



Coping with Crime Victimization

Anyone can become a victim of a crime. If it happens to you or someone you love, here are some important points to remember.

Being a victim of a crime can be a very difficult and stressful experience. While most people are naturally resilient and over time will find ways to cope and adjust, there can be a wide range of aftereffects to a trauma. One person may experience many of the effects, a few, or none at all. Not everyone has the same reaction. In some people the reaction may be delayed days, weeks, or even months. Some victims may think they are "going crazy," when they are having a normal reaction to an abnormal event.

Getting back to normal can be a difficult process after a personal experience of this kind, especially for victims of violent crime and families of murder victims. Learning to understand and feel more at ease with the intense feelings can help victims better cope with what happened. Victims may need to seek help from friends, family, a religious or spiritual leader, a counselor, or a victim-assistance professional.

Potential Effects of Trauma

Some people who have been victims of crime may experience some of these symptoms. Seek medical advice if the symptoms persist.

Physical

- Nausea
- Tremors
- Chills or sweating
- Lack of coordination
- Heart palpitations or chest pains
- High blood pressure
- Headaches
- Sleep disturbances
- Stomach upset
- Dizziness
- Loss of appetite
- Startled responses

Emotional

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Guilt
- Grief
- Depression
- Sadness
- Anger
- Irritability
- Numbness
- Feeling lost, abandoned, and isolated
- Wanting to withdraw or hide

Mental

- Slowed thinking
- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Memory problems
- Intrusive memories or flashbacks
- Nightmare
- Inability to concentrate
- Difficulty making decisions

Tips for Coping

These are some ideas that may help you cope with the trauma or loss:

- Find someone to talk with about how you feel and what you are going through. Keep the phone number of a good friend nearby to call when you feel overwhelmed or feel panicked.
- Allow yourself to feel the pain. It will not last forever.
- Keep a journal.
- Spend time with others, but make time to spend time alone.
- Take care of your mind and body. Rest, sleep, and eat regular, healthy meals.



- Reestablish a normal routine as soon as possible, but don't overdo it.
- Make daily decisions, which will help to bring back a feeling of control over your life.
- Exercise, though not excessively, and alternate with periods of relaxation.
- Undertake daily tasks with care. Accidents are more likely to happen after severe stress.
- Recall the things that helped you cope during trying times and loss in the past, and think about the things that give you hope. Turn to them on bad days.

These are things to avoid:

- Be careful about using alcohol or drugs to relieve emotional pain. Becoming addicted not only postpones healing but also creates new problems.
- Make daily decisions, but avoid making life-changing decisions in the immediate aftermath, since judgment may be temporarily impaired.
- Don't blame yourself; it wasn't your fault.
- Your emotions need to be expressed. Try not to bottle them up.

For some victims and families of victims, life is forever changed. Life may feel empty and hollow. Life doesn't "mean" what it used to. Part of coping and adjusting is redefining the future. What seemed important before may not be important now. Many victims find new meaning in their lives as a result of their experience. It is important to remember that emotional pain is not endless and that it will eventually ease. It is impossible to undo what has happened, but life can be good again in time.

Tips for Family and Friends of a Victim of Crime

- Listen carefully.
- Spend time with the victim.
- Offer your assistance, even if the person hasn't asked for help.
- Help with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, and minding the children.
- Give the person private time.
- Don't take the victim's anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell that victim that he or she is "lucky it wasn't worse." Traumatized people are not consoled by such statements.
- Tell the victim that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and help.

National Resources and Hotlines for Crime Victims

The website for the Office for Victims of Crime in the Department of Justice includes an online directory of victim assistance programs here: <https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/findvictimservices>.

U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Office for Victim Assistance. (n.d.). *Coping with crime victimization*. Retrieved August 20, 2019, from <https://www.fbi.gov>

REMEMBER YOU CAN ALWAYS SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP. You don't have to go through this experience alone. **CCA@YourService** is available for you and your family 24 hours a day. Just call **800-833-8707** or visit www.myccaonline.com.