



Mental Health America of Franklin County

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Coping with the Anniversary of September 11

Helping Kids Cope with the Tragic Date

The terrorist attacks of September 11 were the first, national catastrophe that many of us have ever experienced. This is especially true for our children. For them, the approaching anniversary date triggers a wide range of emotions, whether they reveal them to us or not.

Signs of trouble coping with these emotions may include fearfulness about leaving the house or going to school; loss of interest in friends and activities; difficulty concentrating; persistent nightmares; frequent worrying; talk of death or suicide; increased tearfulness, irritability or anger; and new fears about such things as airplanes, tall buildings, tunnels, or being alone. Children with mental health problems may be the most affected.

Talking to kids about their feelings is a good way to help them cope with their anxieties surrounding September 11. Helping them take positive steps to work out those feelings is even better. For example, to deflect the anxiety of the day, kids could occupy themselves doing something positive for someone else. Volunteering at a pet shelter or nursing home could be a great class project or after-school activity. Planting trees on school grounds is another idea. See what ideas you can come up with together and help kids develop an action plan. Your decision to support them in the activity could be just what they need to deal with the anniversary of this tragic event.

Other tips, especially for parents, include:

- Take care of yourself. Children model their behavior after the behavior of adults around them. If you need to talk about your anxiety, talk with someone (friend, family, religious advisor, or professional). If you need support, ask for it. These are good examples of coping that you can share with your children.
- Avoid the television as much as possible. None of us need to relive the visual images of September 11.
- Acknowledge that bad things happen even to good people. We can't always explain why. Say that it's difficult for you to understand too.

Other tips, especially for schools, include:

- Hold an assembly upon coming back to school. Keep the program light but assure students that careful planning has taken place to ensure their safety at school. Give examples of precautions being taken.
- Provide teachers with program suggestions for the September 11 anniversary date. Encourage age-appropriate projects that will help children share their feelings such as writing stories or poetry, art work, even making “worry dolls” they can talk to.
- Another idea is a class box where they can anonymously submit their thoughts and concerns. Selections from the box would guide future class discussion.
- Hold mental health screenings and programs at school. Make sure you have enough trained professionals on staff to assist, including providing referrals.

For more information or to be referred to a mental health treatment center, call Mental Health America of Franklin County at 614-221-1441 or go to www.mhafc.org.

Mental Health America of Franklin County is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We help people navigate the mental health system. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; free support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; Pro Bono Counseling Program where underinsured and uninsured individuals can receive free counseling; community and professional mental health education including Get Connected; maternal mental health support and advocacy (POEM); and a quarterly newsletter featuring legislative updates and new happenings at MHAFC. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board, United Way of Central Ohio, individuals, foundations, and corporations. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at www.mhafc.org.