



Preparing Well

A Guidebook for Coping
Emotionally and Physically
before, during, and after a
Trauma Anniversary

Written by Virginia Beach Strong Center Clinicians

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VB STRONG CENTER

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Managing distressing thoughts and strong emotions can be challenging during anytime, however they can be especially difficult to handle as a traumatic anniversary date draws near. Oftentimes, physical sensations such as aches, pains, or feelings of fatigue are evident first. These initial symptoms are often mistaken to stem from another etiology, before the symptoms are identified as a trauma reaction. It is normal to experience trauma reactions and it is also normal not to. Each person will experience the anniversary of this event differently due to the dynamic and diverse workforce that is the City of Virginia Beach and makes up the composition of our communities. This e-book was prepared to assist you in your journey to wellness. We hope you find Preparing Well, allows you to reflect, plan, and create an experience that honors the trauma anniversary and your unique experience.

It has been an honor to walk with employees of the City of Virginia Beach and surrounding communities during this journey of healing. Thank you for allowing the VBSC to walk along this journey with you.

Respectfully,

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Preparing Well

Understanding and Managing Trauma Reactions

Understanding Trauma Reactions

A trauma anniversary is characterized by the re-experiencing of psychological distress (trauma reactions) around or on the anniversary of a major life event that was distressing. These thoughts and feelings can span several days to several weeks before the actual date of the trauma anniversary. Reactions often include grief, anger, anxiety, numbness, or a combination of many emotions. These feelings are normal. It is important to recognize and acknowledge your feelings as they are part of your recovery process.

Everyone will have a different reaction to the trauma anniversary, even those who experienced the traumatic event collectively. Some individuals may not experience trauma reactions. This is because each person will perceive the event and the anniversary through their unique life experiences, individual perception of the world, and core values.

Do not compare yourself with your family, friends, or co-workers. Remember everyone is at a different place in their journey. Because of these differing variables, individuals will honor the day differently.



Physical Reactions

- Backaches
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Exhaustion
- Nausea/ vomiting
- Dizziness
- Increased heart rate
- Sleep disturbances

I am experiencing the following physical reactions:



Emotional Reactions

- Anxiety
- Grief
- Numbness
- Withdrawal
- Depression
- Avoidance
- Guilt

I am experiencing the following emotional reactions:



Mental Reactions

- Difficulty recalling information
- Recurrent thoughts about the traumatic event
- Intrusive thoughts
- Feeling disorientated

I am experiencing the following mental reactions:



Behavioral Reactions

- Avoiding reminders of the traumatic event
- Immersed in recovery-related tasks
- Inability to continue normal daily schedule
- Substance abuse
- Increased caffeine consumption

I am experiencing the following mental reactions:

Check-In:

- It is normal to experience a range of physical, emotional, mental, and behavioral emotions as the date of the trauma anniversary approaches .
- You can effectively cope with your thoughts and feelings and be more in control of your behaviors
- The recovery process takes time, be patient and compassionate with yourself.
- It is okay to look back at the past year and reflect on challenges and fears as well as your courage, resiliency and resourcefulness.
- If you are experiencing difficulty coping it is okay to seek professional help.
- Your recovery journey is unique and will be different from others.



18 Strategies to Cope with Trauma Reactions

The following are ways you can effectively cope with trauma reactions.

1. Sharing your feelings through art, writing, dance, or other expressive arts
2. Ensuring you continue with proper nutrition
3. Getting adequate sleep
4. Creating support networks (family members, friends, co-workers, therapist)
5. Scheduling extra time to reflect
6. Limiting acceptance of new duties or tasks
7. Practicing self-compassion
8. Creating and using positive affirmations
9. Scheduling regular check-in with friends, family, or co-workers



Strategies to Cope with Trauma Reactions (Cont'd)

The following are ways you can effectively cope with trauma reactions.

10. Preparing meals in advance or prepping them
11. Practicing meditation
12. Practicing yoga
13. Creating a motivational playlist
14. Practice mindfulness skills throughout the day
15. Practicing breathing techniques daily

16. Keeping a gratitude journal
17. Creating an emotional first aid kit
18. Practicing grounding techniques



Coping through Creating Virtual Connections

Connecting with others helps to reduce feelings of sadness and anxiety. Due to COVID-19 traditional ways of connecting may not be recommended. Below are 10 ways you can stay connected with others while practicing social distancing.

1. Host a movie party
2. Schedule a lunch date via video chat
3. Host a dinner party

4. Take a virtual tour (zoo, museums, etc.)
5. Share a virtual mid-morning coffee break



Coping Through Creating Virtual Connections

6. Schedule morning check-ins
7. Schedule after work check-ins
8. Host a remote game night
9. Participate in a group video chat while working
- ~~10. Participate in an online yoga or exercise group~~

List other ways you can connect virtually?

— My Plan to Cope with Trauma Reactions

How will you engage in for self-care in the upcoming weeks?

List names and contact information of individuals in your support network or individuals you would like to add into your network.

My Plan to Cope with Trauma Reactions

List the activities most important for you to engage in *leading up to* the trauma anniversary.

List activities most important for you to engage in *on the day of* the trauma anniversary.

What meaning do these activities for you?

Create an outline of what your days will look like leading up to and past the event:

Daily Schedule	My Top 3 and 2 Maybes	My Notes
7:00am		
8:00		
9:00		
10:00		
11:00		
12:00pm		
1:00		
2:00		
3:00		
4:00		
5:00		
6:00		
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www.psychpoint.com
www.therapistaid.com



The Virginia Beach Strong Center in partnership with Sentara offers strength-based support and recovery resources for individuals seeking help on their journey.

For additional information contact the Virginia Beach Strong Center Clinician. Please call us at **757-507-7200**, send an email to vbstrongcenter@sentara.com, or visit our website at thevbstrongcenter.org

