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PLANNING FOR THE ANNIVERSARY OF TRAUMATIC EVENTS September 11, 2002

A Practical Guide for Educators

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Introduction

This practical planning guide was created by the staff of the NYU Child and Family Recovery Program at New York University Child Study Center for the teachers, administrators and dedicated parents who are preparing for the first anniversary of the World Trade Center disaster on September 11th, 2002. It expresses the deep respect and appreciation that grew from a year of working side-by-side with the educators of New York city who struggled to meet the critical mental health needs of school communities impacted by the disaster. All the school communities in the New York area were shaken by the catastrophic experiences of that day and by the personal, logistic, and economic devastation that continues to the present time. The struggle by the traumatized people of New York to protect and heal their children has been striking. The personal sacrifices made by New York educators for the sake of their students have not been adequately recognized by the public.

This guide tries to be practical ...because educators have always been practical.

It tries to be helpful ... because working people can always use a hand.

How To Use This Book

This guide is designed to be used in coordination with the Manual, **“Helping Children and Teens Cope with Traumatic Events and Death,”** that was developed by the staff of the NYU Child Study Center immediately after the World Trade Center Disaster and revised five times throughout the last school year. **The Sixth Edition** will be available on the website of the NYU Child Study Center, AboutOurKids.org, before September, 2002. It contains basic information about children’s reactions to trauma and loss, as well as materials useful for those helping children with their reactions.

Permission is granted for reproduction and distribution of this by school personnel. It also can be downloaded in its entirety from the AboutOurKids.org website. (**Appendix I**)

Caring for the Caretakers: Adults Helping Children Need Support Too

For many children and adults, the anniversary of September 11th will result in strong emotions, memories, and responses that are normal and natural, yet difficult to handle. While each individual will respond in his or her own way, consideration of self-care and support will be an important part of the preparation for September 11, 2002. It is crucial that all adults take care of themselves. It is a pre-requisite for them in order to better care for students or their own children. Self-care will allow adults to experience the benefits of extra support for themselves and to model healthy self-care to their children and students. The following suggestions are specifically geared toward parents and teachers.

- Decrease the demands you place on yourself for the day. Don't expect too much of yourself.
- As 9/11 approaches, get good sleep and eat well.
- Reach out and connect with people you care about. Call or get together with a friend or family member.
- Decrease your exposure to news media coverage about 9/11.
- If you anticipate difficulty on 9/11 plan to spend some time with someone special.
- Plan special family time on 9/11 to allow your children a forum to discuss concerns and/or feelings.
- Use the anniversary as an opportunity to show children that feelings are not dangerous and that it is OK (healthy!) to express and share feelings.
- Pamper yourself (e.g. treat self to something special that day-eat ice cream, get a massage, take an extra long shower or relaxing bath).
- Allow time and space in your schedule that day to take a break or breather, if needed.
- Try to decrease the amount of stress in your life in general. This will help you cope with issues related to 9/11.
- Do not judge yourself about your personal response to 9/11. Do not criticize yourself if you find that you are doing some irrational thinking or making irrational plans in preparing for 9/11 (e.g. avoiding certain situations that day). Give yourself some flexibility to be different that day if that is what you need.
- Do not judge or criticize yourself if you are **not** particularly distressed that day. Remember that people respond and react in different ways. Some people may feel anxious, fearful, or sad while others might not be distressed at all.

- Try to make your day's lesson plan and activities easy. Keeping to your schedule provides you with structure and helps you stay on track during stressful times, but do not introduce demanding tasks.
- Allow time for a break.
- Find a buddy and develop a plan in case you are having a difficult time during the day, or an unanticipated reaction.
- Plan specific positive distracters for the day, if needed. Specific strategies for distracting yourself include the following:

- Imagine or picture yourself in a calm, peaceful, relaxing scene (e.g. on an ocean side beach, on a sunny day). Visualize yourself at that place with no problems or worries, only the calm relaxing surroundings.
- Try to remember another difficult time when you had strong feelings and think about how you were able to cope.
- Use the coping skills that have helped you get through other difficult times.
- Tell yourself "stop" to any anxiety-provoking thought. Picture a stop sign or a blinking red light.
- Focus on a positive memory.
- Count backwards by threes beginning with 1000.
- Practice self-affirming or calming exercises (e.g. music, journaling, deep breathing, and relaxation). Take time to write your thoughts down on paper. Write about how the events of 9/11 may have changed your sense of trust, safety, control, mortality, and the future.

