

A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 ON THIRD AND  
ELEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS

By

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**ABSTRACT**

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The purpose of this study was to determine if the tragic events of September 11, 2001 affected the lives of third and eleventh grade students in a rural public school. Students in the third and eleventh grade during the 2002-2003 school year were invited to participate in this study. The objectives of this study were to establish if students have changed their lives, in regards to relationships, academic work, and personal safety because of the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington D.C. The study also wanted to determine who students turned to discuss their feelings and concerns with during a confusing and fearful time of this country. The results were compiled, scored, and compared. No statistical significance was found except on Items 1, 2, 5, 6, and 8.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all the friends and family who lost loved ones in the tragic events of September 11, 2001 and to the firefighters and police officers that risked their lives trying to help.

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To Jay, for his computer support, knowledge, praise, and love

To my close friends, thank you for believing in me

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

On September 11, 2001 terrorists savagely attacked the United States of America. Many individuals were killed and survivors had to learn to live without their loved ones. The brutal act was committed by an organized terrorist group. Their cause and justification for the act was to create chaos and make American citizens lose faith in this great country. Although the terrorists were successful in destroying buildings, and killing thousands, they did not achieve their ultimate goal: destruction of the America society. The resulting pandemonium angered and bonded the American population. Patriotism increased and American's united as a country. There was an abundance of love for one's neighbor.

The terrorists' attacks of September 11 have changed many aspects of American life. In particular and for the purpose of this study, professional counselors were required to address the needs of the changing society; Americans no longer felt safe in their own neighborhoods and communities. The World Trade Center, a symbol of American financial support was destroyed, which left school counselors and parents with the challenge of comforting and providing support to America's children.

As a result of the horrific terrorist attacks, counseling would be immediately needed for individuals who lost family, friends, and for those who feared the country was under attack and no longer felt secure. School counselors had to attend to the largest challenge of their profession; helping children cope with the loss, fear, and uncertainty about their future.

School counselors are required to be prepared to handle a variety of situations. Parents also need to be prepared to help their child through the stages of life, personal trauma and triumph. Each crisis has to be handled independently, while keeping the individuals in mind. The attack of September 11, 2001, occurred following other violent outbreaks in schools (Columbine, Colorado), which forced counselors to consider alternative methods in order to achieve success at assisting children. It appears that America is no longer a safe heaven. We are susceptible to attack, and in fact may be a “target” in the future. Today’s society is required to endure chaos and turmoil. School counselors need to adapt their programs to the changing environment to better meet the needs of students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this investigation is to learn how the terrorists’ attacks on September 11, 2001 affected American children. Data will be collected during the spring of 2003 through a survey distributed to third and eleventh school students in public schools in Minnesota and Wisconsin. The researcher is interested in the perceptions of students post 9/11/ attack.

### **Research Questions**

There are four questions this study will attempt to answer. They are:

1. How have the terrorists’ attacks of September 11, 2001 affected students on a personal level?
2. How have the terrorists’ attacks affected students in the school setting?
3. Do the terrorist’s attacks of September 11, 2001 still impact students?
4. If there is an impact on students due to September 11, is there a difference between the students in the third and eleventh grades?



## **Definition of Terms**

There are four terms that need to be defined:

**Crisis Counseling:** Short-term services to help relieve any grieving, stress, or mental health problems caused or aggravated by the a disaster or its aftermath (*Is crisis counseling available?*, 2002).

**Ground Zero:** Area immediately surrounding the actual location of the September 11 attack, i.e. World Trade Center.

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:** A form of anxiety disorder that is triggered by an individuals memories of a traumatic event, the event that directly affects the individual or one that was witnessed (MayoClinic.com, n.d).

**Terrorism:** An individual that uses unlawful threats by force or violence to intimidate or scare societies or governments due to ideological thoughts or political reasons (*American heritage college dictionary*, 1993).

## **Assumptions and Limitations**

It is assumed that students believe that the terrorists' attacks of September 11, 2001 have actually had an impact on them. A limitation is that due the geographic location of the terrorism on 9/11, school children may feel this topic has nothing to do with their guidance program.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the ramifications of terrorist attacks, the affect on students, and to review how school counselors have adjusted their crisis programs in school setting. The chapter will discuss what happened on September 11, 2001, the aftermath of that day, reactions and emotions of student body, strategies for helping children cope with trauma, and review the literature related to post traumatic stress disorder.

#### September 11, 2001

“A killing storm of terrorism has transformed our lives. We have been swept from a peaceful Tuesday into a calendar of war. New York, Washington, D.C., and a quiet green meadow in Pennsylvania have been attacked, and our fields are now strewn with the remains of heroes. All of us in the Western world are shocked, awestruck, puzzled, and furious. There is no center to this day, no middle or end. All its remaining minutes and hours will be collapsed into that single instant at 8:48a.m. when September 11, 2001, became the saddest day of our history.” (Smith, 2002).

When terrorists attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, American lives changed forever. Americans can vividly remember where they were when they heard the news and magnitude of the attack. Many American (students and adults) had never experienced an attack on American soil before. Children needed the support of caring parents, and school counselors to help them understand and cope with the future.

CNN.com ([www.cnn.com/2001/US/09/11/chronology.attack/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2001/US/09/11/chronology.attack/index.html), 2001, n.p) describes the chronology of terror on September 11, 2001. The horror began at

8:45a.m. (EDT) when passenger American Airlines jet was hijacked from Boston, Massachusetts. The passenger jet aircraft, full of passengers and fuel reroute to Los Angeles was diverted and violently struck the upper floors of the north tower of the World Trade Center in New York, New York. The plane tore a massive hole in the building. The fuel started an immense fire, which would ultimately violate the integrity of the structure. At 9:03a.m. a second jet aircraft was hijacked from Newark, New Jersey and crashes into the south tower of the World Trade Center. The fuel from the jet started an enormous and extremely hot fire. The explosion created an inferno, never experienced in this country. Both towers burned uncontrollably. At 9:43a.m. an American Airlines passenger jet aircraft was hijacked and navigated into the Pentagon (Washington, DC). The result was a massive hole and fire on one side of the Pentagon (Americans Military Center).

