disaster support or recovery groups have conducted anniversary remembrances or activities, such as a special meeting, potluck supper, or memorial service. After a mudslide disaster where many homes were lost, one support group conducted a special "funeral" ceremony at the site of each group member's former home. The ritual provided a way to help individuals put their losses formally to rest.

Commemorative activities

The anniversary can generate mixed reactions of memory and grief, introspection and reflection, and relief and pride in having survived the first year. Many people choose to commemorate the anniversary of a disaster in personal or public activities or rituals.

Mental health can play an important role in encouraging these rituals and ceremonies, as they have an important healing power for survivors of a disaster. Public officials may ask mental health to help with the planning or carrying out of anniversary activities. In cases where no planning is taking place regarding the anniversary, mental health programs can provide leadership and consultation to individuals, groups, and public entities regarding appropriate anniversary activities to foster individual and community healing.

1. Private commemoration: People may find themselves rethinking the day of the disaster-- what happened, what they did, what they didn't do. Many people find themselves reminiscing with friends or family, telling "where we were when" stories about what happened to them.

Many individuals who have experienced tragic loss choose to remember the event in a very personal way. For those who lost loved ones, they may visit the grave or a special place that they had shared with the loved one. They may wish to write a letter or poem to the person who is gone, especially if they feel there was "unfinished business" in the relationship.

Some people are drawn to return to the site where their loss took place. "It was so traumatic I didn't want to come back," said one Loma Prieta earthquake survivor about the first anniversary. "But I just thought I had to be there." She had been moving into an apartment building which was reduced from four stories to one when the quake hit. A handful of former occupants returned a year later at precisely 5:04 p.m., the moment of the earthquake, to share bottles of champagne and unforgettable earthquake stories. Among them were the man who bulldozed their building, allowing them time to retrieve valued possessions, and the Department of Public Works supervisor who oversaw the demolition. "These people were a bunch of survivors," he said. "There isn't anyone else I'd want to spend the anniversary with." The mood was more somber at another site nearby, where former residents brought flowers in memory of three neighbors, including a 3-month-old baby, who lost their lives in the quake (Walsh, 1990).

Numerous individuals made an anniversary hike to the epicenter of the earthquake in the Santa Cruz mountains to privately reflect upon the impact of the disaster on their lives. "This just seemed like the best place to be to commemorate what happened last year and how everybody's struggled, especially since it was an act of nature," said one survivor (Dogan, 1990).

2. Public commemoration: Mental health programs may provide leadership or consultation to planning groups regarding appropriate community commemorative activities. In addition, mental health may be a participant in anniversary activities. Staff may serve as speakers, may provide fliers and brochures, or may simply be present to recognize and support survivors.

Most public events marking the anniversary of disaster have two elements. These include commemoration of losses and recognition and celebration of the human heroism, strength, and compassion that are manifest in the recovery process. Public commemorations have a way of moving survivors to tears, embraces and a joy mixed with sadness that only the survivors of a disaster can truly comprehend (Figueroa, 1990).

Commemorative events often involve a gathering at the scene of the disaster or other appropriate place, such as a grave or memorial site. Services may be conducted, speeches may be given, songs

may be sung, poems may be read. People may carry candles or flowers. Commonly, there is a moment of silence at the exact time of impact. Church bells may be rung. In remembrance of military deaths, taps may be played. A memorial statue or plaque may be dedicated in memory of those who died, or a tree may be planted.

Recognition of heroism and of the contributions of citizens is usually given. At large-scale, community-wide events, the mayor or other public officials may make speeches, thanking and giving praise to those who have helped. The public is usually commended for its hardiness and hard work, and for pulling together when it mattered most. At the anniversary of the 1989 earthquake, the San Francisco mayor spoke to a large group gathered for a commemoration at the Ferry Building. The prominent flagpole atop the building had been damaged and unused since the quake. "The lights went out over this city, but the power of this community's spirit stayed a shining light that the whole world saw. San Francisco never stood taller." At 5:04 PM, the moment of the earthquake, the bells of the clock tower sounded and an American flag rose on the flagpole for the first time since the quake.

At the one-year anniversary of the Santa Barbara Painted Cave fire, a videotape documentary of fire survivors' stories was shown at a local theater. The evening was co-sponsored by the film producers and the mental health Disaster Recovery Project. The event was very moving for all who attended, and mental health staff provided support and informal "debriefing" for individuals at the reception following the film.

At anniversary functions, organizations and agencies often recognize employees and volunteers for their contributions to the disaster recovery efforts. Sometimes a much-deserved letter, certificate, or memento of appreciation is given. After the Loma Prieta earthquake, the Monterey, California Red Cross chapter recognized its volunteers with individually inscribed certificates saying "You have proven that there is one force as powerful as Mother Nature: Human Nature."