- Try to identify the possible emotional responses that you may have that day and how to cope with those feelings. Here is an example of a plan to cope with difficult feelings:

1. *Tell myself it is OK to have strong feelings about this and that there is no right or wrong way to respond.*
2. *Validate my feelings rather than be self-critical.*
3. *Take a few deep breaths; tell myself it's OK, and that it is not a catastrophe if my feelings are evident to others. This is a chance to show others, especially children, that feelings are not dangerous and that it is OK to express them or share them with others.*
4. *If things are beginning to feel out of control, I will take a deep breath and try some self-calming activities such as:*
 - *Deep breathing*
 - *Relaxation*
 - *Calling someone*
 - *Journaling*
 - *Listening to relaxing music or music that creates positive feelings*

- *Eating my favorite food*
- *Focusing on a positive memory*
- *Using distraction to take my mind off the worry*

- **Plan in advance the steps you will use to take care of yourself.** Think of things that will reduce your overall level of stress or worry. You could map out your day and have plans ready for unforeseen events or strong feelings. A sample plan might look like this:

- *take a relaxing bath*
- *eat a balanced breakfast while reading a novel*
- *call a best friend before leaving work*
- *listen to music while getting ready for work*
- *write in a journal*
- *practice deep breathing*
- *plan extra time to get to work to avoid feeling rushed or experiencing anxiety about being late*
- *tell yourself it's OK to have strong feelings*
- *validate your feelings rather than being self-critical*

- Tell yourself statements that are positive, calming, and give you a sense of control or security. Such as:

- *I am OK today.*
- *People care about me.*
- *There are things that I can control in my life.*
- *I can take care of myself.*
- *My anxiety/fear won't hurt me. It can't last forever.*
- *Just let it go.*

- If you are having negative thoughts that are making you feel bad (e.g. "I can't handle this," "I won't be able to cope," or "This is intolerable and I can't stand it"), ask yourself the following:

- *Is this thought helpful?*
- *Is it realistic/rational?*
- *Is there another way to look at this?*
- *What would I tell a close friend if s/he were thinking this?*
- *What would I rather think?*

- Challenge those thoughts and replace them with more realistic self-affirming ones such as:

- *This is a difficult time but I will somehow get through it.*
- *This feels intolerable but I am capable of coping.*
- *I've coped this far so I will likely be able to continue.*
- *Just because I feel like I can't handle this does not necessarily mean that I can't.*
- *I have taken care of myself up to this point and will continue to do so.*
- *This is difficult but I will find some way to take care of myself*

- Write a list of your own thoughts and read the self-affirming ones at different times throughout the day as reminders. **(See Appendix C for a worksheet.)**

Ceremonies and Memorial Events

Ceremonies and memorial activities help both children and adults cope with feelings by joining the people in their community for support and sharing during a stressful time. Sometimes the task of planning memorial events can feel daunting, since each individual's reaction to September 11th is unique, as is their opinion about the best way to mark the day. The task is even more challenging since individual opinions are often strongly held. Different groups will have different needs at the time of the anniversary. Some children will want to be expressive and be actively a part of public activities. Others may want nothing to do with unusual events on the anniversary. Some children, especially some adolescents, may not even want to talk about it. The important points to remember when planning are:

- Give all constituencies a voice in planning and decision-making process.
- Arrange a continuum of activities so that people can choose the level of their involvement.
- Emphasize hope, growth and the future of the school community as well as acknowledgment of the losses.
- Create a balance. Public events are important but they must be planned so people are not over-saturated with activities. Coordination and planning will clearly be the key.

The planning for the activity is as important as the ceremony itself. It helps the event become meaningful. Often, it is in the more informal planning settings, that children get the opportunity to process their feelings and memories of the disaster. Being part of the planning process allows people to feel a sense of control. For these reasons, a continuous school-wide dialogue must happen in the first weeks of school. All members of the school community (e.g., parents, students, and school staff) need an opportunity to be part of this planning, allowing them a chance to explore their reactions and decide, as a school community, how to go forward. It is quite possible that this preparatory activity is the best way to avoid unexpected emotional reactions on the day of September 11th.

The following ideas can be used as a starting point for discussion as you plan for your particular school. It is suggested that some structured, game-like, activities be incorporated into the plan in order to alleviate tension and enhance community.

- Since many children will appreciate the company of their parents on the anniversary, parents could be invited for a school breakfast to be held that morning. The breakfast could be given a catchy name such as "Food for Thought" or "Sunny Side Up." Select remarks by chosen individuals could be made and/or readings performed. For example, one school will simply expand their regular "welcome back" breakfasts (a standard of their Fall activities) to include a breakfast on September 11th, which creates a calming sense of continuity.
- Those who plan the school lunches might want to consider serving well-liked comfort food such as pizza, ice cream, and chocolate milk, which the children consider special.