At 10:05a.m., the south tower of the World Trade Center collapsed. Debris from the building was scattered across Manhattan. As the towers were collapsing news reports indicate that in Pennsylvania, another jet airliner plane, which was hijacked and possibly reroute a target in Washington, DC crashed into a field. At 10:28a.m. the World Trade Center's north tower collapsed.

The United States of America was left in shock and disbelief. At 8:30p.m. President Bush addressed the nation, attempting to alleviate concerns and restore a sense of calm.

After the "dust settled", Americans came out of hiding. The number of people who died on September 11, 2001 was in the thousands. At the World Trade Center, 2,833 individuals died, with 157 dead on the two hijacked planes that crashed into the towers. In the Pentagon, 189 individuals were dead or missing, with 64 who died on the

hijacked plane; 44 individuals died on the plane that crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. In the effort to save lives in the World Trade Center, 343 New York Fire Fighters and Emergency (EMS) workers lost their own lives. In addition, 23 New York Police Officers and 34 Port Authority Police workers lost their lives in the rescue attempt of so many other individuals, ([www.nightlightfund.org/people.html](http://www.nightlightfund.org/people.html), n.d., n.p)

The statistics of September 11, 2001 were staggering. According to New York Metro ([www.newyorkmetro.com/news/articles/wtc/1year/numbers.htm](http://www.newyorkmetro.com/news/articles/wtc/1year/numbers.htm), n.d, n.p) the World Trade Center took years to build and only twelve seconds to collapse. Out of the 2,833 individuals that lost their lives, only 289 bodies were located which did not suffer dismemberment. 19,858 body parts were found. It is estimated that 3,051 children lost one parent on that horrific day.

It took firefighters, volunteers, and clean-up personnel months to remove the debris from Ground Zero. 300 firefighters took a leave of absence due to respiratory problems. The economic impact was disastrous, as New York City lost 105 billion dollars in the month following September 11, 2001. It is estimated that the number of New Yorkers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of September 11, 2001 is 422, 000 individuals.

New Yorkers and Americans rallied to re-build this country. According to New York Metro ([newyorkmetro.com/news/articles/wtc/1year/numbers.htm](http://newyorkmetro.com/news/articles/wtc/1year/numbers.htm), n.d, n.p) Americans also came together to donate an estimated 1.4 billion dollars to charities of September 11, 2001. Americans donated an estimated 36,00 units of blood.

The terrorist attacks not only took away the lives of individuals, but they also destroyed 146, 100 jobs in New York City ([newyorkmetro.com/news/articles/wtc/1year/numbers.htm](http://newyorkmetro.com/news/articles/wtc/1year/numbers.htm), 2002, n.p.) The industry that

suffered that lost amount of job loss was the aviation industry. Due to passenger aircrafts being used to attack The World Trade Centers and the Pentagon, anxiety levels have been raised (<http://english.pravda.ru/economics/2001/11/01/19774.html>, November 11, 2001, n.p). Ticket reservations and sales have dramatically dropped after September 2001.

New York Metro stated that in 2001 the number of Americans that changed their holiday travel plans from plane to trains or cars was 1.4 million citizens ([newyorkmetro.com/news/articles/wtc/1year/numbers.html](http://newyorkmetro.com/news/articles/wtc/1year/numbers.html)).

Parents and school personnel helped children cope with violence and terror by establishing a sense of personal safety and security, (National Association of School Psychologists, 2001). Schools provided small group settings in which students could talk about the terrorists' attacks and teachers referred students to the school counselor.

Various hospitals sent counselors into the school to help students work through their emotions and concerns about 9/11 (Hoff, 2002).

#### Student Reactions

“Those of us who live and work with college students could only wonder if this would be the millennium generation’s defining moment”, stated Nancy Lange, assistant director of the department of residence, research, and technology at Michigan State University (Lange, 2002). Lange was part of a team who designed a web-based survey to determine what students were feeling, thinking, and doing in response to September 11<sup>th</sup>. 4,000 students were sent the survey and approximately 600 responded. The survey posted three quantitative questions; other questions were “open-ended”. Sixty percent of the students stated they had made a donation of money or blood, and six percent reported that they personally knew someone who was killed or missing due to the events of

September 11<sup>th</sup>. Questions asked students to assess if they felt more positive, less positive, or unchanged about 25 different aspects about their lives and the world.

The area the students reported feeling more positive were “your country”, (71 percent). One student wrote, I have never felt so proud to be an American” (Lange 2002, p.22). Interest in discussion about world issues was rated at 66 percent. Other areas of positive feelings included, the level of closeness to your family, role and responsibility of citizenship, quality of your relationship with friends. Areas which students reported feeling less positive were, the level of personal safety, how the news media cover the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the level of concentration on academic work, traveling to other countries, which includes studying abroad. Areas that students reported their feelings as being unchanged were, academic major choice, career plans, ability to manage emotions and thoughts, participating in community services, and participating in programs or discussion on diversity.

The survey conducted at Michigan State University illustrates the internal conflict some students feel. Acts of terrorism have changed the destiny of this country and students were challenged to make decisions regarding their own beliefs and values that will eventually affect and shape the country’s future.

As the events of September 11, 2001 unfolded, millions gathered around the television or radio to collect information and discuss it with others. The question remains: how did children react and how can parents, teachers, and the country help children grasp and understand the magnitude of the tragedy that occurred on September 11, 2001?

