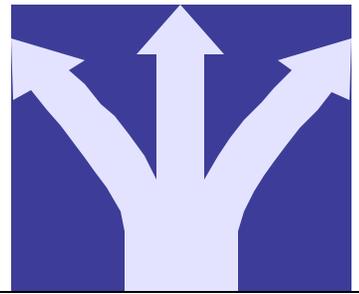


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Helping to Navigate the “New Normal”, and Cope with Ongoing Anxiety

On September 11, 2001 we as a nation experienced a traumatic event unlike anything else in our history. Americans witnessed horrific images of tremendous destruction and chaos. Many Americans experienced symptoms of trauma -- disbelief, shock, and helplessness -- and continue to exist in a state of anxiety given the anthrax scare, the warnings of further acts of terrorist violence and the uncertainty of a continuing war against terrorism.

In light of these events, we at Outlook Associates of New England wanted to provide you with a special two-part newsletter series that focuses on finding a healthy way to move forward and live our lives after September 11. The goals of this month's edition are to:

- Give you a better understanding of the long-term emotional impact of the events of September 11th on individuals
- Enable you to more accurately identify symptoms of trauma at the workplace

Next month part two of the series will provide specific coping tools to use to reduce long-term stress and anxiety.

New Perspectives on How We Have Changed

The chief concern of many of our clients is their sense of safety. They are aware that the fallout from September 11th will be an ongoing stressor with no identifiable end in sight. Clients have expressed a sense of loss at what once was, their life, security, routines, how they think of work and goals for the future. Clients express feelings

of being stressed, fatigued, and angry. The anger is focused on the people who planned this tragedy, but also on the unwanted changes in their own lives.

Outlook Associates contacted three colleagues to ask them how they see clients dealing with the recent events. Below is a summation of their thoughts:

Jack Golden LICSW, a local Boston area therapist, believes we are going through an emotional process of adjusting to how we seek a “new normal” as well as experiencing the loss of security in our lives. He believes we will make changes on a psychological level, emotional level, physical and spiritual level. Mr. Golden relates that we are learning to integrate “new rules of conduct” like how to be patient with and accept long lines at airports for improved security. He points out that our trust in people will change and we may become more guarded before we accept people into our daily life. Mr. Golden views this as developing a sense of self-preparedness to protect ourselves as we go about our daily routines.

Michael McCourt, President of MGM Associates, a security and organizational consultant, believes we are re-evaluating how much control we actually have over our lives. He states our country has always had a strong “can do” spirit to overcoming adversity, and a sense of control in solving problems. He cautions that while we are learning what is within our control, we need to be aware of how our minds and bodies recover from stress “spikes” and a return to ones’ “homeostasis” or normal state. Mr. McCourt states that we have not determined what that homeostasis will be like and that we are now living “day to day” without a clear long-term view for the future, which increases our level of stress.

(Continued)

Gerald Lewis PhD Director of Compass EAP believes we are responding to a heightened sense of anxiety fueled by this constant fear we face. He points out that fear is a normal emotion and that safety fears can help us maintain boundaries and appropriate behaviors (i.e. fear of death or injury from a car accident motivates us to wear our car seat belt). He goes on to suggest that anxiety is fear that has been given a shot of adrenalin based on a kernel of reality. Anxiety unchecked can limit someone's productivity and quality of life (i.e. anxiety about death or injury from a car accident leads to the choice of not driving a car).

Identifying Trauma Symptoms

As we all start to define our "new normal", it's important to identify and understand mental health difficulties in individuals that may lead to unhealthy long-term effects. Persons respond to traumatic events with symptoms ranging from mild irritation to disorientation and a deep feeling of anger and numbness. If these reactions are ignored individuals may experience serious mental health problems such as depression or seek relief through substance abuse. They may have high rates of workplace absenteeism, be more prone to making errors, or may have difficulty doing routine work tasks. Some employees refuse to return to work, quit, or seek transfer to another location.

Symptoms to be aware of include:

Emotional: fear, anxiety, depression, feeling hopeless, or helpless, irritability, feeling numb

Cognitive: confusion, difficulty with concentration, memory, or making decisions, viewing flash backs of the event in your mind, having a short attention span, distressing dreams

Behavioral: experiencing social withdrawal, hyper sensitive or hyper vigilant to one's environment, crying without a reason, easily startled

Physical: sleep or appetite disturbance, nausea, stomach problems, fatigue, headaches, shallow breathing

Organizational leaders may want to develop a routine of taking a pulse of how employees are doing at work. It may be appropriate to ask how people are doing at a planned staff meeting, in small groups or when talking individually with employees. Listen to complaints with more attention; a vague complaint may be an excuse for an employee to verbalize difficulty dealing with on-going stress. If a company is planning any organizational changes, it is important to keep employees well informed. Particular emphasis should be made on how the changes will affect their role in the organization. Stress management training can be helpful to assist with promoting healthy stress responses.

Outlook Associates of New England would like to thank the following individuals for their input and comments to the article:

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OUTLOOK ASSOCIATES NOW IN METROWEST

Outlook Associates of New England is now offering our anger management program in Framingham in conjunction with Compass EAP. Referrals are now being accepted for the anger management group. Interested individuals should contact John Didio LICSW at 781-643-5251, Ext. 3 or by e-mail at jdidio@outlookassociates.com.

OPTIMISM MAY PROTECT AGAINST HEART DISEASE

According to a report in *Psychosomatic Medicine*, persons with a pessimistic explanatory style were more likely to develop heart disease and die of myocardial infarction than those who shrugged off bad news with a view that things were bound to improve. The findings support the results of previous research linking pessimism with higher levels of anger, anxiety and depression—emotions that may be risk factors for heart disease.

Reuters Medical News