- To affirm the growth inherent in change, bulbs and/or trees could be planted around the school or in nearby parks. Plaques could mark the planting site as acknowledgment of the school responsible for the improvements as well as the purpose of the project. The plants/trees and plaques would be a potential source of pride for the students and school for years to come.
- Singing is always uplifting and could be the focus of an assembly or incorporated with breakfast or planting. School choirs, or professional singers or bands, could be invited to perform. A sing-along could be conducted. Songs of patriotism, unity, and peace could be highlighted. However, the repertoire for the event needs to be chosen carefully since people from different parts of the world react quite differently to patriotic songs.
- Drumming, or other rhythmic and sonorous activities, could be performed at a school assembly —again by professionals, or perhaps even better, by the school community. The school could prepare for the assembly by making percussion instruments that are easy to construct out of tin pans stapled together with seeds inside, or oatmeal canisters (tops and bottoms removed) with wax paper taped to one side (as a drumhead) for use with drumsticks. Many other inexpensive possibilities exist for constructing percussive instruments.
- As candle lighting could be dangerous, flashlights or glow sticks could be used as an aspect of a ceremony, perhaps involving a silent procession in and out of the auditorium, before and after a musical event.
- Each class could design and create a bulletin board utilizing particular themes appropriate to the day (i.e. community, democracy, bravery, celebration of difference).
- Rather than focus on school-wide events, specialty teachers could plan their own tributes with an eye toward the future. Again, middle and high school teachers should inform their colleagues and administrators of their plans so as not to over-saturate the students. Not every teacher or class should have 9/11 related curriculum.

Additional suggestions associated with specific academic areas are listed below. Each suggestion could be adapted for different age ranges.

- In Art, children could create collages about hope or harmony. Alternatively, a graphic design/advertising project could be undertaken promoting New York City.
- In History, students could be encouraged to envision a “new” New York and work in teams to write essays or design plans for downtown and beyond. World religions could be studied or non-judgmental comparisons made of different cultures.
- In English, students could express themselves through poetry, writing haiku about peace and understanding, or other suitable themes. Books of the World could be read to develop an appreciation of the differences and similarities between people everywhere.

- In Science, students could "Plant the Seeds for Peace in Our School." Alternatively, create mini-ecosystems in terrariums that represent a balanced environment.
- In Math, students could make blue prints or models for the downtown area, practicing their geometry and exercising their creativity.
- In Foreign Language classes, the derivation of words could be analyzed and respect paid to the languages of the world that have combined to contribute to our own language. In other words, the free flow of ideas can be acknowledged by studying shared vocabulary and syntax.
- In Music, rap songs could be written, a "symphony" of instruments played, or music played as part of meditation and relaxation exercises. Again, communal drumming is an option.
- In Gym, yoga, controlled breathing, and other meditative arts could be taught and practiced. For those who feel the need to burn energy instead of reflect, the choice could be given for more active sports such as soccer or relay races. In general, team sports could be played with emphasis on building community and cooperation, working toward a common goal.

Tips for Teachers

Knowledge increases a sense of mastery and the sense of being part of a community while simultaneously diminishing worry. Some people feel unsure about what is appropriate or helpful to students. Some are afraid to address the anniversary for fear of overwhelming a student or themselves with strong feelings. In order for school staff to feel personally prepared for the anniversary and to prepare for their students, they need basic information. Short scripts of appropriate things to say can provide a foundation for their own natural efforts. In addition, students also need basic information about what to expect. The teacher's information could include:

- Example of prepared scripts for teachers to use before September 11th
- Example of prepared script for teachers to use on the day of September 11th
- Signs and symptoms of trauma response

Example of Prepared Script for Teacher's Use Before September 11th:

A series of brief announcements could be made on the week of September 11th about the events taking place at school and in the surrounding neighborhood. These announcements help students know what to expect and be prepared. A simple statement such as:

“The anniversary of the events of September 11th will happen this week. Our school has chosen to commemorate the event of the day in the following manner... (provide details of what the school has planned). The city will be holding its own ceremony as well.

You might have feelings about what will take place this week. Since no two people are exactly alike, your reactions might be different from the feelings of the people around you. Your feelings might also change from moment to moment. We are a strong community and I expect us to do just fine with these events, even when we have strong feelings. That's normal. I recommend that you discuss your reactions with your parents to decide how you want to participate in the day's events. If I can help you out in any way just let me know. There are also other people here who can help.”

Example of Prepared Script for Teacher's Use, Both the Evening Before and At the Opening of School on September 11th:

A similar and brief announcement could be made on the anniversary day, explaining the events taking place all day. A simple statement such as:

“Today, many people in the city will be holding ceremonies marking the anniversary of the events of September 11th. There may be some noise and commotion as a result. This could include music, extra traffic noises, lots of people milling about, even low-flying

helicopters. Reporters may be near the school, but you can refuse to answer any of their questions if you want.