According to a new study ten of thousands of New York City schoolchildren were suffering from severe anxiety and other mental health disorders six months after the

terrorists attacks of September 11, 2001, (Harris Bowman, 2002). This study was conducted by the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The study surveyed nearly 8,300 students in the 4<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in a school district of 1.1 million students. The study estimates that 75,000 students suffered symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder after the attack. It is estimated that the number of students' suffering from serious depression is close to 60,000. Nearly 74,000 students suffer from anxiety, and 107,000 students from agoraphobia, which is the fear of being in or near public places. Those children, who were physically close to Ground Zero or knew someone at the World Trade Centers on September 11, were more likely to have experienced trauma. Among the children who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, only one-fifth sought help or counseling from a school counselor (Harris Bowman, 2002).

Students of New York City were asked to describe their reactions to the attacks of September 11, and one boy, now 15, said that most of the students try to put it behind them, (Hoff, 2002). Students try not to think about what happened only a few blocks from their school. The boy also stated that he tries not to focus on it. When students are asked, "how are you doing?" in regards to the attacks, he will answer, "I'm fine" not wanting to discuss their feelings and emotions tied to 9/11. In addition, he stated that many students think that way (Hoff, 2002).

According to Myers Walls (2002), a number of young children will not remember anything about the events that occurred on September 11, 2001. Many children are confused about what took place on 9/11. The state of confusion children face ranges from not being sure if September 11 was a war, did it start a war, or if it was related to war at all. Many children are also confused as to the reason terrorists attacked the United

States. The terrorist attacks have not only increased patriotism among adults, but also in children, (Myers-Walls, 2002). Children proudly wear the colors of red, white, and blue or clothing apparel with the American flag.

According to Diener and Lantieri (2001), there are many different ways children handle their emotions when it comes to violence and terrorism. Children may be sad, anxious, or fearful for their own family's safety. Other children may be confused as to what is happening, while others will express no reaction. Finally, some children may convey a mixture of these emotions. It is educators' responsibility to help children sort through these feelings. In addition, counselors need to develop coping skills.

*Through a Child's Eyes* (HBO, January 7, 2003) is a documentary about children and their feelings and thoughts of the events that occurred on September 11<sup>th</sup>. The documentary was taped during the following nine months of 9/11 of children across the United States. "I can't believe they would do something like that", stated Tyler, age 5. Isdora, age 6, expressed that she was afraid because there was no one to protect her and she felt worried on the inside that something bad was going to occur again. A common theme conveyed by the children was the position of God. Noel, age 6, stated, "she was frustrated with God". A few children asked how God could let this happen and wondered if he was mad at them? Some of the children told how they were so near tall buildings and had bad dreams every night. Julianne, age 7, stated that it was hard to be a kid. She said life did not go back to being normal after the day. Yet others children do not understand why Osama bin Laden does not leave the United States alone. Some of the children gave their explanation of why bin Laden committed such a deadly and hurtful crime against this country. The children's reasons for this terror are that the United States is such a rich country and his country is not; he was jealous. A particularly



intelligent child speculated that in the terrorists culture and religion if they commit heinous crimes in this life in the for the their God and religion, that they will have a better afterlife and be liked better by their God. And other children believed bin Ladan killed so many to make more friends for himself. “We didn’t hurt him”, Julianne, age 7.

Max is 6 years old and he lost his father on a plane that crashed into the World Trade Center buildings. Max’s biggest wish is to have is father back. What Max can not seem to understand is Americans taught the terrorists to fly airplanes, so why would they want to kill Americans after they helped them learn to fly? Through Max’s eyes, the Americans were going a good thing by helping other individuals to learn, grow, and potentially be productive members of society. Instead, the terrorists took the knowledge they gained in the United States and killed thousands. Max just wants to know why?

The children were asked to convey their feelings and thoughts about the American flag. One child described as “beautiful” and another stated that individuals could always see it wherever they go. Children in the documentary expressed their optimism for the future. One child hoped for a world with no guns, and another told his plan of how he would personally stopped the bomb and saved all the lives that were killed on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Finally, another child believed that something good would happen after everything terrible has occurred, it just has not happened yet.

In Canton, Ohio a second grade classroom at Washington Elementary School wrote this poem together. The poem, “Heroes”, was inspired by the heroes of Ground Zero.

H is for...  
 Your helping hands and huge hearts  
     The hours of hard work, the headaches,  
     The heartaches, the heroic act you do,  
     And the honor you bring to our country.

E is for...

Your effort and unending supply of energy  
 The excellence in the example that you set  
 The eyes that look up to you and look to  
 You for help, and the encouragement you  
 Give to everyone every day

R is for...

The real life role models that you are,  
 Your quick response for help and rescue,  
 For reassuring, recovering, and returning  
 Without the promise of a personal reward.

O is for...

All you do for others, overcoming fears,  
 Your occupation of helping and saving,  
 Your obvious dedication and bravery,  
 And your outstanding commitment to bettering our world.

E is for...

Each time you endanger your life to help,  
 Exceeding expectation and going the extra  
 Mile, for the hardships you endure in your  
 Experience, and the education and enrichment  
 You provide.

S is for...

The service and the standards you set for  
 Society, the many selfless acts,  
 The sacrifice, the lives you save,  
 The sadness you see, and all of the small  
 Things that seem to go unnoticed (Smith, 2002).

Emotions will also vary in severity from child to child, depending upon their development stage and environmental location. According to the American School Counselor Association (2002), children are going to have common responses when it comes to the acts of terrorism. Fear is their main reaction. As Diener and Lantieri (2001) stated, it is the fear for the safety of the child and their family. The American School Counselor Association stated that, "A child's picture of terrorism may include a bomb dropped on their home" (2002, p. 2). A child's imagination may seem unrealistic to adults, but in their mind, it is quite possible that the worst will happen. Rumors and/or media coverage of the terrorism occurring will also enhance their worries. The thought

of additional terrorists' attacks add to their fear. Students will also feel a loss of control; specifically control over their environment. For example, the military actions of the United States and foreign countries are something children cannot control and may be confused about. Due to their perceptive loss of control, children will grasp onto anything they feel they have control over, such as toys and food, (National Association of School Psychologists, 2002).

