



Angela’s Self-Advocacy Worksheet Series

Trauma Anniversaries & Managing Grief and Loss

Date _____

What are your known triggers during the year? Maybe it’s a single date, birthday, holiday or several dates or a particular month or season that you’ve noticed being not quite yourself. Trauma anniversaries are times that your body remembers more than you do. The brain and the body are inextricably linked, however, the body often leads with its stored trauma when we have unresolved pain still stuck inside; this might create new physical pain, flare-ups of old physical symptoms, mental and/or emotional eruptions. All of these are coping strategies created to help us survive. This worksheet can support you in moving forward into a new-found freedom from the past.

**Please complete this worksheet with the support of a therapist or coach or trusted support person. I’ve created a class to support you in filling this out and it’s available on my website.*

If you have some PTS (post-traumatic stress) symptoms, does that mean that it’s an anniversary or related to old stored trauma? Not necessarily. Sometimes, we experience similar symptoms with any stressful event or if you are overdue for a vacation, or have some other life stress such as moving, a new job, relationship rupture/change, health crisis, or car accident, etc. Pieces of this worksheet can support you during stressful experiences too.

1. Today I’m working on _____.

2. My reason for wanting change _____.

3. What are your stress responses that sneak up on you? Those around you may notice and reflect some symptoms back to you if that feels like a safe conversation to have.





4. What are the primary emotions that you feel during your stress response?

5. How does your body feel during your stress response?

6. Are there brain tapes playing on repeat that are part of your stress response? Write them out, sometimes writing them out makes them shrink or fade away. (I'm, You're, She's - observe)

All of these stress responses are coping strategies and we all have them – be gentle with yourself in the way that you'd be gentle with your best friend if they'd just shared their pain with you. This process is about becoming aware of what your body and mind are saying so you can be proactive and change your response to this season. It may take several years to arrive in a new relationship with your trauma anniversaries, and that's OK. Change can be hard anyway, and when an event only happens for a season, then it may take longer to create the full change you desire versus a trigger that happens every day or week where you have more opportunity to work on it.

It might be helpful to make a plan for how to manage your energy and emotions during this time. Let's start with a few questions:

7. If time, travel and money were no object, where would you like to be during this time period?





8. What would you like to do?

9. Who would you like to be with you?

10. What tools / comfort items do you want to include? (Travel Self-Advocacy Worksheet might help here if travel is part of your plan.)

11. OK, given what we know about actual resources – how can a safe space that is, or aspires to resemble your ideal be created? Can asking for support from an agency or your support community help make this happen?

12. How much planning is needed?

13. Can we set up reminders in an e-calendar/paper calendar to support you in remembering and asking for the support you need?





14. This awareness also supports you in taking better care of yourself in regard to how you show up for work during this time. Are there any requests that you can make of your employer during this time? Who is the appropriate and safe person at work to discuss your needs? Or if you're self-employed, how does this impact your schedule? What more can you do to take care of yourself? (hard to use the word vacation when it's for self)

15. Now that you have some thoughts on how to support yourself, consider who belongs on your support team for this anniversary. Let's make a list of people that you can ask for reliable support during this anniversary. It's hard to ask for specific and direct support, however, learning to ask is a valuable tool for your healing. It might be that you reach out to 10+ folks to cover the time frame or only 1 person.

You might have a friend that will watch TV with you, another that will make your favorite food, and yet another that might help negotiate safety with your employer. It's ok that no one person helps you with everything. (Ideas to get you started: ask for silence, space, puzzles, food, safety, on-call support, movie friend, travel buddy.)

I encourage you to ask for support from at least 2 individuals. Below is space to write down your support person's name and what you'd like to ask them to do for or with you.

Name & My Ask _____

Name & My Ask _____

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Name & My Ask _____

Name & My Ask _____

Name & My Ask _____

Name & My Ask _____





16. Additional thoughts around this exercise?

Great job in leaning into Self-Advocacy! Awareness is the first step in making change in your life. You've got this. Remember to make an appointment with yourself to review your experiences and make notes regarding next year.



Post Reflections: Date _____

17. How are you doing now overall?

18. What would you hope to change for next time? (Looking ahead, how can you set a reminder for your next anniversary?)





19. What went well? What felt healthy?

20. What do you want to remember about this process?





Take a moment here to pause. Find a meaningful way to celebrate you and your growth and healing through this awareness of Self.

This whole process is about reclaiming self-agency and experiencing empowerment through personal choice. There might be times that a simple pause to remember the anniversary is all that's needed to move through it easily. Keeping a space for honoring your healing can still be important. Sometimes it's powerful to reflect on your healing and growth. If you choose to not mark those anniversaries eventually, it's OK! It's your choice.

