

Preparing for disaster anniversaries

Tips for planning anniversary events and supporting communities

Anniversaries are a time of personal and collective remembrance which can be marked by formal and informal memorial events or services.

A well planned anniversary event can support communities in their recovery journeys and provide opportunities for connection.



What to expect around the time of anniversaries

- It is common for people to experience a heightened level of stress and emotion. Bereavement and grief may surface.
- New people may seek support as the anniversary can trigger a realisation that support is needed.
- Media interest can challenge people's privacy and expose individuals to confronting imagery which can trigger stress and emotional responses.

“ *What we have to understand, the... anniversary, because it's a symbolic moment, brings people face to face with the whole experience...the people who are saying it's time to move on, I'd be saying everyone will do it in their own time.*”

– Dr Rob Gordon

Anniversary events can have different purposes

- Providing opportunities for communities to come together.
- Serving as a time for reflection, remembrance and marking the passage of time.
- Creating and reinforcing a sense of history in a community's narrative.
- Acknowledging and remembering those who have been lost or experienced loss.
- Serving as a reminder of the progress from the emergency, as well as the long journey towards recovery.
- Acknowledging and thanking volunteers.
- Providing updates for people outside communities.

Considerations when planning anniversary events

- It is important to seek early feedback from community members about their preferences for the formality and scope of the event, before deciding attendees and whether speeches are necessary. We know community –led events have the best outcomes.
- It is important that events are inclusive and do not exclude people because of timing, their location, or how people were affected by the disaster.
- Media interest around anniversaries can increase. Take a proactive approach and brief media on the story that your community would like to tell.
- It is important to ensure that psychosocial support is available for those attending anniversary events. Australian Red Cross has trained staff and volunteers that can provide this support.

Best practice and tips for anniversaries

- Be inclusive.
- Be supportive.
- Be respectful.
- Be consultative.

“ *In the second year, there is more chance to feel deep sadness and the sense of life being less than it was before. It is often a time when memories and results of the loss come up to change the meaning of everything. It is a time of realising the full extent of what the loss means”*

– Dr Rob Gordon

Tips for supporting others

- Give people the time, space and patience they need. Remember that there is no right or wrong way to feel.
- Listen to people who wish to share their stories and emotions, without forcing them to talk.
- Help others with practical tasks and chores.
- Expect that not everyone will want to participate in anniversary events or services and that’s okay.

- The community has been through a lot, ensure appropriate support is available and plan for potential increases in support needs.
- Remind people around you to take time out to refresh and do the things they love.
- Your actions will influence others – be mindful of creating a safe and supportive environment for those around you, especially those who may be marginalised.

Further information and resources

Helpful resources

- [Coping after a crisis | Australian Red Cross](#)
- [Understanding and managing anniversary reactions: Tips for families affected by disasters](#)
- [After the Disaster Podcast: Episode 5 Memorials and Anniversaries](#)

Webinars

- [Webinar: Shona Whitton and Karen Edmeades – Anniversaries and Memorials: Supporting your community \(90 mins\)](#)
- [Webinar: Dr Rob Gordon: Anniversaries for significant events \(37 mins\)](#)

24/7 crisis support

- Call Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Call Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636
- Call 13YARN on 13 92 76

Other supports

- [Australian Psychological Society](#)
- [Phoenix Australia](#)
- [Beyond Blue](#)
- [Headspace](#)
- [Lifeline](#)
- [Smiling Mind](#)



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for resources