The school has chosen to mark the events of the day by... (Provide details of the school's plans). If, during the day, anyone feels they need someone to talk to, just let me know, because people are here to help you."

Sample Questions Students May Ask and Guidelines for Answers

It can be expected that students will have questions about September 11th. The questions can range from the general (*Will I have trouble getting home tonight?*) to the personal (*Were you there on the day? How did you deal with it?*) A safe bet is to answer questions warmly and kindly, briefly providing any factual information that you know and avoiding excessive personal content. We have provided some sample questions that you may receive, as well as possible answers. If you feel unprepared or unwilling to answer a question, it is helpful to remember that you can always say something like, "I do want to talk about this but not right now."

1. Were you at school when it happened last year? How did it feel?

If you were (or were not) at school, briefly acknowledge how you felt without giving too many details about your personal experience. Try to include a statement about how you coped and how you are feeling currently. For example: "Yes, I was at school on September 11th and it was a really frightening experience. Afterward, I was lucky to have my family and friends around me to help me deal with what happened. Now I'm back at school, and it feels really good to begin another year at our school. We have so many interesting plans for the year."

2. Will things ever be the same again?

"It is a good idea not to focus on how things used to be or to dwell on how things used to be better or more "normal." Rather, explore how things are different now emphasizing how changes in life can bring about new experiences, and opportunities for growth and development."

3. Why must we keep talking about September 11th?

"People talk about September 11th in an attempt to make sense of their experience of such an unusual event. It is a way of dealing with the tragedy and not closing it up. Talking about it is a way of breaking it down into smaller more "digestible" pieces. Some people talk about it to make sense of it. Other people are quieter, using other ways to cope. In our school, we are respectful of differences in what people need to do."

4. *Why isn't the school doing more to commemorate the event?*

People memorialize events in many ways and no way is the “right” way. The school’s plan was made to meet the needs of as many different groups in our school as possible. You and your family may choose to commemorate the events in a different or more extensive manner at home.

5. *What should I do if I can't stop thinking about September 11th?*

Engage the student in an interesting activity. Encourage the student to see you after class in order to assess the situation and arrange for appropriate help.

Signs and Symptoms of Trauma Responses in Children:

Children’s reactions to traumatic events are quite variable depending on a number of different factors. Most children will be fine following a disaster. Age, degree of exposure to the event, and family support are just some of the predictors of how a child or adolescent will cope with a traumatic event. Sometimes their response may be overt, such as acting-out, and sometimes it will be a more quiet or depressed reaction. Others may feel more anxious and worried or irritable. Aggression, oppositional behavior, loss of social skills, learning problems, physical complaints, poor self-esteem and substance abuse are some of issues that have been shown by children after disasters.

Below is a list of some symptoms that you may see in your classroom and will most likely warrant attention.

Preschoolers and Young Children

Unusual fear of separating from parents
Tantrums or irritable outbursts
Increase in general fears
Crying or clinging

Children Ages 6-11 Years

Anger, fighting, irritability, bullying
Social isolation
Fluctuating moods
Fears, depression, anxiety, mood swings
Inability to concentrate and focus on
 academic difficulty
Physical complaints
School refusal

Adolescents Ages 12-17 Years

Depression, suicidal thoughts, guilt/shame
General anxiety, panic attacks
Numbing
Mood swings, irritability
School refusal (or academic decline)
Concentration difficulties
Loss of interest in the future
Social withdrawal

Management of Emotional Outbursts

While a plan for managing emotional outbursts may not be necessary, making such a plan before anything happens will facilitate a sense of control, safety, and security for the staff confronted with such a situation, and, thereby, for the child (or adult) experiencing the loss of control. This is especially true when planning for the anniversary of a traumatic event. Just the date, the angle of the sun, or the repetition of a significant point in the yearly cycle, can be a reminder of a traumatic event. Thus, the anniversary itself, as well as the activities around this highly significant anniversary, may cause people to have strong emotional reactions.

Children, teachers, all New Yorkers, may need some quiet time to cry, think, de-escalate, or calm themselves. They may simply need to take time alone to feel better. Others may need some assistance in coping or managing their responses. Neither children nor the adults around you should be pushed to talk, as this does not allow for a sense of control. Conversely, lack of options for regaining emotional control can be distressing and even escalate the problem.

All New Yorkers can benefit from knowing that there are options and that others are available to help if needed. The following are suggestions for the management of emotional situations in the school on the anniversary of September 11, 2001.

