

# The impact of violent crime on you and your family

## How you might feel

Everyone is affected differently by a traumatic event such as a violent crime. There are a wide range of normal responses you may go through and your feelings may differ from day to day. Some days you may feel like you can cope and other days you may feel like you have difficulty doing everyday things.

It is also normal for people who have witnessed the incident and family and friends of the victim to experience similar reactions.

Here are some common emotional and physical reactions to a traumatic event such as a violent crime.



### Common emotional reactions to trauma:

- emptiness or numbness
- grief and loss
- shock and disbelief
- fear or anxiety
- feelings of self blame, shame or guilt
- outbursts of anger or feeling irritable
- feelings of helplessness or panic
- feeling detached and isolated from others
- tiredness and lethargy
- denial or trying to avoid anything to do with the trauma
- sadness, depression or loss of self esteem
- difficulty concentrating or remembering
- concern over burdening others with your problems.

### Common physical reactions to trauma:

- aches and pains like headaches, back aches and stomach aches
- nightmares or problems sleeping
- sudden sweating or heart palpitations
- changes in appetite
- constipation or diarrhoea
- becoming easily startled by noise or unexpected touch
- becoming more susceptible to colds and illnesses.



You may find you have some or all of these symptoms, or none of them. Be assured that your reactions are a normal, natural part of dealing with a trauma. It is important to look after yourself and seek help and support from others. In many cases the symptoms will go away over time with the support of your family and friends.

You may also find that you would like additional support such as counselling, therapy or someone to just listen to you and provide you with information. You can access a support service at any time after a crime has happened. You may feel this is something you want to do very soon after the incident, or you may feel the need after some time has passed, for example leading up to and during a court proceeding. Section 3 lists contact details of free support services for victims of crime.

## Looking after yourself

Everyone has their own way of coping with a traumatic event. Here are some ways that may help you to cope:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• talk about how you feel with someone you trust</li><li>• don't make life changing decisions until you feel ready</li><li>• remember that bad feelings do go away but it can take time</li><li>• exercise regularly</li><li>• limit your intake of alcohol</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• try to structure your days as much as possible</li><li>• make time to do nice things for yourself</li><li>• eat regularly and try to keep your diet healthy</li><li>• keep a journal of how you feel</li><li>• seek help from a support service.</li></ul> |
|---|--|

## For family and friends – your support and wellbeing

Supporting a family member or friend who has been the victim of a violent crime can be difficult, especially as you are probably feeling upset or angry at what has happened to someone you care about. You may be unsure how you should act or what you should say but you want to be a support to them.

Here are some things you can do that may help you cope and provide support to the victim:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• spend time with them</li><li>• listen attentively (if you don't know what to say it is ok to be quietly supportive)</li><li>• don't be judgemental - trust what they are telling you</li><li>• provide opportunities to talk about their feelings</li><li>• tell them you are sorry about what has happened to them</li><li>• avoid telling them you know how they feel</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• don't take angry outbursts personally</li><li>• help them with every day tasks such as cooking and cleaning so they can have some private time</li><li>• be patient and understand that people recover at different rates</li><li>• be mindful not to discuss evidence if there is an active court case.</li></ul> |
|---|--|

When you are giving support to someone else, it is important that you look after yourself because the experience can be hard on you too. Feelings of guilt or powerlessness are common. Give yourself some time out, if possible take some leave from work if you need to. Support services are also available for family and supporters of victims of crime and can provide counselling, moral support and information. Section 3 lists contact details of free support services available to you.

## Supporting a child or young person who is a victim

A child or young person who is a victim of crime will also experience physical and emotional reactions but they may not be able to express them in words the same way an adult can.

Children and young people often experience feelings of guilt and may find it hard to tell someone about the crime that they have experienced. They may also have witnessed family violence and feel afraid or ashamed to tell anyone. It is important that when they do tell an adult they trust, that they are believed and supported and no longer feel like they are going through the experience alone.

**Younger children.** Here are some common reactions that younger children who suffer trauma may show:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• nightmares or problems sleeping</li><li>• bedwetting</li><li>• the behaviour of a younger child</li><li>• clinginess to adults</li><li>• difficulty trusting adults, including parents</li><li>• feeling that what happened is their fault</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• becoming withdrawn and afraid of being left alone</li><li>• suffering headaches and loss of appetite</li><li>• losing concentration</li><li>• fighting with friends or siblings and other antisocial behaviour</li><li>• fear of people, places or things that remind them of what happened.</li></ul> |
|--|--|



**Older children and teenagers.** Older children and teenagers may react to trauma in similar and slightly different ways to younger children. Here are some other common reactions to trauma they may show:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• feeling ashamed or blame themselves for becoming a victim of crime</li><li>• feeling like there is nobody they can turn to for help who understands</li><li>• can no longer concentrate and may start to do badly at school</li><li>• risk-taking or self-harming behaviour</li><li>• feeling worthless</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• feeling angry, anxious or afraid</li><li>• no longer want to be left alone</li><li>• becoming withdrawn and sad</li><li>• can no longer talk about it, or can't stop talking about it</li><li>• feeling like nobody believes them</li><li>• conflicts with family members or friends</li><li>• overt sexual, aggressive or antisocial behaviour.</li></ul> |
|---|--|

While the support of family and friends is very important, it is also important to get professional support from a person or organisation trained to help young victims of crime recover. Support is important to help the child or young person to learn it is not their fault that someone hurt them, so they can learn that other people have been through similar things and start the process of feeling better.

Children and young people can often detect when an adult is worried, stressed or anxious, so it is important to try and keep normal routines in place as much as possible. As an adult supporting a child or young person who is a victim of crime, it is also important to look after yourself and ensure that you have someone to talk to and to support you.

Section 3 lists support services available for children and young victims of crime and their families, such as counselling, therapy and support and information. This includes support when the child or young person is acting as a witness in court.