Keep reading for my answers to some of these questions. I want to normalize how disruptions like anniversaries impact us as we move forward in life. Healing isn't about not having the disruptions anymore, or ignoring them – it's about navigating them in full awareness for more self-agency.

How you travel your healing journey is always your choice.

Love yourself boldly and fiercely as you do this essential work. Self-care is often hard, and incredibly rewarding.

Respectfully,
Angela





Hi, I'm Angela.

I created the Trauma Anniversaries & Managing Grief & Loss worksheet because I needed to be more proactive around my historical trauma. Asking for support isn't easy for me, and I haven't wanted to admit I still have trauma anniversaries. Creating this worksheet, and then taking the time to complete it for myself, has helped me reflect on what I need and want for support. Being proactive has made all the difference.

I hope you can find more self-agency with this tool. Customize it and make it yours. Create a safe space for you to move through these hard times. You are worthy of not being alone – allow your community to love and bless you during this hard time.

Friends and therapists were instrumental in my first discovering that I had seasons and specific dates that had me displaying my stress-response behavior. Without their feedback and inquiry, I often wonder how long it would have taken for my own self-awareness to kick in.

I'm sharing my responses to encourage normalizing our symptoms and responses. Your anniversary response will be unique to you.

During my stress responses, I notice an increase of nightmares, body flashbacks, physical tenseness in my jaw, neck, shoulders, my normal level of vigilance for threats of safety becomes hyper-vigilance, I lose my ability to cook most meals and I resort to my 9-year-old version of packaged meals and peanut butter sandwiches, I eat more sugar, I make mistakes with simple addition and subtraction with money tracking, I lose focus on taking my supplements and daily walks/workouts, I procrastinate lots of regular things that I don't normally procrastinate, I put off housework. And, I'm grouchy, edgy, and impatient.

I do my best to hibernate during this season. I cancel time with my friends and avoid socializing for binge-watching TV, movies, books, journaling or puzzles. I've also done the opposite: over-socialized to avoid "giving in" to my physical manifestations of stress. In the years that I've been applying the trauma lens to my life, I note that even though there is one day that is my anniversary, these symptoms start up to 6 weeks before that date and it can take several weeks for them to fade away after the date.

This is a major disruption to my life. A one-day trigger can keep me off kilter for a very long time. I still show up and work throughout this time, however, I'm typically behind on my deadlines and projects. I'm apologizing more to my friends and colleagues. The way I see it is that some parts of my brain are clearly preoccupied with this old trauma and my body is equally invested in this derailing of my energy.

My tools and comfort items include food from my favorite deli, a scarf that I like to have against my cheek and around my neck, my yoga mat, my journal, tea, art supplies, sewing supplies for hand stitching, some essential oils for a smell good environment and an epsom salt bath, a fun light emotionally easy book, comfortable clothes, Sesame Street or Muppets, comedy movies and my favorite music.





Likewise, I have several smaller disruptions that last only a few days. For me most holidays are triggers from my childhood abuse. I think holidays present issues for many of us for a variety of reasons. My birthday was also a hard time, but now I love my birthday. I know the energy around a date or holiday can shift. My hope is that this worksheet will help you move forward in your healing and growth.

All of these are coping strategies – there is no right way or wrong way to cope. Some strategies might be illegal or addictive, and I believe if they help us stay alive, then they serve us. Much of my healing has come from learning to accept myself and my history. This process is about becoming aware of what your body is trying to tell you so you can be proactive and change your stress response.

It may take several years to arrive in a new relationship with your trauma anniversaries, and that's OK. Change is difficult anyway, and when an event might only happen for a season, then it's going to take longer to create that change versus something that happens every day where you have more opportunity to work on it.

My personal end goal is to process my seasonal trauma in the interest of healing this piece of me so I don't feel hijacked by my history every year. As I heal, I'm able to choose coping strategies that are healthier for my whole-self. A big part of that is filling out this worksheet well ahead of my stress response, so that I have a plan for the next season.

After my season is over, I reflect in my journal about what worked and what I'd like to do differently next year. Each year, I experiment with different activities and support people – friends and family of choice. At the very least, it helps me remember to bring it up with my partner, therapist, and closest friends so they can be understanding of my distance, distractions, and requests for active support.

My hope is that you learn and grow with the added awareness of yourself during this reflection process. My hope is that you learned how to ask for support in new ways and that your community responded in safe and healthy ways. My hope is that you keep making this worksheet YOURS. Add, remove, edit and make it workable for you. When you are done with it, shred it, burn it or save it to track your growth. You get to choose every step of your journey, and be proud of yourself.

Love yourself boldly and fiercely as you do this essential work. Self-care is often hard, and incredibly rewarding.

**Respectfully,
Angela**

