



## **Helping the Public Manage Fear**

After a Major Fear-Generating News Event  
**DRAFT - 2008**

*The staff of the U.S. in the World Initiative of Dēmos and the National Security Network have – in consultation with professionals from the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, trauma psychology, and public opinion – drawn up preliminary discussion points reflecting the best expert wisdom on how influencers can better help the public manage fear and elicit resilience in the wake of a major fear-generating news event. This draft is intended to generate comment and discussion and will be updated and expanded in response to comments received as well as research commissioned as part of U.S. in the World’s “Managing the Fear Factor” project.*

### ***Take time to acknowledge fear.***

- Don’t go right into partisan attack mode or criticism of past policies.
- Acknowledge public fear – don’t belittle it or skip over it to “root causes”; don’t minimize the seriousness of the crisis.

### ***Propose public responses that are connected to the emotions and concerns that people are experiencing.***

- Don’t just be outraged; give people something to do that is meaningful.
- Not “go shopping,” which has no relationship to what just happened, but also not “and now back to my 10-point plan.” Provide a response that gives the public some feeling of agency.

### ***Construct opportunities for public, communal responses that draw people out of fear and isolation and into community.***

- We know, for example, that immediate willingness to discuss elaborate memorials fills a need in the wake of attacks.
- In Madrid, after the attacks of March 11, 2004, we saw how large public demonstrations of shared sorrow and sober determination also met a need.
- People naturally will turn to their families for support, but encourage and provide opportunities for community support as well – we’re in this together, we’ll get through it together.

### ***Involve the media proactively and line up allies in the media who are interested in helping the public manage fear.***

- Reach out to the media before a crisis occurs, and throughout the process of shaping responses.
- Ask the media to play a specific, constructive role in helping the public manage fear rather than inflaming it – and help the media play such a role through the messages that you deliver.