



LOOKING OVER YOUR SHOULDER

Coping strategies for yourself and your family, Part II

• By BATYA L. LUDMAN

I love hearing “*Hatikva*,” even if it is being sung after a terrorist attack. I love the “*Am Yisrael hai*” stickers and flags posted all over the bus stops. I love the umbrellas and the rolling pins, the prayers and the spirited way we fight back.

We don’t go looking for trouble, we don’t take matters into our own hands, but we do fight back. We fight back with all of the spirit and strength that we have, which enables us to live here, to thrive and to defend ourselves and our country. This is resilience at its best.

We must never lose sight of this; we must capitalize on this in the weeks, and perhaps even months, ahead. Not knowing if the end is in sight and how things will ultimately be resolved is difficult, but our goal now is to get through today and each day; and for this, each of us is better equipped psychologically than we might think.

Things can happen quickly around here, and if you miss the news for an hour, you may not be able to tell whether there has been a new terrorist attack or they’re discussing an old one.

Given that it feels a bit like the Wild West at the moment, most of us keep looking over our shoulder as we go through the day.

While to focus and concentrate may be harder than usual, while we may be distracted and more irritable, we nonetheless carry on. We go to work, get groceries and take our children to daycare. We must, we do, and life goes on.

We understand the situation, but those living outside of Israel may not, and often the foreign media misrepresents it.

At times like this, we are united, our differences are irrelevant and we have much to be grateful for.

Given that this latest round of attacks and bloodshed has seemingly come from nowhere, the incitement

seems to be going on for longer than we hoped, and for many of us we experience a bit of a sense of déjà vu, we must continue to refine our coping skills.

In the initial stage of dealing with terrorism, we respond and cope differently than we do when things seem to go on for longer than we initially anticipated. At first we may modify our behavior by perhaps going out less, or not taking buses; but with time, we all need to go on with our daily activities and function well, as we go about our day. Life goes on and so must we.

People have been amazing. They have come together to help in various ways, our incredible strength shines forth, and each one of us should be very proud of our behavior. We have been and continue to be a light unto the nations. In spite of this, we each are wearing or feeling the pain of current events.

During the second intifada, I used the term “lightly injured” to describe how most of us feel at this moment. We jump a bit more when we see an ambulance go by, hear the sound of a siren and wait for another, and look over our shoulder when out on the street. We are glued to the news, are all a bit twitchy or on edge, and in general are more likely to overreact and be irritable.

For those traumatized from past events, and there is no shortage to choose from, some of the anxiety experienced back then seems to come back now with surprising vengeance.

HAVING SEEN many anxious adults and children in my office these past few weeks, I add some additional suggestions for how to cope, both for yourself and for your loved ones.

1. Coping is enhanced when you can stay present-focused. Remind yourself that right now, in this moment, you are okay. Be focused on the here and now and not on “what if” situations, and you will breathe easier.

2. Speaking of breathing easier, when we are anxious we often forget to breathe; we simply hold our breath or

even gasp. Actually taking the time to stop and breathe and doing it correctly plays a crucial role in mindfulness relaxation training. In brief, take a few slow deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth, to give your nervous system a few moments of real calm.

3. Reduce further retraumatization. It is easy to get caught up in the news and see only tragedy. Don’t forget the hero stories. This is especially important for your children. Stop watching all of the detailed videos showing each act of terrorism. Remember, the goal of terrorism is to terrorize, and the impact on both you and your children through repeated visual exposure can have a lifelong impact. Instead, watch the videos that show our strength – children singing and dancing, adults responding heroically, and more.

4. Post positive. While the news media outside of Israel is incredibly biased (which is both infuriating and hurtful), family from abroad may be truly frightened, concerned and misinformed about your well-being and the situation. They simply may not understand how, now more than ever, we really want to be here, and may instead suggest that we immediately leave and “go home” to our countries of origin.

So while we want them to know how horrible things are here at the moment, we also need to let them know that this is where we belong, and that in spite of things, we are managing quite well. Outdoor cafes and shops are busy. We are fighting back and going about our business.

5. Protect yourself from social media. There are a lot of rumors being spread and they are just not that helpful. Be mindful of what you listen to and its impact. Before forwarding items, check that the sources are reliable, and that the information will be helpful to others and not just keep them up at night worrying needlessly.

