

Acts of Terror: How They Affect You and Me

Acts of terror especially those culminating in the deaths of a large number of people, create terror and trauma in the survivors as well as in the general public. Immediately after the violence occurs there's a sense of disbelief and horror that continues for days, weeks and even months afterwards. People who live thousands of miles away from the location where the act occurred often experience the same degree of terror through constant exposure to the catastrophe via televised replay of the footage.

Viewing the incident repeatedly magnifies the horror especially in young children who may think the incident is happening over and over again. Bob Murray, PhD, a leading psychologist in the field of psychological trauma states that "some of us...may experience a trauma just from watching footage of the disaster that is severe enough to cause psychological problems both now and later."

Our ability to reason coupled with our ability to imagine is a powerful force. We conclude that an act that took place elsewhere can just as easily happen where we live. The shock and horror of 9/11 is revisited when we hear of yet another incident such as the one that occurred in Norway on 7/23/11. It serves to remind us of our vulnerability and resurrects the fears that we thought were safely tucked away with our tricycles and Barbie dolls. It's the monster in the closet or the shadow in the dark....the nameless powerful assailant who might live in our own neighborhood.

According to Dr Murray, symptoms of trauma may manifest themselves in any of several ways including, over-reaction to unrelated incidents, physical trembling and mental confusion. He recommends that people who are experiencing those reactions find someone they can talk to about the incident and as well as the feelings they're experiencing. He also states that it's important to keep reminding yourself that the catastrophe is not happening to you personally.

Taking action, however small, that's focused on dealing with the chaos in your life will help you regain control and give you a sense of empowerment. Something that helped me when our family experienced multiple deaths in a relatively short span of time, was to find a quiet and safe place where I could think, pray and write down my thoughts and feelings in a journal. This enabled me to sort my feelings and decide which ones were irrational and needed to be discarded.

Acts of terror such as the ones we've experienced during the past decade may continue to occur, however, it's important to remember that our ability to protect ourselves is constantly evolving and improving and will continue to do so.