

ResourceGuide

# 9/11: Support for Anniversaries



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# Your GuidanceResources® Program



Anniversaries of particularly emotional events, such as those of Sept. 11, 2001, can provoke strong reactions, including a sense of grief, loss, hopelessness, anger, and anxiety.

Keep in mind that your GuidanceResources® Employee Assistance Program is available to help during these difficult times. The program is provided free of charge to all employees and their household members and offers someone to talk to, as well as other tools and resources to help you regain and maintain your emotional balance.

## Confidential No-Cost Counseling

- Anxiety, depression or other mental health concerns
- Grief, loss, trauma and other life adjustments
- The pressure of getting life back to normal after a traumatic event



## Custom Solutions

- Child and elder care resources
- Locating support groups, volunteer opportunities, community groups
- Travel planning assistance





## Legal and Financial Guidance

- Insurance claims, civil or criminal procedures
- Estate planning, wills, trusts
- Loans, budgeting, debt issues



## GuidanceResources® Online

- Articles, podcasts, videos, and tutorials and online Huddles communities for support, education, and self-care practices
- Arrange counseling or other EAP services



## ComPsych Huddles

- Online groups for your well-being journey
- Focus on education, skill building and peer connection
- Participants can view the calendar on [guidanceresources.com](https://guidanceresources.com)





# Media and stress

It's important to mark the anniversary of profoundly traumatic events, such as those of Sept. 11, 2001. But it's also a good time to assess your stress levels and take some precautions to protect your mental and physical health. There are many options for limiting media consumption, lowering stress levels, and avoiding confrontation over politics and other controversial subjects during these periods. Keep these tips in mind:

## Staying Engaged and Stress Free

Not all of us can cut media and politics out of our lives altogether, especially when it present everywhere in our lives. But there are ways to still engage and mark the moment while keeping your stress levels in check.



### Avoid Addictive Behavior

For many people, the first thing they do in the morning and the last thing they do before bed is to watch the news or scroll social media. The question is, how does this make you feel? For most people, the answer is anxious, irritated, and even irate. Now consider how this affects your mental and emotional health. If political content is raising your blood pressure and heart rate while provoking an irritable mood, you can be sure it's having an effect on your well-being. Instead of just turning on the TV or opening social media apps throughout the day, schedule your media time and then log off when your time's up. Limit your viewing to fact-based media and avoid commentary, which can be more about

emotions than useful information. Combined, these tactics should help keep your emotions, and your blood pressure, in check.



### Steer Clear of Public Commentary

Given the emotionally charged nature of political disagreements, it might be best to avoid political discussions when out in public or with people you don't know well. Even seemingly innocuous comments can sometimes provoke others whose political positions differ from yours. The last thing you need to deal with is an angry outburst in a public setting. Even among friends with whom you share a political affiliation, keep the politics to a minimum. After all, they may be trying to limit their political exposure, too.





### Be Open to Opposing Views

Some political conversations, such as with extended family during meals or on social media, are impossible to avoid. If you find yourself in such a situation, use the opportunity to learn about opposite points of view. If you aren't clear on a point someone is making, ask specific questions to clarify. Then give the person a chance to answer without interruption. You may learn something. Keep in mind, however, that if the conversation becomes heated or uncomfortable in any way, you are under no obligation to continue taking part in it. Try to change the subject, or excuse yourself from the table. Take the time away to calm yourself. Once you return, you may have better luck changing the topic.



### Stay on Top of Your Stress

You don't have to divorce yourself completely from politics and media. Just be mindful that if you are going to engage in the process, it's likely that your stress is going to rise. So take proactive steps to manage your stress:

- Eat a healthy diet
- Get 7-9 hours of sleep a night
- Exercise a least 30 minutes a day
- Meditate or practice deep breathing techniques
- Stay socially connected with friends and family
- Get outdoors when you can



## Setting Digital Limits

More than a quarter of all Americans report being on their phones scrolling social media nearly constantly during the day. That can be especially unhealthy when a traumatic event or the anniversary of a traumatic event is dominating news coverage. If you're looking to cut back on your social media and phone use, keep these tips in mind:

- **Be aware.** Pay attention to your surroundings and how you feel when you're on your phone. Did you sneak away from a date or are you hiding in the bathroom stall at work to scan your social media accounts? You may need to cut back.
- **Moderation.** Create a routine by spending only a fixed amount of time online for personal use during your day. Avoid logging on first thing in the morning and especially at night, when media usage can disrupt healthy sleep patterns.
- **Set rules.** Forcing yourself into a complete digital detox may be an impossibility, but try to set clear rules about when you won't have your phone in your hands or near you, such as when the kids come home for school, during mealtimes, or for the hour before you go to sleep.
- **Get help.** Decreasing your attachment to your phone can be a challenge, so tell family and friends what you're trying to accomplish and ask for their support. If your phone addiction is negatively impacting your physical, mental, or social health, you might consider seeking help from a therapist or support group.
- **Grab a book.** Many people seem to have forgotten that they can still obtain information without using the Internet. Put your phone away and spend a few hours at the library or bookstore and see how it feels to flip through the pages of a book or magazine.
- **Pause before you post.** Before you hit send, stop and reflect on what you're going to share on social media. Avoid unverified news, private information, and confrontational or inappropriate remarks. Concentrate on thoughtful and encouraging posts and on engaging in meaningful conversations with like-minded people.
- **There's an app for that.** If you're struggling to turn off your phone, there are apps that can shut them down for you at pre-determined times.



# Supporting a *survivor* of trauma



Even if you do not encounter a traumatic event directly, trauma can affect you. This is called vicarious trauma. It can be provoked not just by the event itself, but by coverage of the event in real time or during anniversaries of the event.

## The effects of trauma

Victims of trauma face a wide range of struggles. They often question what has happened or what they may have done to cause or prevent it. Many wonder how they will heal and why they cannot connect with their loved ones as they once did.

It is also common for survivors to feel anger or frustration as they ponder whether they will ever feel “normal” again. While every survivor’s experience is unique, trauma is almost always a life-changing experience that can affect everything from sleeping and eating to concentrating at work.

Understanding the nature and impact of trauma can be key to helping yourself or others who may be affected. Many survivors find themselves in unfamiliar and distressing psychological territory. It is common for them to endure intense feelings of isolation, insecurity, and fear,

and their most treasured relationships often suffer as a result.

Many victims turn to alcohol or other substances in an attempt to get some relief from their emotional turmoil and suffering. All trauma survivors manage their experiences in different ways. However, substance abuse is not only ineffective in healing from trauma, but it also can present a host of additional problems that make the healing process even more difficult.

When the effects of trauma persist, they can lead to mental health concerns such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a condition that can be caused by experiencing or observing virtually



any kind of deep emotional or physical trauma. PTSD is characterized by both emotional and physical suffering; many afflicted by it find themselves unintentionally revisiting their trauma through flashbacks or nightmares. PTSD can make a survivor feel isolated, disconnected and “different” from other people, and it can even begin to affect the most routine activities of everyday life. Psychologists and counselors with experience in treating trauma survivors can be very helpful in working through PTSD.



## What you can do

Since each individual's experience is unique, there is no one-size-fits-all remedy. Finding ways to be helpful and maintain a healthy relationship with someone affected by trauma can be challenging. The following tips can help:



**Listen.** Talking about the experience, when the survivor is ready, will help acknowledge and validate their experiences and can reduce stress and feelings of isolation. Let them take the lead, and try not to jump in with too many comments or questions right away.



**Research.** If the victim is bewildered by the causes of the event and its aftermath, you can help them find answers and resources.



**Reassure.** As strange as it may sound, those having a hard time with trauma often question whether an incident was their fault or what they could have done to prevent it. They may need to hear that it was not their fault and be assured that they are not alone. Support groups can be a great source of reassurance in such situations.



**Empower.** Following trauma, victims can feel as though much what happens in life is beyond their control. Aiding them in maintaining routines can be helpful, as can offering options or possible solutions.



**Be patient.** Every journey through the healing process is unique. Try to understand that it will take time, and do what you can to be supportive. The healing process has no pre-determined timeline.



**Ask.** Your loved one may need help with any number of things or have questions on many different topics. Even a favor as mundane as running a few errands or taking the dog for a walk can be a big help, so consider lending a hand.