Community activities

Besides commemorative functions, some communities sponsor other activities to mark the anniversary and to focus on community healing. Some communities have disaster preparedness fairs, with demonstrations and information by fire departments, the Red Cross, emergency service offices, and mental health. Art, photography, and creative writing projects or contests focusing on the community "then and now" have been held. At the one-year anniversary of the Santa Barbara fire, a photography exhibit of the best photos from the fire was held at the community art center. The Berkeley, California Firestorm Recovery Project sponsored a community-wide exhibit of children's art depicting the 1990 East Bay Fire. A commemorative calendar entitled "Through Our Children's Eyes" displayed some of the art works and talked about children's healing.

At the ten-year anniversary of a northern California flood and mudslide disaster, the community held a retrospective of photos, slides, writings and memorabilia from the disaster. In addition, there were a Firefighter Ball and formal presentations of awards to disaster volunteers, given by the county Board of Supervisors and the local chapter of the Red Cross.

Retrospective analysis

Often, formal meetings, conferences, or educational symposia may be held at the time of the anniversary to examine issues and "lessons learned" from the disaster. Emergency management or professional groups with disaster responsibilities often hold such conferences. Mental health disaster recovery programs may be asked to participate in such programs. However, since disaster mental health is a relatively new field, mental health programs may need to proactively suggest inclusion of mental health perspectives in such meetings.

Mental health agencies themselves may sponsor symposia to examine various aspects of healing from disaster. At the one-year anniversary of the 1991 East Bay Firestorm, the City of Berkeley Mental Health Services and Alta Bates Medical Center co-sponsored a conference on "Disaster: Psychological Response and Recovery" which was attended by several hundred mental health professionals from the impacted communities. Topics included patterns of psychological response to disaster; mental health interventions during and after the firestorm; intervention, expression and research with children; psychological aspects of recovery from physical injury; healing the healers; critical incident stress debriefing; fire victims' dream journal study; and the psychological impact of trauma on relationships.

The Counseling and Psychological Services branch of University Health Service at the University of California at Berkeley sponsored a similar event for faculty, staff, and students affected by the fire. Entitled "When Traumas Happen: Recovery from Individual and Community Disasters," the symposium provided speakers and discussion on such topics as the effect of disasters on individuals and communities; how relationships are affected by trauma; issues in rebuilding cities after fires; personal recovery from trauma; helping children recover from trauma; and storytelling as a healing tool.

Termination of Crisis Counseling programs

At the time of the one-year anniversary of the disaster, most FEMA Regular Program Crisis Counseling projects are ending. Staff may feel guilt at "abandoning" the community by winding down the project at a time when anniversary reactions have reawakened so many feelings about the disaster. They will also be dealing with their own feelings regarding the ending of the project and, for some staff, the loss of a job. It is important to provide planning meetings, debriefing, support and opportunities for staff to express their feelings at this important time. It is also helpful to provide them with consultation and supervision regarding termination of services. Issues such as linkage of ongoing clients with other resources must be discussed.

A formal critique discussing program successes, problems, and lessons learned for the future can be an important part in bringing closure to the program and planning for future disaster mental health response.

SUMMARY

The anniversary of a disaster can reawaken a wide range of feelings and reactions in the survivor population. These reactions can be disturbing to survivors who do not anticipate them. This chapter describes common anniversary reactions and how numerous survivors experienced them. Anniversary interventions and activities are discussed. The anniversary of the disaster is an important time for individuals and the community. Mental health's leadership and involvement in

community activities at this crucial time can help make the anniversary another step toward healing.

CHECKLIST

DISASTER ANNIVERSARY MENTAL HEALTH ACTIVITIES

PREDISASTER

- _____ Include brochures, fliers, and educational materials regarding anniversary reactions and interventions in a library of disaster mental health materials

DISASTER RECOVERY

- _____ Provide consultation and training to disaster mental health staff regarding anniversary reactions and appropriate interventions and activities
- _____ Two to three months before the anniversary, begin planning anniversary materials and activities
- _____ Use the media to provide education and normalization about anniversary reactions; use press releases, news conferences, interviews, or articles and stories
- _____ Develop and distribute fliers and brochures about normal anniversary reactions and ways to cope
- _____ Provide materials, consultation, and/or training to organizations providing services to disaster survivors, such as schools, churches, medical clinics, senior service centers, disaster agencies
- _____ Prepare switchboard or intake workers for possible increase in disaster-related calls in the weeks preceding and immediately following the anniversary

- _____ Ensure that crisis counselors and support group leaders provide anticipatory guidance and appropriate anniversary-related interventions with clients
- _____ Assist community groups in planning and implementing appropriate commemorative programs or other anniversary activities
- _____ Participate in formal meetings, conferences, or educational symposia

POSTDISASTER

- _____ Conduct a formal critique of mental health's role in anniversary-related activities
- _____ Revise disaster plan, policies and procedures based upon recommendations from the critique

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