

## **Coping with the threat of terrorism**

The real power of terrorism lies not with the actual attack, but with the terror caused by the threat of an attack. Unpredictable and uncontrollable threats are hard for us to manage and it is natural for people to feel some anxiety or insecurity when these potential threats are brought to our attention. Acts of terrorism are extremely rare, particularly in Australia, and the effects of fear and worry are often well in excess of the actual threat of an attack.

Reacting with fear and distress to the threat of terrorism can have a negative effect on your wellbeing. Below are some ideas which can help you cope and continue to work, relax and maintain important relationships in the face of a threat. Using some of these strategies can also help you to 'bounce back' after you have felt threatened. They won't stop you feeling strong emotions but will help you manage them better.

### **Strengthen your support network**

Having a strong network of people around you is one of the best ways to cope with feelings of insecurity or anxiety during difficult times. Contact friends and family and make sure that you keep in touch regularly. If your family and friends are far away, consider joining a group in your local area. Community centres, churches, sport clubs, libraries and other similar organisations offer a broad range of social groups based around hobbies and interests. Sharing time with other people can be very effective in helping you to feel more stable and secure. Take a moment to think about whether you could benefit from improving your support network; if so, write down four or five possible steps that you could try; old friends or family you could contact or community groups to explore.

### **Look after yourself**

Get plenty of rest and try to eat regular and well-balanced meals. Do things you enjoy and give yourself time to relax. Regular exercise, like walking, cycling or jogging, is a good way to reduce the physical effects of stress. Take a moment to review your lifestyle. Should you try to adjust your sleeping, eating or exercise habits? Would you like to take up a new hobby or interest?

### **Regular routine**

Keep up your regular daily routine. Plan tasks one step at a time and recognise your accomplishments. Remember that you are in control of these day-to-day things. This

can help fend off feelings of insecurity and keep the focus on the positive things you achieve each day. Take a moment to plan what you are going to do for the rest of today and tomorrow. Try to build in some work, some time with friends, gentle exercise and an enjoyable activity each day.

### **Monitor your television viewing time**

It is important to stay well-informed and it is not sensible to avoid media reports altogether. However, images of trauma and disaster can be very graphic and the media often report in sensational ways to get a good story. This can lead to feeling more frightened and insecure. Try to limit the amount of media coverage you watch, listen to or read, especially before bed. Do things you enjoy instead.

### **Focus on facts**

Do not let your feeling of security be swayed by rumours or speculation. Try to arm yourself with facts and be aware that others' opinions may be inaccurate. You may wish to avoid interacting with people who are hyping-up a threat. Change the topic of conversation or seek out calm and reassuring company instead. Do you feel you have a sufficient grasp on the facts? What other information do you need to know and how could you find it? Are there people you interact with who make you feel worse?

### **Keep risk in perspective**

We face risks regularly as part of our everyday lives. It is very important to remember that terrorism threats, while frightening, are extremely unlikely to happen to us or to those close to us. It is not helpful to worry excessively about something that almost certainly will not directly affect us. Take a moment to think realistically about how likely it is that the event you fear will happen to you or to someone close to you. What are the chances?

If disasters and tragedies occur, it is also important to remember that, in time, their impact subsides and people move on to resume daily lives much as they did before. Previous generations have experienced war, hunger, and tragedy, yet they have often gone on to thrive and flourish. Take a moment to think about some people you know who have come through great adversity and thrived – use their example to inspire you.

### **Find a positive perspective**

Even though unpleasant and frightening things are happening in the world, there are countless examples of human kindness and generosity, of courage and caring. Remind yourself of these to help keep things in perspective. You may like to do some voluntary work or help other people in need. This can be a rewarding experience, helping to remind you that there is a great deal of good in the world even when there are threats.

Fear or dislike of strangers or foreigners can also be heightened under a terrorist threat. It can be helpful to recognise that diversity in a population can be an opportunity for unity and strength, and that there are members of our minority groups who have

experienced past terrorist incidents themselves. Take a moment to think about some examples of positive events and people in the world today — in your local community, nationally, and internationally.

### **Believe in yourself**

We all face challenges or difficulties in our lives. When confronted with a traumatic or stressful experience, drawing on past experiences and reflecting on the personal strengths that helped can be comforting. Reassure yourself of your ability to draw on these skills again to deal with threat or loss. Take a moment to think about some examples of difficult times from the past that you have handled well. What skills helped you through then? What did you do to help yourself get back on track?

### **Make a plan**

If you are feeling especially anxious about a threat, you may find it comforting to make an action plan. Collect the telephone numbers of close contacts and agree with loved ones on a place to meet if you were displaced by an incident. Some people are reassured by knowing that important aspects of their lives such as insurance documents, wills and financial affairs are in order. This kind of action plan is not necessary unless there is a real and genuine threat, but it does help some people to feel more assured. Would you feel reassured if you had an action plan? If so, try to develop one over the next week or two.

Using the suggestions above to develop your ability to cope will stand you in good stead if faced by other difficult events in your life. It is important not to let your fear of threatening events interfere with your ability to interact with family or friends, or to disrupt your daily life. If this becomes a problem, or if you continue to feel anxious, you may wish to talk to your doctor or another health professional.