Anniversary Reactions to Black Saturday - Continually building resilience

As the anniversary of the Victorian Black Saturday approaches, some people may report a return of some of the reactions they had soon after their exposure to trauma either first hand or through their involvement with the survivors. The anniversary reaction may involve some restlessness, fear, anxiety, flashbacks. For some people it may signal that more grieving needs to take place. The reactions can last several days or even weeks. It is important to note that it will be different for different people and only some may relate to these experiences.

The anniversary is also another opportunity for emotional healing, reflecting on the resilience of the human spirit, and noting the coping strategies that have been effective in the process of recovery. Sometimes lives need to be rebuilt slowly on many levels, and this can require patience, understanding, and support; but you can emerge from a disaster or traumatic event stronger than before.

Here are some tips that may assist in dealing with the anniversary and making it count towards another step of continual resilience building.

**Recognise the emotions.** Paying attention and acknowledging the feelings that surface during the anniversary can be helpful in dealing with the losses and working through the natural process of grieving. It’s always useful to identify the feelings rather than be surprised by their impacts, eg. sadness, homesickness, fear, anxiety, frustration or anger. They are normal reactions to deep experiences. So don’t ignore them but use them as opportunities to sort out what is really going on deep inside and how it fits in with your larger life perspective. If you feel overwhelmed by the media reports around this time – limit what you read or watch on TV. Just because it is being broadcast doesn’t mean you need to take it in.

**Reflect.** The anniversary provides a natural point at which to reflect on the past year – think how far you have come and note all the challenges that you have overcome. Note and appreciate the courage and resourcefulness that has been shown by those who have experienced much loss and also by those who have been there supporting them. Reflect on a sense of hope and purpose this experience has brought into many lives.

**Remember.** The anniversary will be an opportunity to commemorate the significant event and honour the memory of those who are no longer with us. Some may choose to share favourite memories, stories or attend memorial services.

**Re-energise.** Do you know what activity energises you? Then do more of it during this time. Whether it’s spending time with trusted friends or being alone, walking, reading, gardening, doing something creative like painting or sculpting, seeing favourite movies.

**Recreate memories.** On trauma anniversaries, it may be useful to generate new memories. Doing something special that can become a new memorable event or activity which associated with this day.

**Return to the basics.** Don’t forget the essential balance in your life that always needs to be in check to stay healthy physically and emotionally: balanced and healthy diet, exercise, moderation in alcohol and caffeine intake, and sufficient sleep.

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