Anger is another emotion expressed by children in response to terrorism. Children may be angry at other countries and individuals affiliated to the recent terrorists attacks. Loss of stability is unsettling for children. Terrorists have destroyed trust and a sense of security that children used to possess before September 11, 2001. Children of military members may feel isolated because their friends may not understand how it feels to have a family member leave for active duty. Children of military members may even be jealous that their friends have family in the home. Children need normalcy in their life and when a parent leaves for military duty, the unknown is almost certain. Children will also react to war and terrorism in a state of confusion. Confusion can occur on two levels. First, children may feel confused about the terrorists and war. Secondly, children may have trouble understanding the difference between violence as seen on television and in the movies, and what actually takes places on the news. Separating the realities may require adult help and knowledge, (National Association of School Psychologists, 2002).

Specific reactions to traumatic events will also vary according to the age of the child. Young children, ages 1-6 years, will respond to tragedy by expressing helplessness and passivity, experiencing heightened arousal and confusion, have difficulty talking about the event, cognitive confusion, generalized fear, have difficulty identifying

feelings, nightmares, regressive symptoms, anxieties about death, inability to understand that death is permanent, and somatic symptoms (Hamblen, 2002).

School-aged children, 6-11 years, will respond to a disaster by having feelings of responsibility and guilt, shaken by reminders of the event, nightmares and other sleep disturbances, concerns about safety, angry outbursts, close attention to parents' anxieties, school avoidance, changes in mood, somatic changes, withdrawal, regression, separation anxiety, loss of interest in hobbies, and giving magical explanations to fill in missing information, (Hamblen, 2002). Pre-adolescents and adolescents, 12-18 years, will react to a shocking event by being self-conscious, being rebellious, and experience abrupt changes in relationships. They may also experience depression, withdrawal, a decline in school performance, wishful revenge, and sleep and eating disturbances, (Hamblen, 2002).

Another way that children can be traumatized at the present is by proxy. "Trauma by proxy" is a traumatic event that has happened to someone else, but a child is able to identify with the victim (Brown, n.d.). This kind of trauma has happened with the attacks on the World Trade Center. Trauma by proxy is due to the fact that young children are still developing and have a limited life perspective on life, they will often internalize the anxiety and fear of the trauma (Brown, n.d.). In addition, since September 11, children as young as 2 ½ years have learned to connect planes with crashing into buildings, even though their parents thought their children had no exposure to the event, (Myers-Walls, 2002).

### Helping Children Cope With Trauma

Coping strategies can help children get through this difficult time in the country's history by assuming children know what is happening in the country. A lack of

communication about the event does not protect children, for they will only hear information from somewhere else. Tell children the truth and stick to the facts. It is also important to keep explanations developmentally appropriate for the student's age. Maintaining a "normal" routine for students and monitor viewing of scenes of the aftermath (National Association of School Psychologists, 2001). Children may be concerned that other children lost a parent or afraid that terrorists will strike again. Besides showing patriotism by wearing red, white, and blue, help children find a way to get involved in an organization. For example, find ways that raise money for the victims of September 11. Doing something concrete may also help children; concrete physical exercises will give children chance to process the trauma and exercise control over a very frightening event. Examples of concrete activities include, make a poster for a local fire department, do a drawing of an American flag surrounded by pictures of things that make the United States great, and write a letter of support to President Bush urging him to be a wise and strong leader, (Brown, n.d.).

There are also specific steps when helping children at different ages. For children ranging in age from infancy to two and half years, parents and educators need to maintain a child's routine, avoid unnecessary separation from important individuals in the child's life, maintain a calm environment, avoid exposure to reminders of the disaster, and expect that some child will regress, (Hamblen, 2002). Helping children ages 2 and half to 6 years should be done by listening and tolerate child's retelling of the event, respect child's fears and anxieties, help child to name strong feelings they are experiencing, expect uncharacteristic behavior, set limits on scary hurtful play, and maintain routines, (Hamblen, 2002). Children 6-11 years of age need to be listened to and have their feelings and emotions respected. Educators and parents should monitor the child's play,

may re-enact trauma with peers or siblings, and allow children to try new ways of coping with their fearfulness (Hamblen, 2002). Finally, children eleven to eighteen years, adults should encourage them to talk about the traumatic event with either their teachers or parents, provide the adolescent time spent with their support system, explain that the strong feelings they may be experiencing are normal, and encourage the adolescent to engage in activities that they enjoy (Hamblen, 2002).

The research also indicates ways parents and educators can help children cope with violence due to war and terrorism. All adults should model calmness and control. Children watch adults and how they respond to situations and react in a similar manner (National Association of School Psychology, 2001). Adults should reassure children that they are safe and that trustworthy people are in charge. Adults should also let children know that it is acceptable to be upset (National Association of School Psychology, 2001). Adults should explain the all-different kinds of emotions are okay when such a horrific tragedy like September 11 occurs. Observing children's emotional state is also important to look for signs of heightened anxiety. Adults need to tell children the truth. Adults should not pretend the events did not happen or that they are not serious. In addition, adults should stick to the facts and keep explanations developmentally appropriate. Lastly, adults need to monitor their own stress level because children will need their support (National Association of School Psychology, 2001).

Schools and school personnel are also important resource in helping children cope with violence and terrorism. Schools can assure children that they are safe. Schools can reassure students that the schools are well prepared to care for the students at all times in an event an emergency should occur. Having the school's crisis response plan in place is extremely important, which means informing parents and teachers of protocols. Schools

should maintain structure and stability within the building, normalcy is a must (National Association of School Psychologists, 2001). Schools should have their school counselors and psychologists available in the event that students need to talk or want extra support. The school counselors and psychologists should also know what community resources are available. It is helpful to students if the school schedule allows students time for age appropriate discussion and at the same time, schools need to monitor or restrict viewing of media coverage of war and its aftermath (National Association of School Psychologists, 2001).

