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## **Drawing on Your Faith to Cope** **With War and Terrorism**

Faced with the war with Iraq and the threat of terrorist attacks at home, Americans of every religious and spiritual tradition are wondering how best to move forward with their lives. In times of crisis, people often look to their faith for support and guidance in coping with the emotional and spiritual impact.

Each person reacts differently in a crisis and a range of responses are to be expected. These responses can appear immediately or sometimes develop months later. Here is a list of common emotional and physical responses to a crisis:

- Disbelief and shock
- Disorientation; difficulty making decisions or concentrating
- Apathy and emotional numbing
- Sadness and depression
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Intrusive thoughts; replaying events in our minds
- Excessive worry about safety and vulnerability; feeling powerless
- Irritability and anger
- Headaches and stomach problems
- Difficulty sleeping
- Extreme changes in eating patterns; loss of appetite or overeating
- Excessive use of alcohol or drugs

For many people, war not only challenges their emotional and physical sense of well being, but also their spirituality. As a result, many Americans will turn to their faith through prayer and meditation to try to cope with their feelings and seek support, reassurance and understanding in this time of crisis.

While some people find solace in their faith, others may be troubled by questions and doubts. They may have difficulty sorting out the ambiguities of life and faith. What is important to remember is that trust, hope and strength are the most essential elements of all faiths.

## **Tips for People of Faith**

Here are some ways people can use their faith to cope with anxiety and uncertainty:

**Reflect.** Reflect on ways to achieve peace on earth, and to support our service men and women, and those with loved ones in the military.

**Connect.** Spend more time with family, friends and members of your house of worship. Reach out to others for strength and support. Draw strength from your faith.

**Talk.** By talking with others, you'll relieve anxiety and realize that others are having similar feelings and reactions. Talk with a friend, family member, doctor, religious or spiritual advisor, mental health professional or anyone with whom you feel comfortable. Encourage those you care about, especially children, to do the same.

**Act.** Engage in positive activities for your spirit, mind and body. Candlelight vigils and prayer groups are good ways to encourage togetherness and reassurance. Consider doing things for others. Contact community volunteer organizations to see how you can help. You may want to organize activities, such as blood drives, creating "care packages for service men and women or writing letters to people in the military.

**Get help.** For most people, the fear and anxiety will end when peace is declared. But some people may have trouble getting back to their usual routines and normal feelings. Anyone who is troubled for longer than four to six weeks should seek professional help. People with existing mental health issues and those who have suffered past trauma may also want to check in with a mental healthcare provider.

***Information provided courtesy of Mental Health America***