## We can help

If you or a loved one is struggling to process trauma, direct or vicarious, talk to your Employee Assistance Program. We offer confidential counseling and other wellness tools to help in regaining emotional stability.



# Helping young trauma *survivors*

**Most children affected by tragedy, whether directly or vicariously, recover within a few weeks, although some need help for longer periods of time.** Grief and other emotions may take months or years to resolve and may be re-experienced or worsened by news reports or the event's anniversary.

Some children may need help from a mental health professional, while others may turn to religious leaders, community leaders, teachers, other adults and friends for assistance.



The first step in helping those affected by trauma is to identify the children who need assistance. The following may be signs that a child has been affected by trauma or a violent act:

- The child refuses to go places that remind them of the event
- The child seems emotionally numb
- The child shows little reaction to the event
- The child starts to behave dangerously or erratically

To help children cope with trauma, adults should:

- Attend to children
- Listen to what children say
- Accept/do not argue about their feelings
- Help them cope with the reality of their experiences
- Reduce effects of other potential sources of stress in their life
- Monitor the healing process over time
- Immediately address severe reactions to the experience
- Attend to sudden changes in behaviors, speech, language use and emotions
- Remind children that adults love and support them

**If your child has been exposed to trauma and appears to be struggling, don't wait to seek help.**

**Your Employee Assistance Program is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and offers free, confidential family and individual counseling, along with tools and resources to aid recovery.**





# The healing value of work

When experiencing grief and trauma, getting back to a daily routine can be a comforting experience, and most people can work productively while still dealing with these difficult emotions.

Imagine that you, as a manager or supervisor, are busy with daily responsibilities when tragedy strikes. Initially, your responses will probably be almost automatic and will involve whatever steps are necessary to preserve life and safety. It's in the wake of such events, that the hard questions begin for managers. As you would expect, there are no easy answers, and each situation presents its own set of challenges. However, there are some general guidelines to help you in most situations. However, there are some general guidelines to help you in most situations.

## Stay Firmly In Charge

Let all employees know that you are concerned and doing all you can to help them. You represent the organization to your employees, and your caring presence can mean a great deal in helping them feel supported. You do not have to say anything profound; just be there, do your best to manage, and let your employees know you are concerned about them. Be visible to your subordinates, and take time to ask them how they are doing. Try to keep official business related to the event from pulling you out of your work area for long periods of time.



## Ask for Support From Higher Management

Relief from deadlines and other practical help, such as a temporary employee to lighten your burden of administrative work, can make it easier for you to focus on helping your employees and your organization return to normal functioning.





## Do Not 'Keep a Stiff Upper Lip'

Let people know, in whatever way is natural for you, that you are feeling fear, grief, shock, anger or whatever your natural reaction to the situation may be. This shows your employees you care about them. Since you also can function rationally in spite of your strong feelings, they know they can do the same.



## Obtain Information for Your Employees

Do not be afraid to say, "I do not know." Particularly in the first few hours after a tragedy, information will be scarce and much in demand. If you can be an advocate in obtaining it, you will show your employees you care and help lessen anxiety.



## Encourage Employees to Talk About Their Painful Experiences

This is hard to do, but eases healing as people express their painful thoughts and feelings in a safe environment, and come to realize that their reactions are normal and shared by others. You may want to have a mental health professional come in to facilitate a special meeting for this purpose, or the members of your group may prefer to discuss the situation among themselves.

Don't be afraid to participate and make an effort to set a positive example by discussing your own feelings openly. Your example says more than your words.



## Build on the Strengths of the Group

Encourage employees to take care of one another through such simple measures as listening to those in distress, offering practical help, visiting the hospitalized, or going with an employee on the first visit to a feared site. The more you have done to build a cohesive work group, and to foster self-confidence in your employees, the better your staff can help one another in a crisis.

## Ask for Support from your Employee Assistance Program



The EAP is available to offer professional counseling to those who wish it, and to provide debriefings to groups affected by trauma. Encourage your employees to take advantage of the EAP as a way of preserving health, not as a sign of sickness.

## Resource

- The U.S. Office of Personnel Management: [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov)



Live Assistance

Online: [guidanceresources.com](http://guidanceresources.com)

App: GuidanceNow<sup>SM</sup>

Web ID: Enter your company-provided Web ID



Scan for more resources