Parents and educators should monitor the exposure to the media and continual repetitions of the traumatic event in pictures and sounds. Continued exposure to violence of September 11, carries the risk of re-traumatizing a child. Parents, educators, and students will function better if reasoning, discussion, and problem solving is used in their interactions with each other. It is also beneficial to discuss methods for creating peace and alternative options for when conflict occurs (Myers-Walls, 2002).

Overall, parents and educators can help children suffering from a disaster by creating a safe environment, provide extra reassurance, reinforce that the government is combating terrorism, and rebuilding what terrorists' destroyed. Adults need to be aware that children will take on the anxiety that elders carry, so therefore it is important for adults to try to put the attacks into perspective, and most importantly, be honest (Hamblen, 2002).

#### Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

It was in 1980 that the American Psychiatric Association added Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, to the third addition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) (Friedman, 2002). PTSD is a psychiatric disorder that can

occur following an experience or witnessing life-threatening events. PTSD can be a persistent disorder, occurring for several years and sometimes for a lifetime. Traumatic events leading to a PTSD diagnosis include: war, natural disasters, terrorists' attacks, serious accidents, or violent personal assaults. Individuals suffering from PTSD often relive the experience through nightmares and flashbacks (Carlson and Ruzek, 2002). They may have difficulty sleeping, and may feel estranged. PTSD is a co-morbid disorder usually occurring with depression, substance abuse, and memory problems. PTSD affects all aspects of the individual's life. Individuals may lose their ability to function in family or social life, in their occupation, in their married life, and may have trouble parenting (A National Center for PTSD Fact Sheet, 2002).

When PTSD was first considered a psychiatric disorder, little was known what a diagnosis in children and adolescents would look like. Eventually it was determined that children and adolescents may receive a diagnosis of PTSD if they survived natural disasters, a kidnapping, rape, murder of a parent, sniper attacks, school shootings, war, peer suicide, automobile accidents, a plane crashes (Hamblen, 2002).

Hamblen (2002) reports that few studies have been conducted on the general population of children and adolescents and their rate of exposure of PTSD. Results from these studies indicate that 14 to 43% of boys and 15 to 43% of girls have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime.

According to Hamblen (2002), there are three factors that may increase the probability that children and adolescents will develop PTSD. The three factors are the severity of the traumatic event, the physical closeness to the traumatic event, and the child's reaction to the traumatic event. The last factor is especially important in the development of PTSD and includes family and support systems. Family support systems



and the level of parental coping skills will affect to what extent children will develop PTSD. Children with greater family support and less parental distress have children with lower levels of PTSD symptoms.

PTSD presents itself very differently in specific age groups. Very young children lack the ability to verbalize their feelings and therefore express their anxiety in their actions. Young children will have generalized fears in the separation of loved ones; they may avoid situations that are related to the traumatic event, experience sleep disturbances, and show a preoccupation with symbols and words related to the disasters. These children may also express their anxiety in their play habits by repeating certain themes of the disaster (Hamblen, 2002).

Elementary school-aged children will experience “time skew” and “omen formation”, which is not usually found in adults in PTSD (Hamblen, 2002). Time skew means children will incorrectly place the time and which order traumatic events occur. Omen formation refers to a belief that there were enough warning signs of the upcoming traumatic event. Therefore, children believe that if they are alert enough they will not miss the next disaster. As with very young children, elementary children will exhibit posttraumatic symptoms in their play and drawings. At this age, school-aged children will verbalize their feelings and emotions.

PTSD in adolescents more closely resembles PTSD in adults. Differences between adolescents and adults include the play adolescents engage in; they may also incorporate traumatic reenactment in their daily lives. In addition, adolescents may exhibit impulsive and aggressive behaviors (Hamblen, 2002).

Children and adolescents who have experience a traumatic event most often encounter symptoms that affect their life. They will have troubled relationships with

peers and family members, they will act out, and have problems in school performance. A common co-occurring disorder is depression. Other disorders that are common in children and adolescents are substance abuse, separation anxiety, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, panic disorder, conduct disorder, and oppositional defiant disorder, (Hamblen, 2002).

Treatments for children and adolescents diagnosed with PTSD vary. For some individuals with PTSD, a natural recovery will relieve the symptoms but for the majority of other children an effective treatment is necessary. Treatments that have been documented to work effectively are cognitive-behavioral therapy, play therapy, psychological first aid, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing, and medications (Hamblen, 2002).

Cognitive-behavioral therapy for children includes having the child discuss the traumatic event, develop relaxation and assertiveness skills, and amend any inaccurate facts and thinking about the event. Cognitive-behavioral therapy also involves challenging the child's false ideas about the traumatic event (Hamblen, 2002). Cognitive-behavioral therapy often is accompanied by psycho-education and parental involvement. Psycho-education involves teaching parents and educators about the signs and symptoms of PTSD so they can recognize and get treatment for the children. The more the parents are involved in giving support to their children the better the children will be able to cope with the traumatic experience, (Hamblen, 2002).

In play therapy, the therapist uses games, drawings, and toys to help the child process the traumatic event. Psychological first aid helps children and adolescents clarify trauma related events, improve PTSD reactions, encourage children and adolescents to express their feelings, and teach problem solving skills. Eye movement desensitization

and reprocessing combines cognitive therapy with direct eye movement. In a last resort, medication may be used to help alleviate the symptoms of PTSD in children and adolescents, (Hamblen, 2002).

Children, adolescents, and adults diagnosed with PTSD are not the only individuals affected by the disorder. In the first weeks following a disaster, individuals will feel unexpected sense of detachment, anxiety, and anger in their close family and friendships. PTSD interferes with an individual's ability to trust, to experience emotional closeness, communicate skills, and do effective problem solving. These symptoms may make it hard for family members to get along with individuals who have been affected by a severe drama. It is hard for family members to watch a loved one go through a varied of emotions and feelings and believe that they are completely helpless (A National Center for PTSD Fact Sheet, 2002).

