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# Coping with 9/11, nearly a decade later

By Jackie Nash

Dr. Renee Clauselle, from left, provides mental health services in Franklin Square and Kings Park. Dr. Linda Sapadin, Ph.D., is the author of, "How to Beat Procrastination in the Digital Age."

It's been nearly 10 years since the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the nation, and it's difficult for adults — especially here on the South Shore of Nassau County, where so many of the victims of 9/11 left from that beautiful Tuesday morning in 2011, never to return — to cope with the memories, grief and anxieties that come with this 10th anniversary. However, many children and young adults are also profoundly affected and less capable of dealing with psychological trauma.

Dr. Linda Sapadin, Ph.D., a psychologist in private practice and columnist for the Nassau Herald said that many people who suffer from psychological trauma related to a specific event experience more anxiety on the anniversary of that event. This effect is known as the "Anniversary Syndrome" — a psychological process wherein a date associated with some very important event in one's life evokes

some or many of the feelings and thoughts or emotions experienced then. Anniversary Syndrome is sometimes sub-conscious; some people have little awareness of the source or cause.

Dr. Renee Clauselle, founder of Child and Family Psychology, which has an office in Franklin Square, said that research has shown that time does not play as big a part in the healing process as good psychological help,

So how can parents and teachers aid themselves and children in coping with trauma related to 9/11? According to Sapadin and Clauselle, the following tips can help:

### **Use calming words, steer away from negative emotions**

Sapadin said that parents and teachers should make sure to use calming words when talking about the events of Sept. 11, 2001, in order to prevent causing themselves and their children to fear the occurrence of a similar event. For instance, instead of saying, “I can’t believe this happened,” a parent could say, “It was a terrible event, but look how the country has come together since then.”

Ultimately, parents should reiterate the importance of 9/11 as a day to remember those who died, while remembering that the county lives on — “remembering but looking forward,” Sapadin said.

Clauselle agreed that it is important to use calming words, regarding the anniversary of 9/11. “There is a famous slogan, ‘We will never forget,’ that surrounds the 9/11 events — some may confuse this honorable gesture with feeling like they always have to feel the sadness and pain around the event,” Clauselle said. “Some may feel guilty to heal from the pain by wrongly assuming that it is dishonorable to their loved ones. Nothing could be further from the truth.”

### **Tell the truth**

When talking about 9/11 with young adults who remember that day and have experienced trauma related to it, Sapadin said, parents should not make sure to talk about the events of 9/11 truthfully and objectively, so that their children are don’t feel ill-informed. Being overprotective, or less than completely truthful about what really happened that day, will likely cause children to become more stressed and anxious when they learn the truth, she explained. It’s also important for parents to tell their children that although the occurrence of a similar event is possible, it’s not probable.

Parents should wait to talk about 9/11 with younger children who are not old enough to remember 9/11, or weren’t even born until after that date, until asked by those children, Sapadin said. While parents should be honest, they should also be age-sensitive, she added.

Sapadin said that teachers should have an understanding of which students lost someone on 9/11 or have another kind of painful connection to it, and talk to students individually about the anniversary of that day in order to prevent causing certain students from feeling overexposed, and others from feeling confused. Teachers should ask students, “Do you remember it?”, “What do you remember about it?” and “What was the scariest thing for you?”

### **Limit media exposure**

Viewing images on television and in publications of the planes crashing into the World Trade Center, or of dead bodies, might be too insensitive for children who are old enough to remember 9/11, Sapadin said. Media exposure should be limited, she said, in order to ensure a focus on “remembering but looking forward.”

### **Memorialize**

Similar to Sapadin's reiteration of "remembering but looking forward," Clauselle said that memorializing 9/11 and remembering the people who died that day, rather than focusing on the tragedy, is pertinent to healing from trauma. "True memorial lets us reflect and move on with great braveness and strength — the same strength that our heroes that lost their lives showed on that day," Clauselle said. "Try to increase positive emotions — remember the positive things, good qualities about someone you may have lost, the strength and spirit that New Yorkers demonstrated on that day, the heroes, and remember to feel blessed to live in this country."

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