For Children:

- Make available a “safe room” or “safe area” to which children can be sent for comfort or support if they become upset while at the school. Most children can regain control within their own classroom community where the people are known to them. However, a few may need to withdraw for a time necessitating a plan for their care and safety.
 - It is preferable if a mental health professional can be in the “safe room/area” in the event that a child needs comforting or support.
 - The most important issue for planning is that one or more staff members should be released from normal duties so they can respond to issues that arise.
 - Copies of the Coping Plan should be available since its use will encourage resiliency and resumption of control.
 - “Safe Rooms” need to be stocked with appropriate toys or activities for those children who need to “chill out” before returning to the classroom.
 - Phone linkage to this room will be important, since adults need to be informed where children are in the building.
 - Light refreshments are also a good idea.
- Develop a plan for managing children who become visibly upset during a commemorative activity or in the classroom.

For example,

- The teacher can designate a “Chill Out Place” within the classroom that contains music and headsets or books for those who become upset and need some quiet time.
 - If a child cannot regain control and becomes so upset that the teacher needs assistance, a plan can be made for the teacher to call the “safe room/area” to request that the child be picked up from the class or activity.
 - If no phone is available, another child in the class can go to the “safe room/area” and request that the released professional come to the classroom to retrieve the child.
 - Once the child is at the “safe room/area” the designated professional can speak with the child, help the child calm down, and help that child develop a plan for coping if they become upset again (**See Appendix A for a Coping Plan worksheet**).
 - While sympathy is necessary, these options should not become too appealing lest other children act up in order to join the fun. Time limits should be imposed, unless the child is too upset and the adult cannot predict the child’s rate of recovery. In these alternate areas, the primary emphasis should be on resiliency and resumption of responsibilities.
- The parent or guardian should be notified whenever a child seems seriously distressed, even if the child seems fully recovered. Parents need to know that you have personally looked after their child.
- When appropriate, available mental health services should be reviewed during this contact.

For Parents:

- A “safe room” or “safe area” should be available for parents who need comfort or support if they become upset while visiting the school. Parents with worries about separating from their child can use this room to remain nearby without disturbing school activities.
- If possible, a mental health professional should be nearby in the event that a parent needs comforting or support.
 - This “safe room/area” is also a place where parents can seek comfort from each other. Most parents do not require a formal therapeutic intervention. Many will prefer the comfort of other parents who are going through a similar experience as opposed to the services of a mental health professional.

For Teachers:

- Teachers, too, may be surprised by their own intense reactions on the 9/11 anniversary. During the disaster, many of the professionals in the schools put their own reactions aside in order to care for the children. An anniversary reaction is possible. A few teachers may experience moments of difficulty. A system for short periods of respite would help them.
 - Provisions should be made to ensure the privacy of teachers who access mental health professionals on that day.

Tips for Parents

Knowledge provides a sense of control, a sense of belonging to a community, and the feeling of being prepared -- all of which decrease worries. While most parents know their children well and are comfortable with their children's emotions, some parents may be uncertain whether their responses are appropriate. Parents, too, need information that helps them prepare for the anniversary. With it, they may feel more able to handle both their own reactions and the feelings of their children. Armed with information about changes in school procedures for the anniversary, and community plans for commemorative activities, as well as information about common anniversary reactions, they will be better prepared to help their children. Children usually feel more secure and resilient when parents act as good role models for managing emotions and self-care.

The following section contains some questions that parents might have. Samples of possible answers for each question are included. These sample answers may help create a foundation for their own natural efforts.

Should I let my children watch television?

TV and radio coverage of the anniversary will be extensive. An important lesson we learned from previous disasters is that children do better when their exposure to the images and sounds in the media has been limited. Either turn your T.V. off or limit the amount of time your children watch it. If they will be watching T.V., you should view the programs with them and discuss their reactions. Ask them questions about what they just saw and about their feelings after viewing a show. Consider limiting your own exposure to the media.

What if my child becomes upset after reading the newspaper or viewing something on television?

Encourage your child to discuss feelings. It is important to accept your child's feelings rather than ignoring them or providing the "correct" way to feel. Remember, there are no "right" or "wrong" feelings. Each individual's reaction will be different. Brainstorm with your child to identify strategies for feeling better. You can share how you made yourself feel better when you were upset. You can also identify ways in which your child has successfully managed difficult situations in the past.

For example, if your child becomes upset by seeing a picture of a crying child who has lost a parent, you might acknowledge that the feelings make sense to you and then reassure your child by saying that those children have many people who still love and care for them. Then you could redirect your child to another activity that has been diverting in the past (i.e., playing a game with you, taking a walk with you).

Will it hurt my child to talk about what happened?

