

The Anniversary February 22nd 2012 Preparing and Remembering...



As you know, February 22nd 2012 will mark one year since the devastating earthquake in Canterbury that took 182 lives. It also caused many serious injuries and left Christchurch, and the surrounding region, dealing with ruined buildings, broken infrastructure, enormous community disruption, emotional trauma, an uncertain future and ongoing quakes.

After such a traumatic event, and the many ongoing, traumatic situations arising from it, you may now be looking towards the anniversary day and wondering what it will bring, and how you want to commemorate it in some way, if at all. The lead up to an anniversary like this can sometimes be harder than the actual day itself. The day will be likely to trigger some difficult memories and grief emotions for people, perhaps even distressing flashbacks, and so it's natural that anxiety may build up as it draws nearer.

Some planning about how you want to spend the day can really help the day to become more manageable.

This information sheet is in 3 sections:

1. Taking time to think about what you'd like to do that day
2. Ideas of ways you could mark the anniversary
3. Special notes for those bereaved by the quake.

1. Taking time to think about what you'd like to do that day

There is no 'right way' to do such a day, even though some people may want things done a particular way. There are no 'rules'. You might not even know what's 'right for you' until the day comes along.

Everyone will handle the day differently simply because...everyone's different.

There may be some things you will want to do by yourself on the day, and some you may want to do with others. Or you might prefer not to mark the day. It will be your choice how to make the day work best for you. (Notes for those bereaved by the quake are in the third section.)

If you are part of a family, or any kind of group of friends, workmates or neighbours, you might all need to make some compromises so that everyone's ideas and needs for that day can be respected as much as possible.

If you have children and teenagers in your family it's very important to ask them what they'd like to do on that day too. Don't overlook them. They might surprise you with their thoughts and feelings about the day.

Here are some useful questions to get you thinking:

- What else will be happening on that day that I will have to give some attention to? (work, study, childcare, other commitments)
- What do I personally want from the day?
- What do others in my family, or group of friends, workmates or neighbours, want from the day? Are some of their ideas helpful?
- What ideas do any children or teens in my family or neighbourhood have about the day?
- Who would I like to be with on this day?
- Would I like time on my own?
- Are there things I definitely do want to be involved in?
- Are there things I definitely *don't* want to be involved in?
- Is there one thing that's more important to me than anything else that day?
- How can I keep my plans simple and workable?
- What things might help me decrease my stress loads before that day?

“Memory is the diary that we all carry about with us.”

- Oscar Wilde

2. Ideas for marking the anniversary

Here, over the page, are some ideas others have used on anniversary days like this one. They might help you think of your own ideas as well. Many could be done alone, or in small or large groups. Other people you know may have some ideas that you like the sound of too. (If you have been bereaved by the earthquake, also see section 3.)

- Have a time of silence shared with others – at 12.51, or at a time that suits people best.
- Attend a community ceremony (look out for information about these).
- Spend time alone in a quiet reflective place – being outside in nature helps many.
- Organise a distraction or get away for a break if the day isn't one you want to mark.
- Light a candle.
- Have a ceremony you organise yourself, or with others you know.
- Listen to, play or sing special music.
- Carry something with you that day that is meaningful to you.
- Write or sing a song to honour the day.
- Make a short film to honour the day.
- Follow cultural traditions that may be comforting for you.
- Pray.
- Swap stories with others about that day (respect that some others may not wish to).
- Visit with friends, family or neighbours.
- Have a meal together with family and friends, so you can draw strength in being together.
- Go for a walk somewhere special.
- Plant a tree or a new garden.
- Have time to cry if you need to – alone or together with others.
- Pick or buy some beautiful flowers.
- Display photos – and take some new ones of people being together remembering.
- Read any cards or messages sent to you and display them.
- Make a donation to a special charity or cause, in memory of the event.
- Contact those who have supported you during the first year, acknowledging them.
- Write down the memories that come to mind – yours and others' memories too.

**Waiho i te toipoto...Kaua i te toiroa.
Let us keep close together...Not wide apart.**

Compromises can help

Remember that different people close to you may have different ideas about how things could be done on 'the day'. Work out some ways to each compromise a bit, if you can. This can decrease any tensions that might build up.

Communicate your plan

It's a good idea to let the key people in your life know what you'd like to do that day – your partner, family, friends etc. This helps avoid misunderstandings if people think that you'll be doing something else.

It's OK to say no

Give yourself permission to say “No” to something if you'd rather not be involved with that on the day. Or, if you go along to an event, give yourself permission to leave the room/place for a few moments, or to leave early, if you need to. Most people will understand. Be flexible with yourself, and remember others may need to say No to something on that day as well.

Work your plan

Many people, of all ages, have been learning some new skills to manage stress. Use these. Breathing slowly and deeply can be especially helpful, for example. If you'd like to be emailed information about some good stress busting strategies, you could email Skylight at: rs@skylight-trust.org.nz

Grief just is

Remind yourself that grief's normal. Expect grief responses to come on such a day - but for some that could mean feeling numb and experiencing little emotion at all. Grief is unpredictable. It is what it is, so go with it.

“In memory's telephoto lens, far objects are magnified.”

- John Updike

Take stock. Life for you is probably very different to what it was before. You might like to think about the things that have changed and recognise how well you have coped, considering all that has happened. You might like to think of one thing that you could do that could make life a bit easier right now. It might be planning to walk each day, keeping in touch with a friend more regularly, getting more relaxation and rest, or developing a plan of action that helps you feel safer.

