

Helping Children

It is a very common reaction to try to protect children from trauma. This reaction leads many adults to attempt to hide information about the experience and their reactions from children. News of a traumatic event spreads quickly. Children are adept at picking up subtle signs of family upset and, in the absence of good information, thinking it is their fault.

Sharing information and feelings about the crisis event in a calm and caring way helps children have a clearer understanding of the event, as well as allowing them to express their feelings, thoughts, and concerns. Children fill in the blanks when information is not provided --- thus creating their "own story." Like adults, children's reactions will vary. Some will want to talk, others will not. Some will cry while others appear unconcerned. This is normal and healthy as long as help is made available (if needed) to cope with troublesome reactions.

Reactions Common to Children



- Nightmares
- Crying
- Physical complaints ...
stomach aches, etc.
- Acting out/aggressive behavior
- Withdrawal
- Problems at school

If you feel additional help is needed, consult your family doctor, school nurse or counselor, or mental health professional.

CRIME RESPONSE PROGRAM
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
Victim/Witness Assistance
Madison, Wisconsin

CRIME RESPONSE PROGRAM

Responding to Crime Related Trauma

CRIME RESPONSE SERVICES
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Madison, Wisconsin
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Crime Response Program

The program provides immediate trauma services and support to victims, witnesses and their families on scene or in the early stages of the criminal investigation.

Characteristics of Crime Related Trauma

Crime related trauma involves physical and/or emotional injury or a threat of the same. These may include battery, robbery, home invasion/burglary, child abuse, elder abuse, sex offenses, arson, hate crimes, attempted homicide/homicide, injury/death by intoxicated/negligent use of a motor vehicle. Regardless of the specific nature of the crime --- it is an event outside the usual range of experience and is markedly distressing to most people.

Common Reactions to a Crisis Event

Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing, or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions. Although every person and every incident may be somewhat different, the reactions usually include the same symptoms. Some people may experience symptoms immediately following the incident and some may have a delayed reaction and experience symptoms at a much later time. The following are **normal reactions to a crime**:

PHYSICAL *Reactions*

- Restlessness
- Hyper-alertness
- Tension
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Shaking/tremors
- Change in appetite
- Sleep disturbance/nightmares/flashbacks
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased alcohol consumption

EMOTIONAL *Reactions*

- Anger
- Fear
- Guilt/self-blame
- Sadness/grief/depression
- Withdrawal/isolation
- Dazed/easily startled
- Numbness/shock
- Indecisiveness
- Lack of concentration/memory
- Moodiness/irritability
- Feelings of loss and abandonment
- Feelings of vulnerability/suspiciousness
- Reliving the incident in your memory
- Anxiety

There is no "right" or "wrong" way to react or feel after a crisis event. Many other crime victims have felt the same way you do now. You are not alone and you aren't crazy. Frequently people say they are "fine" and are reluctant to talk about their experience. However, it may be important to talk with others about how you are feeling. Receiving services from a trained trauma responder does not mean that you are weak or crazy. It just means that you have suffered a crisis too powerful to handle alone.

How Reactions Vary

People react to trauma in different ways depending on a variety of factors. Physical and emotional symptoms are common but their intensity and duration can be affected by:

- Support offered by family, friends, co-workers
 - Prior victimization history
 - Mental health history (particularly depression)
 - How one is treated by officials at the time of the incident
 - Other stressors in the victim's life
 - The severity/dangerousness of the crime
 - The availability and receipt of trauma response services
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How to Help Yourself

Realize that you have experienced something out of the ordinary and you need some special care for awhile.

- Try to rest.
- Eat well balanced and regular meals even if you don't feel like it.
- Resist using alcohol or drugs to numb your feelings. Your feelings are normal and if you use alcohol or drugs to "escape" you may delay the healing process.
- Spend time with your friends and loved ones who care about you. Talk about your feelings.
- Avoid making impulsive or important decisions until you have worked through the crisis.