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It takes courage to live in the home of the brave

September 11, 2001 everything changed. One month later, just under the surface, anxious, sad and angry feelings are still bubbling for many. Who knows what it will take for those understandable emotions to heat up to a boiling point? One more assignment to add to your pile? Somebody cutting you off in traffic? Bruno's out of coffee lids- again? Halloween decorations (especially fake tombstones) upsetting you?

The terrorist attacks in NYC, DC and Pittsburgh have affected all Americans across the country and many others around the world. Most people who survive terrifying events have symptoms of severe stress in the days and weeks that follow the event. These typically diminish and disappear over time. However, if not managed, this heightened state of arousal can go on to develop into Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This is a real illness that requires treatment. Symptoms of PTSD include:

- Re-experiencing the event or having recurrent intrusive images
- Having nightmares and scary thoughts about the terrifying event
- Problems with appetite or sleep
- Irritability/Anger
- Sadness/Feeling depressed
- Feelings of helplessness
- Excessive drug and alcohol use

PTSD has its origins in what you probably recall from high school biology class as the "fight or flight response." This is the biologically innate internal alarm system that alerts us to real or perceived danger. It's the system that gets activated when you hear the words "pop quiz today". It is also the system that was activated on September 11 when you heard about and/or witnessed thousands of people fall from the sky to their deaths.

Many are still caught up in this state of internal arousal. All these symptoms are common responses to disaster. And what about our behavioral responses? For 26 years, I have lived in a cottage, on the beach, along Erie's shoreline, in the flight pattern of the Erie International Airport. Following this disaster, I watched myself do something that had never occurred to me to do before. The very first airplane I spotted overhead after September 11, had me running to the end of my pier, waving frantically and saluting the bravery of all aboard for being up in that deadly sky again. I don't know if anyone on the plane saw me, but this action, surprisingly, brought me momentary relief from my own preoccupation with this sad event that has changed so many for a such a long time to come.

Life after this trauma, for many, is requiring a huge adjustment to what was once "normal." While things are different, they're not over. Our collective challenge is to somehow learn to cope and reclaim that sense of normalcy as best we can.* What can we personally DO with this challenge of terror?

I offer the following suggestions gathered from various sources and urge you to borrow something, one thing, from the list and apply it to your life, right now, today.

- Get Support- from family, friends, professors, colleagues, etc.
- Exercise- a simple 10 min. walk can significantly reduce anxiety and blood pressure
- Eat well and stop drinking so much- Don't assault your own body by making it work extra hard to throw off toxins now.
- Give your immune system a break so you don't get sick and run down.

- Reduce your stress- let go of a relationship that is hurting you
- Cry, Emote, Rest
- TALK- the most healing thing you can do. Ask others how they are doing, too.

In measuring your progress, try not to think in terms of outcome, but of having made your best effort. Think less in terms of completely eliminating your symptoms and more in terms of evidence that you are increasing your involvement in the PRESENT. If you regain/increase your ability to love and care for others (including yourself) and to work and participate in some activities you find meaningful, or you simply become better able to enjoy yourself, consider yourself a courageous and healing person.

From Angel Kyodo Williams on September 11 (Founder of Urban Peace Organization):

"I want to encourage you all, first and foremost, to be still. To listen to your heartbeat. To be silent. To breathe. If you listen deeply, it is the voice of sanity and compassion that you will find there. It is the voice that will remind you of your connection with all beings."

From former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark:
 "We also have to realize that we're going to be here only one time, and we've got to enjoy life, however hard it is. To miss the opportunity for joy is to miss life."

From Clarissa Estes (Critical Incident Specialist):

"Psychic infection spread from terrorism is a far greater concern now than germ warfare. The main goal of terrorism is "intentional psychological trauma." Murder and mayhem are only secondary goals. Terrorism is willful psychological assault; a conscious and planned assault against the minds and hearts and spirits of a large group of persons.

Ways to proceed:
 Refuse to dwell on what psychically depletes you of hope, contentment and ease.

Dwell in what strengthens you.
 We all wish to be brave and strong in the face of disaster. We all wish to be looked up to for our endurance and our efforts to help others. If you truly care for humanity, include yourself in their numbers, by giving your own inner feelings the voice and the dignity they so deeply deserve."

From Barbara Kingslover (Author):

"Surely, the whole world grieves for us right now. And surely it also hopes we might have learned, from the taste of our own blood, that every war is both won and lost, and that loss is a pure, high note of anguish like a mother singing to any empty bed. The mortal citizens of a planet are praying right now that we will bear in mind, better than ever before, that no kind of bomb ever built will extinguish hatred."

From Tom Ridge (President, Office of Homeland Security):

"All of us can do our part to strengthen the whole. If you are a student, be a better student. If you are a manager, be a better manager. If you are a janitor, be a better janitor. We must not let fear win."

And lastly, I offer this infamous quote that I discovered years ago, of all places, on the back of a Salada tea bag:
 "The human spirit is stronger than anything that can happen to it."

Please hold that thought and all your loved ones close.
 Sue Daley
 Personal Consulting Office

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