Individuals with PTSD may push away close family and friends, but these relationships are extremely beneficial in the recovering process. Close relationships provide companionship and a sense of belonging. Close relationships offset the isolation the PTSD individuals may feel (A National Center for PTSD Fact Sheet, 2002). It is extremely important that parents foster close relationships with children diagnosed with PTSD to ensure that the child feels comforted and supported.

Close relationships also provide self-esteem to individuals with PTSD. Close relationships give individuals the opportunity to build up their self-esteem. With a growing sense of self-esteem, individuals with PTSD are able to combat guilt and depression that are often experienced with PTSD. Close family relationships also lead to opportunities to make contributions, which in turn can reduce feelings of failure and estrangement. Finally, close family relationships can provide emotional support to

individuals with PTSD to help them cope with life stressors and strain (A National Center for PTSD Fact Sheet, 2002).

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to find if the events of September 11, 2001 have impact on students currently enrolled in elementary and high school. This chapter will describe will development of the survey, a description of the sample selection, and data analysis. In addition, this chapter will include methodological limitations.

#### Survey Development

After a review of the literature to look for appropriate instrument, it was determined that the researcher would develop her own. She developed a list of appropriate questions in conjunction with her researcher advisor, keeping in mind age and developmental appropriateness.

#### Subject Selection and Description

The researcher contacted the superintendent and principles of two high schools in two different midwestern cities; one in a large urban city and one in a small rural city. The urban elementary and high schools chose not to participate in the study. The superintendent and teachers of the schools reviewed the cover letter/consent form (Appendix A) and the survey (Appendix B). The two forms were then sent home to the parents of two third grade classes and three 11<sup>th</sup> grade English classes for the signatures of the parents and returned to the teacher. The third grade class was composed of 55 students and the eleventh grade was composed of 70 students.

Students attending third and eleventh grade were invited to participate in this study. Two third grade teachers were told how the survey should be distributed. After permission slips had been sent home and returned signed, the third grade students were

given the survey to complete at the end of the following day. The eleventh grade students were asked to participate during their English class, which were periods 1, 2, and 3 during the course of an eight-hour day.

#### Instrumentation

The researcher designed an original survey for this study. A one-page survey was distributed for the students to complete. Topics on the survey included questions regarding fear, availability of their school counselor, and how activities in their personal lives have changed. No measures of reliability or validity have been reported because the survey is specifically designed for this study. A final copy of the survey is located in Appendix B.

#### Data Collection

Permission to distribute surveys was sought by the superintendent, principals and teachers in the schools. After permission was granted from the superintendent, principals, and teachers, the parents of students in the third and eleventh grade were notified of their child's participation in the survey. A permission slip was sent home for them to read, sign, and return. A copy of the survey was attached to the permission slip. Both female and male students were asked to participate. A copy of the consent form is located in Appendix A. The principals, teachers, and parents will be contacted in the Spring semester of 2003. After the child's parents granted permission, the surveys were distributed the following day after the permission slips were sent home. Students were granted as much time as need to complete the survey. Students were compelled to participate. The alternate to participate in the study was to sit quietly. The students returned the finished survey to their teachers. The teachers put the surveys into an envelope. The researcher collected the surveys at the end of the school day.

### Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using statistical and manual methods. Data was analyzed using central tendencies, of mode, mean, median, frequency counts, and chi-square analysis.

### Limitations

Limitations of this study include: 1) no measures of validity or reliability on the instrument, 2) only one school participated in this study, 3) Proximity of students to Ground Zero, 4) the demographics of the rural city cannot be generalized to the population of the United States, 5) third graders are not at the same developmental stage as the eleventh graders and therefore may not be able to comprehend and answer the questions appropriately.

CHAPTER FOUR  
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of September 11, 2001 on students currently enrolled in elementary and high school. The sample was composed of 16 students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and 11 of the students in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. There were a total of 11 males and 14 females in the sample. The survey consisted of 10 items. The only items found to be statistically significant were items one (confusion) and item number two (teachers and friends), and item number five (anger and respectful). Data was analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, and chi-square analysis.

Table 1 demonstrates the percentages, frequency counts, and statistical significance of Item 1 “feeling when I heard about 9/11: confusion”. This item was found to be statistically significant at the .05 level. Table indicates that 11<sup>th</sup> graders experienced a greater sense of confusion when hearing about 9/11 than did 3<sup>rd</sup> graders (not confused: 87%).

Table 1

		ITEM01A FEELING WHEN HEARD ABOUT 9/11: CONFUSION		Total
		1 yes/checked	2 no/not checked	
GRADE LEVEL OF 1 STUDENT	03 <sup>rd</sup> grade Count	2	14	16
	Expected Count	4.7	11.3	16
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	12.50%	87.50%	100.00%
2 11 <sup>th</sup> grade	Count	6	5	11
	Expected Count	3.3	7.7	11
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	54.50%	45.50%	100.00%
Total	Count	8	19	27
	Expected Count	8	19	27
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	29.60%	70.40%	100.00%
Chi-Square Tests				
Fisher's Exact Test	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	0.033		



Table 2 indicates the percentages, frequency counts, and statistical significance of Item 2 “who did you talk to about 9/11: teachers”. This item was found to statistically significant at the .001 level. This table indicates that 81% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders talked with their teachers about 9/11 versus 3<sup>rd</sup> graders (0%).

Table 2

		ITEM02B WHO TALK TO ABOUT 9/11: TEACHRES		Total
		1 yes/checked	2 no/not checked	
GRADE LEVEL OF 1	03 <sup>rd</sup> grade Count	0	16	16
	Expected Count	5.3	10.7	16
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
2	11 <sup>th</sup> grade Count	9	2	11
	Expected Count	3.7	7.3	11
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	81.80%	18.20%	100.00%
Total	Count	9	18	27
	Expected Count	9	18	27
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	33.30%	66.70%	100.00%
Chi-Square Tests				
Fisher's Exact Test	Exact Sig. (2-sided)			0

Table 3 shows the percentages, frequency count and statistical significance of Item 2 “who did you talk to about 9/11: friends”. This item was statistically significant of the .01 level. This table show that a greater percentage of high school students (81%) talked with their friends about 9/11 than did 3<sup>rd</sup> graders (No = 68%).

