

Tips for Navigating Disaster Commemorations

1. Be gentle with yourself and others

Give yourself and others space and grace for the feelings that may emerge. You may feel a range of things.

2. Different needs. Different ways

Everyone's recovery is very personal. What works for one person might not feel right for another. Check in with each other to understand what everyone needs, and plan together how to navigate these differences with care and flexibility.

3. Symbols of significance

Symbolic acts can comfort and give shape to memories and emotions that can be hard to put into words. Consider choosing a simple act that feels meaningful to you. For example: Lighting a candle, placing flowers in a river, or visiting a special place.

4. Limit unhelpful exposure

Avoid repeatedly revisiting debates, media coverage, or graphic images about the disaster. Only engage with what truly helps you process.

5. Check in with yourself

Processing, reflecting, remembering, supporting others, and navigating emotions is emotional work and can be draining. Where you can, schedule time for self-care, quiet, or breaks, and listen to your body - notice your emotional and physical responses. What you need on the day may differ from what you had planned.

6. Connect intentionally

On a day that marks loss and remembrance, seeing life carrying on around you might grate. Take comfort in connecting with others who understand.

7. Honor how far you've come

Take a moment to acknowledge what you've endured, what you've achieved, and the challenges you've faced. Even if progress feels small, recognize that you're still standing.

8. Reach out if needed

If things feel overwhelming, recognize that you've been through a lot, and reach out for extra help. Accepting support when you need it is a sign of strength.



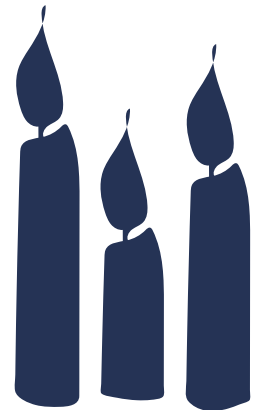
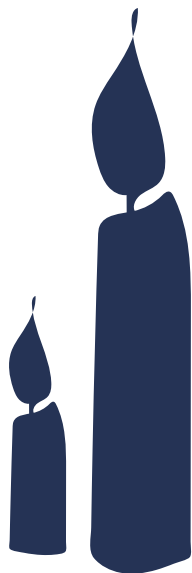
Recovery from disaster is a deeply human process. Commemorations can be hard, but they can also be a stepping path on the way to healing. The process of piecing your story back together in the wake of disaster is an important and ongoing process. It takes time.

Commemoration Days – Both Hard and Healing

Why remembrance days bring feelings, and can be helpful to healing: Reflection at key points is how we stitch the story back together.

What do we mean by this? Recovery is about emotional healing but it's also the process of rebuilding the story of your life – your narrative. (A wonderful friend of ours, Dr Rob Gordon from Australia, reminds us of this).

A disaster is not just an event that causes damage to the physical — it **breaks the continuity of your life**. The plans you had, the assumptions you held, the identity you lived through... all get disrupted. Your life no longer lines up neatly with the “story” you were in before the event.



People aren't just healing emotionally after disaster — they're also doing the deeper cognitive and narrative work of trying to answer:

- What happened to me?
- What does it mean for the life I thought I was living?
- What kind of person am I now?
- How does my future make sense in light of what happened?

This is why commemorations and other milestones can feel emotional. They naturally make you look back and notice the gap between “how life was” and “how life is now.” This reflection helps your mind ‘sort through’ the disruption, understand what’s changed, and start building a new, coherent story you can live in again.

This reflection is difficult and often painful, but it helps the story become whole again. That reflection isn't a setback — it's part of how we make sense of what's changed and slowly stitch the story back together. And these natural reflection points help in noticing progress you might otherwise miss.