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Reliving and Re-experiencing Trauma: Trauma Anniversaries

The anniversary of a traumatic event is often referred to as a “trauma anniversary” or “trauma-versary”. Our bodies and minds can remember and recall traumatic events (or memories or details from events) both subconsciously and consciously. Oftentimes, this can be heightened during the anniversary of when the trauma was experienced. This means that we are more likely to become triggered around the anniversary of traumatic events. Being triggered happens when something external or internal reminds us of the pain, fear, and discomfort we experienced during trauma. These reminders can be things like smells, music, holidays, events, names, words, places, people, and of course, anniversaries. When we are triggered, we may feel as though we are reliving and re-experiencing the trauma that we endured (note: this can be especially distressing and confusing if the memories of the initial traumatic event are blurry). This is more than just recalling a painful memory, this can shock our bodies and minds into believing we are in danger again. During this time, survivors of trauma can experience a multitude of emotions and reactions.



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Some of the reactions and feelings that come up can be:

- Survivors' guilt
- Fear, anxiety, panic attacks
- Confusion and memory deficiencies
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Mood disturbances (depression or intense, uncontrollable euphoria)
- Avoidance or inability to leave the house
- Hyperarousal and being "on edge"
- Intrusive memories or thoughts
- Inability to focus
- Strong feelings of regret, shame, or guilt
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach issues, nose bleeds
- Heightened stress levels
- Difficulties breathing or shallow-breathing
- Skin irritation
- Feelings of agony and torment
- Feeling suicidal

It is very important to keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list. Additionally, some survivors of trauma can have a different experience during trauma-versaries and experience joy, gratitude, or pleasure, and some engage in advocacy work or social activism related to the trauma they endured. Processing trauma can look different for everyone and there is no "right way" to react or feel during a trauma-versary.



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Overall, it's important to be kind to yourself and allow yourself to feel and find compassion as your trauma-versary approaches. And if you are a support system, validate your loved one that their emotions and reactions are completely valid and appropriate. Ultimately, creating safe processing spaces for trauma survivors every day of the year, not just during trauma-versaries, is imperative in moving towards being a more mindful, trauma-informed society.

For more support during trauma-versaries please feel free to contact the following 24-hour hotlines, created by community members for community members:

- National Suicide Hotline **1-800-273-8255**
 - For anyone in suicidal or self-harm crisis or experiencing emotional distress.
- Rape Abuse Incest National Network (RAINN) **1-800-656-4673 or hotline.rainn.org**
 - Supporting survivors or loved ones of sexual violence, human trafficking, incest, etc
- Trevor Project **1-866-488-7286 or text **START** to **678-678****
 - For the LGBTQIA+ community and loved ones, with special attention to LGBTQIA+ Youth
- Trans Lifeline **1-877-565-8860**
- Crisis hotline for trans folks ran by trans folks
- For friends and family of trans folks looking to better support their trans loved ones, call 1-877-565-8860 and ask for their friends and family hotline



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- Call BlackLine **1-800-604-5841**
 - Hotline that operates with an LGBTQIA+ Black Femme Lens and that prioritizes Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Disaster Distress Hotline **1-800-985-5990** or text **TalkWithUs to 66746**
 - For survivors of natural or human-caused disasters, including gun violence
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Helpline **1-866-277-8525**
 - Questions about PTSD, seeking resources for PTSD, learning about treatment, coping tools, etc
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Resources

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