

Views from VanDeWalle

Brandy VanDeWalle, Extension Educator in Fillmore County

March 10, 2021

Disaster Anniversaries

Birthdays, anniversaries and holidays are days to celebrate annually with joy and happiness. If you are like me, I'm sure there are also dates that might bring feelings of anxiety, stress and sadness. For example, I'll never forget where I was when September 11, 2001 happened. I'll never forget days that various people in my life were impacted by serious illnesses or passed away. Many Nebraskans will never forget March 15, 2019 when the 'bomb cyclone' hit causing massive and historic flooding in the state. This date forever changed the lives of many and will take years for many to recover. Then to top it off last year during March of 2020, COVID-19 hit, causing schools to go virtual, business disruptions, etc. As March 15, approaches, our Nebraska Extension team put out resources which I decided to share in my column this week.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has the following tips for how to cope with these trigger events.

- **Be aware that special days may be difficult.** It's common for some stress and other emotional reactions to happen around the anniversary of an event. Simply recognizing that your feelings are normal will help. Dealing with some of your losses and the new realities you're facing after a disaster can be challenging. Try not to be too hard on yourself.
- **Be gentle with yourself.** Show yourself the same kindness and patience you'd give to others during this time. Allow yourself to feel angry or sad and recognize that these emotions are natural.
- **Participate in activities that you enjoy.** This may be different depending on the individual. Some people like to reflect in solitude while others may prefer spending time with family and friends for support. Some of these activities may include singing, prayer, meditation, attending a spiritual service, going to the movies, or just getting together with loved ones to share a meal.
- **Talk about your losses if you need to.** If you want to talk about your losses since the disaster, you can. If you want to talk about the future, you can do that, too. Be sure to share your thoughts and feelings with someone you trust. That can be a friend or family member or a health care professional.
- **Draw on your faith/spirituality.** For many, faith and other spiritual beliefs are a source of strength and comfort every day, and most especially during difficult times. Reach out to your faith adviser, spiritual community, or anyone that you feel comfortable talking with about your beliefs to support and console you.
- **Accept kindness and help from others.** Support from family and friends is essential to healing. It's often difficult for people to accept help because they don't want to be a burden to others, or don't want to appear weak. Allow the people in your life to show their care and concern.

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- **Help others.** For some people, volunteering is a healthy way to heal and they get a great deal of satisfaction from helping others. Some activities can be as simple as donating food, clothing, and other items.

While it is hard to cope with these trigger dates, know that you are not alone and you are cared about, especially by Nebraska Extension. Nebraska Extension, along with numerous other partners has recently created the “Nebraska Needs You” campaign and is working to support others in times of difficulty. We have the Rural Family Stress & Wellness Team, that I am a part of which participates in activities supporting the wellness of rural Nebraska communities by working with community partners and the University of Nebraska. Resources can be found at ruralwellness.unl.edu.

(Source: The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)