Table 3

		ITEM02B WHO TALK TO ABOUT 9/11: FRIENDS		Total
		1 yes/checked	2 no/not checked	
GRADE LEVEL OF 1 03 <sup>rd</sup> grade STUDENT	Count	5	11	16
	Expected Count	8.3	7.7	16
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	31.30%	68.80%	100.00%
2 11 <sup>th</sup> grade	Count	9	2	11
	Expected Count	5.7	5.3	11
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	81.80%	18.20%	100.00%
Total	Count	14	13	27
	Expected Count	14	13	27
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	51.90%	47.10%	100.00%

Chi-Square Tests

Pearson Chi-Square	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
	6.677	1	0.01

Table 4 shows the frequency count, percentages, and statistical significance of Item 5 “What are your reactions now: Angry”. This item was found to be statistically significant at the .05 level. This table indicates some confusion among 11<sup>th</sup> graders about their reactions, while 3<sup>rd</sup> graders indicate a low percentage of feelings of anger (12%).

Table 4

		ITEM05F WHAT ARE YOUR REACTIONS NOW: ANGRY		Total
		1 yes/checked	2 no/not checked	
GRADE LEVEL OF 1 03 <sup>rd</sup> grade STUDENT	Count	2	14	16
	Expected Count	4.7	11.3	16
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	12.50%	87.50%	100.00%
2 11 <sup>th</sup> grade	Count	6	5	11
	Expected Count	3.3	7.7	11
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	54.50%	45.50%	100.00%
Total	Count	8	19	27
	Expected Count	8	19	27
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	29.60%	70.40%	100.00%

Chi-Square Tests

Fisher's Exact Test	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	0.033
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Table 5 shows the frequency count, percentages, and statistical significance of Item 5 “What are your reactions now: Respectful”. This item was found to be statistically significant at the .01 level. Again it seems that 11<sup>th</sup> graders have mixed reactions about 9/11 in terms of feeling respectful, whereas 63% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders indicated they are not respectful in terms of their reactions now.

Table 5

		ITEM05F WHAT ARE YOUR REACTIONS NOW: RESPECTFUL		Total
		1 yes/checked	2 no/not checked	
GRADE LEVEL OF 1 03 <sup>rd</sup> grade STUDENT	Count	1	15	16
	Expected Count	4.1	11.9	16
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	6.30%	93.80%	100.00%
2 11 <sup>th</sup> grade	Count	6	5	11
	Expected Count	2.9	8.1	11
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	54.50%	45.50%	100.00%
Total	Count	7	20	27
	Expected Count	7	20	27
	% within GRADE GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT	25.90%	74.10%	100.00%

## Chi-Square Tests

Fisher's Exact Test	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	0.009
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A t-test was run on items 6-10 to determine any differences using grade as the independent variable. Two items were found to be significant at the .05 level. Survey question number 8 “What are your current feelings about personal safety?” was statistically significant (Table 6). Table 7 displays the range of student responses, which indicate that more than 50% of students feel above average or high in their personal safety.

## Independent Samples Test

Table 6

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
		F	Sig.
ITEM08 WHAT ARE YOUR CURRENT FEELINGS ABOUT PERSONAL SAFETY	Equal variances assumed	5.542	0.027
	Equal variances not assumed		<.05

Table 7

ITEM 08 WHAT ARE YOUR CURRENT FEELINGS ABOUT PERSONAL SAFETY

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 low		3	11.1	11.1
	2 below average		2	7.4	18.5
	3 medium		5	18.5	37
	4 above average		7	25.9	63
	5 high		10	37	100
	Total		27	100	

Item number 6, “How often do you think about 9/11 now”, was found to be statistically significant at the .05 level (Table 8).

Independent Samples Test  
Table 8

t-test for Equality of Means

		T	df	Sig. (2-sided)	Std. Error Difference
ITEM06	Equal variances	-2.654	25	0.014	0.366
HOW OFTEN DO	Assumed				
YOU THINK ABOUT	Equal variances	-2.396	14.287	0.31	0.406
9/11 NOW	not assumed				

When asked “How often do you think about 9/11 now?” more than 80% of students think about 9/11 somewhat to not at all (Table 9).

Table 9

ITEM 06 HOW OFTEN DO YOU THINK ABOUT 9/11 NOW

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 not at all	5	18.5	18.5	18.5
	2 a little	13	48.1	48.1	66.7
	3 somewhat	5	18.5	18.5	85.2
	4 a lot	3	11.1	11.1	96.3
	5 all the time	1	3.7	3.7	100
	Total	27	100	100	

## DISCUSSION

Based upon the findings in this study, it is clear that although the researcher anticipated a greater impact of September 11 upon students the results indicate otherwise. There may be a variety of reasons for the results. The developmental age of the students may have impacted survey results. In addition, some of the questions on the survey may have not been developmentally appropriate for some students. For example, third graders may not have known what some words meant (e.g. “respectful”), and therefore may not have chosen answers that really described their feelings. Students in the third and eleventh grade may have engaged in egocentric thinking when answering certain questions, specifically, “What are your current feelings about personal safety” and “How often do you think about 9/11 now”? For example, third graders tend to view things very concretely and in the present tense, so an event, which occurred nearly two years ago, may not have much impact on their feelings of personal safety today. Likewise, adolescents tend to view life from an egocentric and invincible position, which might explain their lack of concern regarding their personal safety. In addition, students may not have been as concerned about the impact of 9/11 on their personal safety due to the location of the event. Since 9/11 did not occur in their hometown, it was of less concern to them and their feelings of personal safety. Students may have moved on with their lives. It has been nearly two years since the occurrence of the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington D.C. Students may be done grieving or being fearful or experiencing anxiety and returned back to their regular routine.

