

Preparing for disaster anniversaries

Tips for communities and individuals

Anniversaries of disasters fulfil both social and psychological functions, marking the passage of time and providing an opportunity to pause, reflect, celebrate or mourn. Around anniversaries, people may compare their situation or feel the weight of the expectation of others. People may also have their own expectations of how 'recovered' they should be and feel frustrated about their situation.

Anniversaries are a time of both personal and collective remembrance that can be marked by formal and informal memorial events or services.



People may experience a stress responses when their senses encounter a similar sensation to the disaster itself. These are called sensory reminders and things like warnings, storms, heavy rain, smoke or sirens can trigger this stress response. Commonly these are associated with the hazard season or anniversary of the event.

Recovery from disasters can be a slow and stressful process. Milestones, like anniversaries, can be challenging and carry expectation that recovery is over. Everyone recovers differently, there is no one thing or time that marks the end.

It is normal to still feel sad or stressed during the years after a disaster. It takes time, but these feelings will fade if you have the right information and look after your wellbeing.

Tips for looking after yourself

- It's ok to share, talk to people you trust about the event and your own reactions.
- Don't do it alone, spend time with friends and family.
- Plan to do something for yourself that makes you feel good. There is no pressure to participate in events.
- Check in on yourself, eat well, exercise and review your sleep routines and patterns.
- Minimise exposure to media coverage.
- Allow time for memories to fade.

“ Anniversaries are a very important part of creating a sense of history. Putting things into the past helps us to put the present into perspective, allowing us to recover”

– Dr Rob Gordon



Some tips from Dr Kate Brady for looking after yourself

- Take your time, be kind and patient to yourself and those around you.
- There is no pressure to participate in events, think about what participation suits you and will benefit your recovery.
- Don't do it alone, reach out to those who make you feel good and connected to something bigger.
- Create new rituals and adapt this year to your new reality.
- Look at the new things that have come out of the event.
- Find those things to look forward to and be positive about.

Some tips from Dr Rob Gordon for looking after yourself

- Rest and listen to what your body, mind and emotions tell you. You will eventually get energy back – you just have a big overdraft.
- Give yourself time for recreation activities you enjoy which add energy and make things feel worthwhile .
- Put energy into rebuilding relationships, family and important friendships. Make time to be together by changing routines and patterns.
- Assume that unusual change in yourself or those you love is related to your experience and try to work out what the connection is. This helps not to take it personally. Problems are often presented as everyday hassles when in fact they are about bigger things.

Seeking further support

Sometimes, personal recovery needs to be supported by specialist knowledge to ensure that stress doesn't linger unnecessarily or lead to other health problems. Stress problems can resolve with advice from professionals, such as counsellors or psychologists. Consider seeking further support if:

- Physical or other symptoms are causing concern.
- There is no one to talk to or relationships are being affected by the stress.
- You feel emotionally numb, depressed, or overanxious.
- You continue to have disturbed sleep and nightmares.
- You are unable to handle the intense feelings or physical sensations.
- You are becoming accident prone and are increasing the use of drugs and alcohol.
- Recovery has stalled or does not seem to be proceeding.

Further information and resources

Helpful resources

- [Coping after a crisis | Australian Red Cross](#)
- [After the Disaster Podcast: Episode 5 Memorials and Anniversaries](#)
- [Understanding and managing anniversary reactions: Tips for families affected by disasters](#)

24/7 crisis support

- Call Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Call Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636
- Call 13YARN on 13 92 76



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for resources