

## Public Health Efforts to Heal the Community

*Getting involved at home can help in the recovery from tragedies that we experience.*

There is no question that it will take a very long time for the nation to heal from the tragic events of September 11, 2001. In the aftermath of such shock and confusion, Americans are coming together, unifying in national spirit, and wanting to do something to help.

Healing our nation starts in our own community – and there's an opportunity to be involved while helping yourself come to terms, as well.

In Public Health, the focus is the community. Making conditions better, resources stronger, and bringing people together to improve the health of *all individuals*. Today, many Americans are feeling helpless, perhaps living hundreds or thousands of miles away from New York and Washington and unable to jump in and lend a hand. Yet the pain and strong desire to “do” something persists. Our persons may be wounded but the American spirit is strong and growing stronger. If we focus on healing the many communities of our nation, we can heal ourselves.

Perhaps you've donated money to the relief efforts or given blood, but still you wish you could *do* more – do something that will help in our nation's efforts to recover from this tragedy and assure that it will not happen again. Here are some ideas that you may want to pursue or share with others in your own community. The process of *doing* something can help free the emotional and physical helplessness and encourage a renewed sense of vitality as we slowly recover and rebuild.

- Volunteer. Donate time, not money. Pick an organization you've heard about or call the local department of public health for ideas. Spend a couple of hours on a single occasion, or make a short-term commitment of a few hours a week for one month. The local Boys and Girls Clubs, American Red Cross, and soup kitchens always welcome volunteers.
- Host a neighborhood potluck. Get to know your neighbors, unite as a neighborhood, and talk through your feelings. Start to move beyond fear toward renewed tolerance of those around you.
- Visit a nursing home. Many Seniors are greatly affected, as are we, by the events of September 11, but may feel disconnected from the larger community and a need to share. Conversing with an older person who brings the advantage of time, history, and life-experience can be immeasurably beneficial not only for them, but lend a different perspective that may help you, too.
- Religious services. Whatever your religion and whatever your normal preference for attending services, you may find an opportunity there to become involved in some local efforts related to healing your community and the nation.
- Make a meal. Identify someone who may be struggling with this or another challenge in life right now and prepare a meal for them. Make a warm,

healthy, complete meal and drop it off for them to share and enjoy with their family.

- Plant a tree. . . either in your yard or contact a local park, as a memorial. You may want to do this with children, who are coming to terms with the events in their own way. Get your hands dirty, dig into our earth, and watch your memorial to the victims, their families, and all Americans grow.
- Have a yard sale. Been putting off the garage sale? Muster up the anxious energy and advertise that all earnings will be donated to the September 11 fund at the United Way or another relief organization. You'll bring people together, build a sense of community pride, and earn money for relief efforts.
- Write an article. Write an editorial letter to the local paper, write an article about the spirit of Americans in your community, or use this article as a framework for your own suggestions to members of your community on how to work together to heal.

Getting involved in some active way can help you to recover and greatly affect the overall health of your community. The sobering events of September 11<sup>th</sup> have shocked and disturbed all Americans deeply. The courage and character of our nation has always begun at home – in the individual neighborhoods that make up communities, states, regions and our nation. No time or effort spent is too little and the opportunity now is to focus on the helping others and ultimately improve the public health for all Americans.

*References:*

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