

Feeling uneasy at the moment?

As terror in Jerusalem escalates, take time to invest in coping strategies for yourself and your family

• By DR. BATYA L. LUDMAN

If you've recently had a sense of uneasiness that you can't quite put your finger on, but somehow can't help but feel it's related to the current security situation, then try and take some comfort in the fact that you are not at all alone. Things do seem as though they have escalated, and your increased angst, while feeling unpleasant, is absolutely normal.

Let's face it, we all like to feel as if we are in control, and that is hard to do when at the moment things seem anything but "normal" or the least bit predictable and the tension in our small country is quite palpable. Still, how you personally cope through all of this will have a direct impact on your own well-being as well as that of your children and others around you; so stop, take a few nice deep breaths, and let's work through this together.

When feeling a sense of increased stress, there is often a sense of déjà vu that takes us right back to a time when we have felt vulnerable in the past. Whether it is the sound of a siren, a news report of a terrorist attack, the threat of a suicide bombing or simply the fear of driving on an isolated road or walking in an area that could be unsafe, we are innately primed from past experience to prepare and be on guard just in case something could happen.

As a result, you might notice that you are checking the news feeds far more frequently, sleeping more poorly, eating more (or less) and having more conversations with others about the current situation. You may feel more anxious for no apparent reason. Your heart may feel like it is beating faster, you may find it harder to focus, concentrate or make simple decisions, and you may feel obsessed with checking on your loved ones.

These are all very normal responses to a very abnormal situation – a fear for our safety and that of our loved ones.

The following suggestions are meant as a guide for helping you and your children cope in the current environment. It's most important that you "put your own oxygen mask on first" and look after yourself, so that you can then give your children what they will need in order to cope well.

For you:

1. Recognize your feelings and say them out loud to yourself. You may be quite surprised by your anger, fear, indifference, anxiety or sadness. Allow yourself to acknowledge that while some of your feelings may seem to be rational, others may be less so and are based on fear more than reality.



A child pays homage at the site in Jerusalem's Old City where Rabbi Nehemia Lavi and Aharon Banita were stabbed to death on October 3. (Marc Israel Sellem)

- 2. Talk to a friend or someone with whom you can share your worries and concerns, but who will not make you more anxious or upset. This can be done through email or a chat rather than face-to-face, if that is easier. The goal is to acknowledge your feelings, share them and have them validated. But once this has been done, force yourself to let it all go (as if it was yesterday's news) and move on.
- 3. Find ways to be positive. Today is a new day, and at this moment you and your loved ones are fine. Look for ways in which you are okay and verbalize out loud the many things you appreciate about your life right now.
- 4. Keep everything in perspective

- and keep on living. Take a break and do something nice for yourself. Watch a fun movie, color a picture, meet a friend for coffee, take a relaxing bath or enjoy a massage.
- 5. Take breaks from the news. Put yourself into a "need-to-know-only" mode. If you must check the news, decide how often and try to adhere to the time parameters you set for yourself.
- 6. Stick to routine, and put as much control in your life as you can. While you may be easily distracted, the more you can follow a regular daily routine, the better it will be for everyone.
- 7. Plan your day. Write up a list of short-term, present-focused and future-oriented goals. Attack the list!

- 8. Look after your own health. Now that the holidays have ended, try to eat well, get adequate sleep and put exercise, meditation and relaxation into your daily schedule. Put some fun in your life and make sure to laugh.
- For your child:**
- 1. Talk to and with your children. Kids need to make sense out of things; when things don't make sense, they need to be able to voice their concerns and know you're there to listen and help, even when you may not have any real answers.
 - How your children cope will depend on their age, emotional development, past experiences and the perceived

- 3. Reassure your children that you are doing everything you can to ensure their safety. Children need to know that you are there for them, have someone who can be there when you can't, and that their basic needs are being taken care of.
- Be flexible and allow your child as much freedom as you feel comfortable with, while providing appropriate discipline and rules. Children do need to be aware of safety issues within their immediate environment. Teach your child to be street-smart and have a general discussion about "what to do if..." with your older child or teenager. Children should know important emergency phone numbers.
- 4. Help your children feel in control by giving them predictable routines during unpredictable times. Keep schedules for meals, bedtime, play dates, homework and other activities as normal as possible. Don't allow your own distraction to interfere with good parenting.
- 5. Turn off the television and limit access to inappropriate information. Most children have access to some information, either through the media or in school; recognize that it may be inaccurate. Younger children are unable to differentiate what is real from what isn't and don't realize that the horrendous images repeated over and over

- again on TV are not new incidents.
- 6. Encourage expression of feelings through talk, play, art or music. Children love to draw pictures, write stories or simply play, as a way to work through their concerns. Teach breathing and relaxation strategies to kids. They love them, and they work!
- 7. How will I know if my child is not coping well? Children who are having difficulty will show symptoms that are related both to their age and level of maturity.

You may see signs of regression such as temper tantrums, bed-wetting or sleep issues in a younger child. An older child may have difficulty concentrating, socializing, focusing, leaving the parent to go to school or go out, or may appear sad, quiet, preoccupied, irritable or fearful. Some children have physical and somatic complaints such as headaches or stomach-aches. If you or your children are not coping well, get professional help immediately.

When we've been jolted from a sense of perceived safety with reminders that sudden, random, unexpected, horrendous acts of violence can lurk around the corner and affect our entire family, coping becomes more challenging for each and every one of us. Our response to this must be one of resilience: to recognize that life is precious and live our life to the fullest, enjoying every minute and not allowing terrorism to terrorize us. In this small way, we pass on the message of strength, stability and hope for a better tomorrow.

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Protesters outside the Prime Minister's Residence in Jerusalem on Monday evening, at the close of Simhat Torah, demonstrating against what they say is insufficient government action in the face of rising terrorism. (Marc Israel Sellem)