Get the basics right

Even simple, basic things can help like eating sensibly, drinking water, getting some exercise and getting enough sleep and rest. You might like to encourage others to do these things too. They might sound simple but they're very important. Do whatever you can to decrease your stress levels as the day comes closer. Avoid taking risks to cope with any difficult emotions, such as excessive drinking. Instead, use support.

Use support

The ongoing nature of this series of quakes has left people, of all ages, vulnerable and challenged in ways they may never have been before. It's always okay to ask for support in tough times. Perhaps arrange to join with others on that day. You don't need to face such a day alone. As the date draws near, talking with someone, like a counsellor or a trusted friend, might be very helpful. Or visiting your local medical centre could help you to get support to manage physical or mental health symptoms that are affecting you, such as a lack of sleep or ongoing flashbacks that are disturbing or scary.

For further help about how to cope day to day, especially as the quakes continue, email rs@skylight-trust.org.nz for information or phone 0800 299 100 with your request.

For a **list of Canterbury counsellors** see the following link www.familyservices.govt.nz/directory (Search for Canterbury region, keyword *counselling*)

Or for a **list of agencies offering support** in Canterbury use the same link, but search for Canterbury region, keyword *disaster recovery*.)

Or phone **Skylight's counselling support line** on 0800 299 100 (Monday – Friday, 9am-5pm) (Skylight is New Zealand's leading grief and trauma support agency for all ages.

www.skylight.org.nz)

Relationship Services Whakawhauanga phone line is 0800 RELATE (0800 735 283) or phone on 03 366 8804 to arrange to see a counsellor.

3. Special notes for those bereaved by the quake

**When someone you love becomes a memory,
that memory becomes your greatest treasure.**

For you, this first anniversary will not only mark the earthquake event, but one year since the death of someone you loved and cared about. Or, you may have known more than one person who lost their life in the quake.

At this time it might also be very difficult for you if you feel your loved one is somehow being 'owned' by the community, and the country, as well. This often happens for families and friends when their loved one's tragic death is known about, and grieved for, by many people, including many who are strangers to them. Part of you may feel it's right that their name is known and their loss respected and mourned by many, but another part of you may feel like you wish you could all be left alone to grieve privately and without intrusion.

You will probably find yourself having a lot of memories of the person/people, as well as of the events of that day. It may, naturally, be an especially emotional time. Taking some time to think about how to spend the anniversary of your loved one's death can really help.

The anniversary suggestions listed earlier may be helpful, but here are some other ideas that may be more relevant to you on the day itself, or at any time:

- Remember the person who died with others. Sharing memories can be an opportunity for others to remember too. Often such conversations can be as full of laughter as they are full of sadness, because memories can be so bittersweet.
- Spend time with others who have also been bereaved by the quake also. Being together can be mutually supportive – you know that they really 'get it' because it happened to them also.
- Visit the person's grave or the place where their ashes were scattered.
- Publish a memorial for them in your local newspaper.
- Wear something of theirs.
- Keep something they gave you in your pocket.

- Display photos of them
- Watch a video of your loved one.
- Have a drink at the person's favourite pub.
- Release balloons into the sky, with messages tied to them.
- Fly a kite in the wind.
- Engrave or put their name on something special and display this – such as on a photo frame, embroidery, a candle or on a piece of jewellery that you can wear.
- Do something the person would have enjoyed doing too.
- Write a letter or card to them, expressing what you're thinking and feeling on this day. Keep it somewhere safe. Just getting the words out can be a real help.
- Take a positive action in their name, like setting up a scholarship fund or award in the person's name.

**Listen to your instinct and follow it. What's it telling you?
It can take you to exactly what you need right now.**

Memories

Often it takes a while before bereaved people feel able to focus on their memories of their loved one, or to look at photos or video of them. Some find it very comforting to do these things, even though it can be hard. When it comes to your memories, go at your own pace. Everyone's different. Despite tears, sadness or distress, our memories have an important role to play in keeping us linked with the person. You might like to contact Skylight for a sheet of ideas about creating a memory book or box. This is something all ages can contribute to.

Email rs@skylight-trust.org.nz

Bereavement grief

Grief can often be a more intense experience than people realise. There's no quick fix but understanding the nature of grief can help. If you would like some support information about bereavement grief to be sent or emailed to you, contact rs@skylight-trust.org.nz or phone 0800 299 100 with your request. If you are also supporting bereaved children, teens or young adults just mention that in your request too. Skylight specialises in this kind of support, for all ages. Contact us weekdays between 9am and 5pm.

Or see Skylight's online support resource shop at www.skylight.org.nz/shop

If you, or others, have suicidal thoughts

Suicidal thoughts and feelings are rarely spoken about, but they are not unusual after great grief and trauma. They can be scary and overwhelming for people. For some, they're brief thoughts that come and then pass away again. For others, they may become more persistent and stay in their minds. Whatever the situation, help is definitely available.

If you ever think that you, or someone else, is at risk of taking any kind of self harming action, ask for help from: your doctor or medical centre, your local mental health team, a counsellor, psychologist, psychiatrist, a phone support line (Lifeline 0800 111 777, Samaritans 0800 726 666, or Youthline 0800 376 633), a local support organisation, or your nearest hospital emergency department. In emergencies dial 111. If ever your request for help isn't heard, ask again or ask someone else.