

Dealing With 9/11 Anniversary PTSD? Here's the Life-Giving Advice You Need

It was bedtime as usual on the night of Sept. 10, 2001. Little did we know that by the next morning, countless Americans would *never* again be the same! And maybe you and your loved ones are more impacted than you realize.

Since 9/11, an astounding number of people have been afflicted with or re-activated by Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (**PTSD**), a condition that can affect *anyone* who has been exposed to a traumatic or life-threatening event. It has been described as a “normal reaction to an abnormal event.”

I just received a desperate text from another wife of a veteran who battles PTSD. She said, “Welby, I’m not sure I can handle another 9/11 anniversary. Last year my husband was triggered so badly not only did I think he was going to end up as one of the suicide statistics, but *I found myself* struggling with PTSD symptoms too and just wanted to run away! Why is it that our warriors are so drawn to war movies and horrific news when it actually makes them worse? He won’t turn off his news feed on Facebook, and stays glued to the T.V. and all the replays of the disasters. What am I supposed to do?”

Veterans are just part of the millions who have been severely affected by trauma. And even if a person was not directly involved with the disaster, horrific events such as 9/11 can retraumatize those who already have PTSD. It’s similar to grief. Those who have deeply grieved the loss of a loved one, find that any further grief or loss in their life will also exhume all the grief they thought was buried.

One amazing lady shares, “I already had PTSD after the suicide of my husband, so when 9/11 hit, things went from bad to

worse. Now I am remarried to a Vietnam veteran who also has PTSD. When his PTSD kicks in, mine does too ... and it gets really interesting here! I still cry at the drop of a hat, but volunteering, connecting with others and also directing my grief in positive ways has really helped.”

As one of the most tragic days in the history of the United States approaches, (or any patriotic holidays or traumatic anniversaries), be alert for increased symptoms of PTSD in yourself and those around you. These may include anxiety, avoidance, depression, fear, flashbacks, hyper-vigilance, numbing, nightmares, difficulty sleeping, relationship problems, outburst of rage and other emotions, withdrawal, employment problems, increased substance abuse and suicidal thoughts.

But before you toss in the towel, I’m here to tell you there is hope. I see victory over PTSD every day in my veteran husband, who has battled it for decades. Although it is never easy—a continuous challenge—the rewards are so worth it!

I encourage everyone who struggles with PTSD and all the loved ones who also live with it, to do all you can to be prepared for triggers and traumatic dates like 9/11.

Bottom line: know what resources are available and connect with others who care. I encourage you to visit for helpful information about PTSD, resources and ways to connect with others.

How Those With PTSD Can Prepare for the 9/11 Anniversary

1. Stay aware of your body and emotions.
2. Talk about it with someone who is supportive.
3. Have the courage to call for help if you need it (1-800-273-8255).
4. Avoid the news, photos and all T.V. about 9/11.
5. Plan something enjoyable to do that day and the next.
6. Consider volunteering or helping someone with a need.

7. Be with someone you trust and who cares about you.

How Loved Ones of Those With PTSD Can Prepare for the 9/11 Anniversary Too

1. Stay mindful of your own body and emotions.
2. Remember you cannot “fix” the one you love.
3. Give them space if they need it.
4. Encourage them to connect with a support group and/or counselor.
5. Keep the television and all media off or tuned to something unrelated.
6. Connect with others in a similar support role.
7. Do something special for *you*.

And as for the young lady who is dreading 9/11 and wants to run away, I reminded her that she cannot control her husband or his reactions, but she can continue to express her love and support, while at the same time staying focused on taking care of herself and her children.

As a person of faith, God has given me an incredible promise to hold onto as well. Jesus said in John 16:33b (NIV): “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” Our story doesn’t end with PTSD. Our grief and our tears are not in vain, because we are promised a hope to come.

As long as there is trauma, there will be PTSD. And although people with PTSD may never again be the same, they *can* live happy and fulfilled lives in spite of it. I know. Because we *do*. {eoa}

Welby O’Brien holds a master’s degree in counseling from Portland State University and a teaching degree from Biola University, and based on her own life journey, she has authored LOVE OUR VETS: Restoring Hope for Families of Veterans with PTSD (), Goodbye for Now (grief support) and Formerly A Wife (divorce support). Join Welby and thousands of

others on Facebook: Love Our Vets – PTSD Family Support, LLC on Facebook.

For more on dealing with PTSD, listen to the podcasts included with this article.