

January

2009

IMPRESSIONS

INSIGHTS FROM THE PRACTICE OF CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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*is published by
Dr. Michelle Eabon
a clinical
psychologist in
practice in Fairfax,
Virginia and covers
topics which may
be of interest to
professionals
providing services
to children,
adolescents, adults
and their families.*

The experience of traumatic events usually includes an immediate emotional reaction but there can also be a delayed reaction on or around the anniversary of the event. People often anticipate that they will feel some sadness at the one year point, but then be caught unaware by unexpected strong feelings around later anniversaries.

Unexplained sleeplessness, depression, anxiety or nightmares can have many causes. However, it bears examining whether these strong reactions are occurring around the anniversary of a death or other substantial loss.

Anniversary Reactions

*Michelle F. Eabon, Ph.D.
Clinical Psychologist*

What can be perplexing is that sometimes an anniversary reaction occurs when an individual has experienced secondary trauma when a loss was indirect. This could include the sudden death of someone known but not close to an individual or an event which affects national consciousness.

Regardless of the source of the original trauma, the reac-

tion is troubling because it is unexpected, may occur several years distant from the original event, and may occur after an individual feels he or she has successfully dealt with the loss. Many times it is this intense delayed reaction which prompts an individual to seek supportive psychotherapy.

Strong anniversary reactions are normal and allow for an exploration of hidden issues which may have been obscured by the major effects of the original loss. Reflecting upon these experiences facilitates emotional rebuilding and insulates against future anniversary responses.