6. About an hour or two before bed, resolve with your partner to shut down all technology and move into

calm mode. Read a relaxing book, give each other foot massages or listen to some soothing music. Talk about other things and don't obsess about the situation.

7. Recognize that your nerves may be frayed and treat those you love with kindness. This means looking after yourself as well.

And for your children:

1. Remember that while you may live on your computer and phone, as you become immersed in "what next" behavior, in search of nonexistent answers, your children will cope very differently.

2. Children need to know that you are there for them, so reduce outside distractions (put down your gadgets), look them in the eye and have a conversation. Regardless of their ages, they need to feel your love and security in order to feel safe and be able to focus on their own needs appropriately.

3. Try to understand where your children are at, and let them take the lead in the conversation when appropriate. Continue to spend time with each child alone to talk about the current situation and how it impacts her. Check out what they are thinking and how they are feeling, what they have heard and what it means to them. What, if any, are their particular concerns at this time?

4. You might be surprised to discover that their worries are very different from yours. Always take their concerns seriously and remind them that there are no silly concerns. Ask them how they think things should be handled. Children are incredibly creative and have some great ideas. You just might be surprised and impressed by what they have to say.

5. Provide your child with facts and honest answers. They don't benefit from thoughts or rumors, and may be overwhelmed by too many details, by all the things they hear their buddies discuss in school, or by what they overhear at home. Reassure them that your job is to look after their well-being, and your goal is to keep them safe.

6. Screen what your younger children are watching and sit with older children so you can discuss the value inherent in their choices. Point out the impact of this visual information on their own value system, as well as on their developing brain. Ensure that what they watch does not lead to increased fear, inability to sleep and problems focusing. Watch videos about how to respond in an emergency.

7. One of the most wonderful aspects of life in Israel is that, from an early age, our children have always had a lot of freedom. They go out on their own in the neighbor-



A pizza store on Jerusalem's King George Street is empty last week, while the Western Wall is nearly deserted (left); a tip to de-stress is to fight back by going about business as usual. (Marc Israel Sellem)

hood and may even may walk alone after dark late into the night. For your older children, having this freedom encroached upon may feel very restrictive.

The choices that you make as a family are for you to decide on, and your children must adhere to them. If you are consistent, explain things and have an open discussion, showing that you value their input (even if you ultimately disagree), you may find them more cooperative.

8. Remind children when they are out on the street to continue to be street-smart and "aware of their surroundings." This means they should not be on their phones, listening to music or lost in other distractions. They need to pay attention!

9. As difficult as it is, have that discussion about "what to do if..." Brainstorm with them, role-play and even have them enroll in a self-defense workshop.

10. Don't forget that in spite of all that is going on, your children are still children. The fact that your child may be upset may have nothing to do with the current situation. He may sense and react to the fact that you are on edge, but he may also fight with his sibling simply because that is what children do.

11. Continue to maintain routine as much as possible.

Children need structure and consistency. Find ways to make family time enjoyable, relaxing and meaningful. Sit down together as a family for dinner. You might just be surprised by all that your children can teach you.

12. Finally, remember that you are your children's role model for effective coping. Your strength will be transmitted to them. They are intuitive, know what you are thinking and take their lead from you. Let them know how you deal with your fears.

I know that when I speak in a calm, soft voice, make good eye contact and use a gentle soothing touch, for instance, it is easier to be heard and any tension dissipates faster.

Each child reacts and responds so differently. No one knows your children like you do.

During these difficult times, remind yourself that every challenge is an opportunity for growth.

The writer is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in Ra'anana, author of the book Life's Journey: Exploring Relationships - Resolving Conflicts, and psychology columnist for The Jerusalem Post since 2000. ludman@netvision.net.il, www.drbatyaludman.com

The Jerusalem Post Group is looking for:

Call Center Representatives in Jerusalem
Telemarketing for potential customers abroad
Evening shifts 16:00-22:00
Training provided
CV FOR JOB NO. 5001

Call Center Representatives in Tel Aviv
Also suitable for students
Night shifts 16:00-22:00
North American & European clientele
Training provided
CV FOR JOB NO. 5002

Call Center Representatives in Tel Aviv
Morning and evening shifts
Suitable for all ages
Training provided
CV FOR JOB NO. 5003



41
NIS
average pay
per hour

jobs@jpost.com or fax to: 03-5435676

THE JERUSALEM POST
www.jpost.com

HEBRON ZALSMAN SHAVIT