It is appropriate for your child to express his or her feelings. It is possible that some children will cry during the anniversary week. This is a normal reaction to sad memories. Stay calm. You can acknowledge the feelings by saying that many other people feel sad too. It is understandable. Praise your child for being honest and open about feelings. After accepting the feelings, try to help your child identify strategies for regaining emotional control and enjoyment. Then provide a soothing and diverting activity.

Should I keep my child home on September 11?

This is a personal decision that has to be based on your knowledge of your child. We recommend that most children go to school where the routine and structure will help them maintain control and feel part of a community. If you do allow your child to stay home, make it clear that missing school cannot become a pattern. You will allow it for only this one special anniversary day. Make sure you or another caretaker will be available to provide support for any child staying home.

Should I develop a safety plan with my child? (See Appendix B)

Having a plan for emergencies is a good idea. It helps both you and your child feel more in control. A safety plan can include:

1. A clear system for how the child can contact you during the day.
2. An alternate contact person when you are not available.
3. A designated support person in the school building who can be contacted if difficulties do arise. This support person should be someone with whom your child is comfortable.
4. Alternate transportation routes to get home (if your child is traveling independently).

Security

On September 11, 2002 there will be heightened security around many areas of New York City. It is probable that there will be an increased presence of police and security officers in subway stations, buildings, street corners, and official landmarks. Security operations serve to help keep people safe and are necessary to help manage the multitude of events that are scheduled to take place in and around the five boroughs. The presence of security personnel sometimes causes people to feel anxious or afraid, despite the protective and preventative function they serve. People may ask themselves “Do I have something to worry about?” The following tips are provided to ease the tension that is associated with increased security and can be adapted by schools depending on their individual needs.

- Provide advanced notice/reminders to parents, students, and school staff about tightened security and the possible effects of heightened security on travel plans. Parents and teachers should create alternate travel routes to school.
- Inform security personnel that parents may be attending school on September 11 and that they should be extra courteous on that day.
- Plans for increased security should be shared with parents and staff prior to September 11th.
- Concerned parents should be provided with alternate phone numbers.
- High school students should be reminded to bring identification and their class programs in order to pass through security checks.
- Parents of elementary school students should make sure that children know their address, phone number and who to contact if they should need to do so. It may be useful to have young children carry identification.
- Create a system in which school staff notifies security and the main office if they anticipate packages or deliveries.
- All staff need to be familiar with the school evacuation plan as well as contingencies for alternate scenarios especially for evacuating students with disabilities. All staff should be familiar with the role they will be expected to play in the event of an emergency.
- If a fire drill is planned for the first few days of school, before September 11, provide warning for staff and students so they are not startled by alarms. Focus on the positive nature of drill, “Getting to know your school and how it works.”
- Require each parent to update the “blue card” information including contact information and alternate contact information in case of an emergency. This should be completed before the first week of school. For large schools, it may be necessary to assign additional help to this task.

- Arrange for extra security staff to be present in school at the beginning of the school day and on September 11th. This will alleviate tension created by long delays when parents and adults are asked to sign-in before entering the school.

Appendix A
COPING PLAN

Develop a plan for feeling better if you become upset again:

1. List the things that helped you to feel better today:

2. Which of those things you could try again?

3. Can you return to the “safe room/area” if needed? _____

4. List people you can talk to later if you become upset again:

5. Try to do some things that will help you to feel calm such as:

- Take a few deep breaths
- Count to ten
- Tell yourself that things will be OK
- Talk to someone
- Find something that makes you feel safe or happy (e.g. stuffed animal, favorite music)
- Try to think about a time in the past when you were feeling good (e.g. holiday, special event)

6. List things that have helped you get through other difficult times (e.g. other times when you were scared or angry). What did you do during those times that helped you feel better? _____

7. Can you use any of those things again if you become upset? List the ones that might help you now or in the near future.

Appendix B

SAFETY PLAN

1. If I need to, I can reach mom/dad or guardian during the day by doing this:

2. If I can't reach my mom/dad or guardian, I will try to reach _____

at _____

I could also try:

3. If I am having trouble at school or feel scared I can go to (list at least two people):

4. If I have trouble going home the usual way I will try this instead:

5. Remember: Stay calm. My mom/dad and I have a good plan to follow if needed and the following people will help me if I ask.

Appendix D

September 4, 2002

Dear Teachers:

As you are well aware, the one-year anniversary of the events of September 11, 2001 will occur on Wednesday of the second week of school. Our school has decided to commemorate the day in the following manner. (Insert information specific to your school.)

Although this day will affect us all in different ways, we expect that most members of our school community will handle the event with minimal distress. However the anniversary, itself, as well as anniversary activities, may be difficult for some, triggering strong reactions. For example, children may become sad, moody or irritable in the days before the anniversary or on that day.