However, it is important to note that statistically significant differences were found on several items. It appears that on the Items 1, 2, and 5, 11<sup>th</sup> graders were more aware of their reactions, more likely to talk with teachers and friends, and more likely

nearly two years after 9/11 to experience confusion about feeling angry and respectful. Again, developmental differences may account for these differences. Adolescents are beginning to think critically about life; they are able to think hypothetically about “what should be” rather than what is. Their idealism about how life “should” be may be colored by the reality of 9/11, which was a confusing and life-changing event for many people.

Developmental differences may also explain the statistically significant results on Item 6 and 8 where both 3<sup>rd</sup> graders and 11<sup>th</sup> graders indicate very little thinking about 9/11 now, and very minor concern about their personal safety. It may be a function of their egocentricism that past events have little impact on their current thoughts or feelings of security.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

In summary, the purpose of this study was to determine the impact of September 11, 2001 on third and eleventh grade students currently enrolled in rural public schools during the 2002-2003 school year. The subjects in this investigation consisted of twenty-seven total respondents. Of those respondents, sixteen participants were in the third grade and eleven were in the eleventh grade. Eleven of the respondents were male and fourteen of the respondents were female; two respondents did not complete the gender question on the survey.

Once parental consent was obtained, the participants in this study were asked to complete an original survey developed by the researcher. Data was analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, and chi square analysis. No statistical significance was found on the majority of the items, with the exception of Items 1, 2, 5, 6, and 8. The responses to these items indicated that 11<sup>th</sup> graders were more aware of their reactions, more likely to talk with teachers and friends, and more likely to experience confusion about the events of 9/11. Both levels of students indicated that nearly two years after the event, they did not think a lot about 9/11, nor did they have much concern about their personal safety.

It is the researcher's assumption that third and eleventh grade students do not think about the traumatic events of 9/11 due to the length of time that has passed since 2001. In addition, the researcher believes students at both grade levels engaged in egocentric thinking as a result of their developmental stage. Also, students may not feel



an immediate impact of the events due to their proximity to New York City and Washington D.C.

### Conclusions

The overall results of this study suggest that the traumatic affects of September 11, 2001 do not have as great of an impact on students as the researcher assumed it might. However, there were significant differences found on items 1, 2, 5, 6, and 8. Developmental differences may account for the differences in responses between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders, as well as the amount of time passed since 9/11, and geographic proximity to the event. Therefore, the results of this study reflect that students were impacted by 9/11.

### Recommendations

It is this researcher's recommendation that further research on the impact of terrorism on children needs to be conducted. A larger sample size may have produced different results. Additionally obtaining a future sample that is more representative of the socioeconomic and sociocultural population of our society as a whole may be helpful. Geographic location is another consideration; a comparison between urban and rural students may yield different results. In this particular study, almost half the participants were in the developmental stage of adolescence, which is a large factor that should be considered due to the impact of egocentric thinking in adolescents.

Beyond of the results of this study, if another terrorist attack should occur on United States soil, it is important to consider the feelings and reactions of students enrolled in school, whether that be elementary, middle, or high school. Particularly among high school students, school staff, families, and parents are needed to provide support and opportunities to allow students to express their concerns and feelings in a

safe and comfortable environment. It is the researcher's opinion that ongoing research on the topic of the impact of terrorism upon on students is important and be continued.

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APPENDIX A

Human Research Consent Form

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Your child's school has an opportunity to take part in a study about the effects of September 11, 2001 on children. I am a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Guidance and Counseling. The attached survey will be distributed in your child's classroom. The teacher has fully approved this project. I am asking your permission for your child to be included in this study. The study has no apparent risks involved. If your child does become upset or concerned while completing the survey, the school guidance counselor will be available to talk with your child. If the guidance counselor is not available, another teacher will be on hand to talk to your child.

For any child who is not permitted to participate or for any child who wishes to leave the classroom, they may sit in the library until the survey is completed.

The records of this study will be kept private and your responses on the survey will not have personal information capable of identifying your child individually. In any sort of report I might submit to the University, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant.

Your decision to have your child participate is completely voluntary. If you agree to allow their participation, you or your child are free to withdraw at any time without negative ramifications.

Questions or concerns about the research study should be addressed to me at 715-233-2315, or Dr. Leslie Koepke, the researcher advisor, at 715-232-2237. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone 715-232-1126.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Carissa Kaproth

Leslie A. Koepke, Ph.D  
Research Advisor

-----

I, do or do not (circle one) agree to allow my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in this study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### Survey



Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: Female                      Male

1) Which of the following feelings did you feel when you heard about 9/11? (Circle all that apply)

Confusion	Nervous	No Understanding	Shock
Fear/Scared	Unsafe	Angry	Sad

2) Who did you talk to about 9/11? (Circle all that apply)

Parents	Teachers	Brother/Sister	Neighbors
Friends	Other Relatives	Counselors	Minister/Religious Leader

3) How did you learn about the attacks of 9/11?

Teachers	Parents	Friends	Radio	Television	Newspaper
Other: _____					

4) Did you help the 9/11 victims by doing any of the following? (Circle all that apply)

Give blood	Send care package	Write a letter	Raise money
Pray for the victims/families	Attend church	Other: _____	

5) When you think about 9/11 now, what are your reactions? (Circle all that apply)

Confusion	Nervous	No Understanding	Shock	
Fear/Scared	Angry	Sad	Respectful	Humble

6) How often do you think about 9/11 now?

All the time	A lot	Somewhat	A little	Not at all
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7) Did 9/11 change your relationship with your family?

All the time	A lot	Somewhat	A little	Not at all
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8) What are your current feelings about your level of personal safety?

Low		Medium		High
1	2	3	4	5

9) How did your school performance change as a result of 9/11?

Low		Medium		High	NONE
1	2	3	4	5	

10) How comfortable do you feel talking about 9/11 now?

A little uncomfortable		Medium uncomfortable		Very uncomfortable
1	2	3	4	5