

MEMORANDUM



9/11 Pace University Oral History Project

"What Now?" Coping with Terror Alerts
Counseling Center

To: Faculty, Administration, and Staff

From: Richard Shadick, Ph.D., Assistant Director, Counseling Center

Date: June 11, 2002

Recently we have been exposed to a number of alerts from federal, state, and local officials warning us that our city is again the potential target for a terrorist attack. Articles in the news continue to feed us information about what happened September 11th and a number of television shows have begun to play footage memorializing the disaster. While these efforts are meant to prepare us and to help us mourn, it can also bring up a lot of strong and unpleasant feelings.

By definition, terrorism threatens our society by instilling fear and helplessness. It seeks to hold us hostage by fear of destruction and harm. Terrorism evokes a fundamental fear of helplessness. The violent actions are random, unprovoked, and intentional, and often are targeted at defenseless citizens. Trying to cope with the irrational information that is beyond normal comprehension can set off a chain of psychological events culminating in feelings of fear, helplessness, vulnerability, and grief.

Following the announcement of a potential terror threat or watching footage regarding September 11th (or other images that evoke memories of the day), it is not uncommon to experience reactions that you felt following the tragedy. Some common responses are:

- Recurring and intrusive thoughts of the incident
- Becoming afraid of everything
- Isolating yourself
- Having difficulty maintaining daily routines
- Tremendous sense of loss
- Reluctance to express your feelings
- Nightmares
- Moodiness, agitation, feeling overwhelmed
- Strained relationships
- Depression or anxiety
- Thoughts of wanting to hurt yourself
- Fatigue
- Hopelessness or helplessness
- Increased use of alcohol



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Here are some things you can do to cope:

1. Identify the feelings that you may be experiencing. Understand that your feelings are a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.
2. Remember that you have overcome adversity and trauma in the past. Try to remember what you did that helped you overcome your fear in that situation.
3. Talk to others about your fears. It's ok to ask for help. Human Resources and the Learn To Excel program have convened small groups with a counselor so people can share feelings. Take advantage of these opportunities.
4. Maintain your normal routine.
5. Think optimistically and realize that the situation will improve. Be realistic about the time it takes to feel better.
6. Recognize that the nature of terrorist attacks creates fear and uncertainty about the future. Continue to do the things that you enjoy. Don't get preoccupied with the things you cannot control to the extent that they prevent you from living your normal life.
7. Understand that our government is combating terrorism and restoring safety and security. Recognize that trained officials throughout the country are mobilized to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the attacks.
8. Limit exposure to newspaper, television, and radio coverage.

If you are having trouble coping, consider seeking help from the Counseling Center. There are many ways to feel traumatized by terrorist incidents. Mental health professionals are trained to help people cope and take positive steps toward managing their feelings and behaviors.

The Counseling Center is located at 41 Park Row-4th Floor and can be reached at 346-1526 in New York and in Westchester they are located at the Administration Center, 2nd Floor in Pleasantville and can be reached at 773-3710.

The preceding contains some material from the American Psychological Association's website. For more information please visit www.apa.org/psychnet/coverage.html.