The following suggestions are offered to help your students cope adaptively with the day:

1. Since knowing what to expect provides a sense of mastery and security, a series of short announcements preparing students for the upcoming events taking place in school and in the neighborhood should be made to your class throughout the week of September 11th. A simple statement such as the following would be fine.

“The anniversary of the events of September 11th will happen this week. Our school has chosen to commemorate the event of the day in the following manner... (provide details of what the school has planned). The city will be holding its own ceremony as well.

You might have feelings about what will take place this week. Since no two people are exactly alike, your reactions might be different from the feelings of the people around you. Your feelings might also change from moment to moment. We are a strong community and I expect us to do just fine with these events, even when we have strong feelings. That’s normal. I recommend that you discuss your reactions with your parents to decide how you want to participate in the day’s events.” If I can help you out in any way just let me know. There are people here who can help.”

2. A similar announcement about the events taking place on the anniversary day should be made so that students will know what to expect. The following statement is an example.

“Today, many people in the city will be holding ceremonies marking the anniversary of the events of September 11th. There may be some noise and commotion as a result. This could include music, extra traffic noises, lots of people milling about, even low-flying helicopters. Reporters may be near the school, but you can refuse to answer any of their questions if you want.

The school has chosen to mark the events of the day by: (provide details of the school's plans). If, during the day, anyone feels they need someone to talk to, just let me know, because people are here to help you."

3. Separation from parents and family could become an issue for some of the students. Usually, just talking with a "good listener" will be sufficient for them to return to the school routine. However, some students may ask repeatedly to call their parent or guardian, and show an inability to manage their distress. You need to follow the school plan for these situations, but to do so in a warmhearted way. It is recommended that such students be linked with a mental health worker who can support the child during phone calls and help the child to make a plan for coping with the day. (Insert a description of the services the school plans to provide.)

4. Members of the media (reports, TV crews etc.) may be near the school. Students need to be reminded that they don't have to answer questions from reporters. Younger children should be taught to say, *"I'm sorry, I don't want to talk right now."*

5. (If the school has decided to make a "Safe Room," this letter should include information about the procedures for sending children to that room in a safe and orderly manner.)

Thank you for your cooperation with this matter.

Appendix E

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As you are well aware, the one-year anniversary of the events of September 11, 2001 will happen on Wednesday of next week. We have been informed that the city will be conducting a ceremony to commemorate the day. Our school has decided to commemorate the day in the following manner: (Insert information specific to your school.)

Although the anniversary will affect us all in different ways, we expect that most members of our school community will handle the event with minimal distress. However, the anniversary itself, as well as anniversary activities may be difficult for some, triggering strong reactions. For example, children may be sad, moody or irritable in the days before the anniversary or on that day.

Please note, that accommodations will be made for students who do not wish to take part in these memorial activities.

The following suggestions are offered to help your children cope adaptively with the day:

1. Talk to your children about the events so they know what to expect. Let them express their feelings and concerns. Your child's concerns may differ from your own and those of others, so it is helpful to listen carefully before helping them identify solutions. Remember children often say more with their behavior than with their words.
2. As some transportation may be crowded or altered on that day, you may want to accompany or bring children to school early. If you keep your child home from school, please notify school personnel of their absence. (If arrangements are being made for additional phone lines at the school, let the parents know the number to call.)
3. Members of the Media may be near the schools. Your child should be told that the choice to answer questions from reporters is theirs. You may want to teach your young children to say, *"I'm sorry, I don't want to talk right now."*
4. Evidence has clearly indicated that exposure to media coverage may increase your child's distress. We recommend that access to TV be carefully monitored or limited altogether. If your child is watching TV, view it with them and talk about it so that you know they understand what they are viewing.
5. Your children should know where you will be on Wednesday and how you can be contacted if they need to do so. Just knowing this will increase their sense of security.
6. We have included a series of handouts for parents that you might find helpful (If you want to insert materials from this Guide, please feel free to do so.).

As always, our school staff will be available on site to answer any questions and concerns.

Checklist for Administrators

Security Arrangements

Review security arrangements both in your school and community.

- Establish a relationship with your local police precinct.
- Consider arranging for increased staffing on 9/11, because more families may be on the school premises.
- Forewarn school personnel about any changes in security procedures.
- Review procedures with security personnel for handling members of the media.
- Review procedures with security personnel for managing upset or demanding parents.
- Make sure all school personnel have important phone numbers including the number for the Main Office, Guidance, and Security etc.

Things to Communicate with Parents and Students

- Communicate the school's plan for commemorative events, including the arrangements for those students who feel unable or unwilling to participate in them.
- Ask parents to communicate with the school if their child has lost an important person in the WTC disaster or they feel that the child is having an adverse reaction.
- Review plans for increased security with parents and students.
- Remind parents and staff of the need for careful planning and the need for multiple travel routes on the day of the anniversary.
- Provide alternate phone numbers for staff members trying to contact the school and for parents having worries or concerns.
- Remind parents to update "blue card" information and review contact information with their child.

- Provide information packets geared for parents prior to 9/11.
- Inform high school students to bring ID and class schedule.

Things to Communicate with Staff

- Communicate the school's plan for commemorative events, including the arrangements for those students who feel unable or unwilling to participate in them.
- Review the school's crisis plan and evacuation procedures with the staff, especially if many staff members are new to the school.
- Consider assigning additional staff to respond to phone calls.
- Make arrangements for coverage if teachers are having adverse reactions and need a brief respite.
- Create a policy through which staff can communicate about deliveries expected at the school.
- Inform staff and students before conducting a fire drill, letting them manage their reactions to the alarm through knowledge and forewarning. Subsequent drills can be conducted in the usual fashion.
- Assign a "safe room" for students (and possibly staff members), preferably with a mental health worker or supportive staff member available. It should contain copies of the Coping Plan. Completion of the plans will encourage resumption of control.
- If the plan includes a "safe room" for students, a plan must be made for orderly movement of these students within the school.
- Assign a "safe room" for parents, also with a mental health worker or supportive staff member available, if possible.
- "Safe Rooms" need to be stocked with appropriate toys or activities in case a child needs them while regaining control. Plan various interventions for those children who become upset. Phone linkage to this room will be important. Light refreshments are also a good idea.
- Secure privacy for teachers who wish brief contact with a mental health worker.
- Provide scripts for teachers outlining what to tell their students about 9/11.

- Provide outline for staff of the school's referral process if they feel a child may need evaluation or contact with a mental health worker.
- Provide teachers with outline of common reactions to trauma, including depression, anxiety, acting out, loss of motivation.
- Inform teachers and staff about available support and procedures for accessing them.

Appendix G

Checklist for Teachers

- Create relevant theme for bulletin board with students.
- Let students know what school events they can expect both before and on the anniversary of 9/11.
- Be prepared for difficult questions relating to 9/11.
- Be aware of potential symptoms of trauma and consult with mental health workers.
- Integrate structured game-like activities to alleviate tension.
- Develop a plan for students who may become upset during commemorative activity.
- Make a “safe area” available for children to go to in order to receive comfort.
- Allow time for your own breaks and access support staff, if needed.
- Model self-care.
- Plan positive distracters for the day, if needed.
- Support and modulate expressions of feelings among students.

Checklist for Parents

- Monitor and supervise media intake. This includes television viewing and newspaper reading.
- Develop a safety plan with your child. This should include:
 - Precise instructions for how to reach you during the day.
 - An alternative person to contact if you are unavailable.
 - A designated, familiar person in school to whom your child can go to if having a difficult time.
 - Knowledge of alternate routes home (if they travel independently).
- Know the trauma warning signs. These include:
 - Nightmares
 - Separation problems
 - Changes in appetite
 - Irritability
- Know your child's school plans to commemorate the day and any changes in security procedures.

**AboutOurKids.org Resources
for Helping Children Cope with Trauma and Loss**

The following materials on our website AboutOurKids.org provide information and offer advice for parents, educators, and mental health and medical professions to help children cope with the September 11th attack. They are included on our resource page at http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/crisis_index.html.

Articles

About Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

After 9/11: Helping Bereaved Children at Special Celebrations and Holidays

Attack on the U.S.: Friendship/Remembrance Bracelets

Attack on the U.S.: Guidelines for Parents

Attack on the U.S.: Guidelines for Parents (Español)

Attack on the U.S.: Guidelines for Teachers

Attending Funerals or Memorial Services

Building Resilience in Children in the Face of Fear and Tragedy

Children and Grief: What They Know, How They Feel, How to Help

Choosing a Mental Health Professional for Your Child: Who, What, When, Where, Why, How

Coping With Trauma

Helping Children and Teens Cope with Traumatic Events and Death: The Role of School Health Professionals

Kids and Terrorism: Supporting Our Children in Times of Crisis

Ladder 35, Engine 40 (an e-book for children about September 11)

Power of an Idea

Summer of 9/11: Suggestions for Parents and Caregivers

Talking With Kids About Terrorism and Acts of War

Talking With Kids About Terrorism and Acts of War (Español)

When Hurt Leads to Hate: Preventing Your Child's Feelings of Anger from Leading to Actions of Bias and Hate

Crisis Manuals

The following crisis manuals in PDF format can be downloaded from our website at <http://www.aboutourkids.org/crisis.html>

Manual for Administrators and Mental Health Professionals (71 pages)

Manual for Parents and Teachers (44 pages)