

Keep a journal or do artwork to unburden yourself when intense feelings arise.

Create a serene place where you can escape, either in your imagination or in reality. Make your environment one that you enjoy.



Guidelines

Don't have unrealistic expectations for recovery. Expect the experience to bother you. Don't pretend everything is okay.

Decide not to let the traumatic incident cause you further harm, whenever that is in your control.

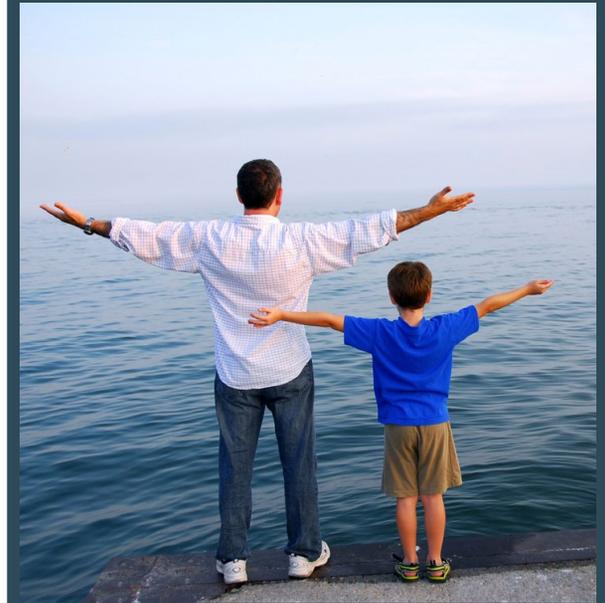
Don't make major changes if you don't need to. An ordinary workload can sometimes seem unbearable. Take one thing at a time. If you normally plan a half an hour to get a job done by rushing through it, schedule 45 minutes or an hour so you can do the job more deliberately and thoughtfully.

Important Advice

Seek professional help if your symptoms persist. Sometimes the trauma is so painful that a counselor or doctor is needed. Your Victim Advocate may be able to help with expenses through the state Victim Compensation Program. Getting help is a healthy choice, a sign of strength, not weakness.

Based on "A Handbook for Providers, COMPSYCH", and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief.

Trauma Reactions and Healthy Coping Tips



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Stress Reactions

It is quite normal for crime survivors to experience emotional and physical aftershocks for days, weeks or months following the trauma of crime. Below are some common symptoms.

Physical Reactions:

- Loss of appetite, nausea
- Headaches, stomach aches
- Insomnia, exhaustion
- Sweating, chills
- Grinding of teeth
- Increased blood pressure
- Rapid heart rate, breathing difficulty

Cognitive Reactions:

- Memory problems, inability to concentrate or make decisions
- Hyper-alert, easily startled
- Nightmares, intrusive thoughts and images (flashbacks)

Emotional Reactions:

- Fear, panic attacks
- Anger, irritability
- Grief and sadness
- Self-blame
- Depression, numbness
- Loss of faith, loss of sense of security

Behavioral Reactions:

- Withdrawal, decreased interest in pleasurable activities
- Impaired job performance, increased use of sick time
- Tearfulness, moodiness
- Increased family conflicts
- Increase in alcohol consumption
- Change in sexual functioning
- Hyperactivity, pacing

Processing a traumatic event

Recognizing common thought processes or stages in your recovery may be helpful. You may experience these feelings in a different sequence or repeat them.

Denial

Disbelief is a common first reaction. Our mind's protective mechanisms prevent us from acknowledging what we find unbearable, at least for a brief time. As shock wears off, there is partial acceptance of what has occurred.

Anger

It is typical to experience anger, resentment and even rage. Survivors may have less patience than usual, and fixate on blame. Anger is frequently displaced onto family members, friends, co-workers and others, such as law enforcement.

Bargaining

Trauma frequently leads to "bargaining" with a higher power/supreme being. In an understandable wish to gain control, victims try to conduct themselves in a certain way in exchange for some outcome.

Depression

Anger and rage are replaced with a great sense of loss. Self-image may become negative and plans for the future may seem unimportant. A person may cry frequently, stay in bed longer, and lose interest in activities that normally gave pleasure.

Acceptance

This is when people come to terms with what has happened, usually after working through the previous stages and adapted to a new life, a "new normal".

Practical Guide to Feeling Better

The following ideas will help you cope and move toward well-being more quickly.

Physical

Eat a healthy diet and get enough rest. If you are irritable or tense from lack of sleep or if you aren't eating correctly, you'll be less able to deal with a stressful situation.

Drink lots of water to flush the chemical cascade triggered by the trauma. Vigorous exercise alternated with relaxation in first 24 -48 hours may also help.

Do not overuse alcohol or drugs in an effort to numb pain.



Emotional

Reach out – people do care. Talk about the incident. Contact a friend and have someone stay with you a few hours or a day.

Be aware that some people may not understand your need to talk. They may give well-meant but unhelpful advice. Some may avoid contact because they are unsure how to help.

Express your feelings as they arise. Take time to cry if needed. Understand that it is not possible to avoid all suffering, that it is a part of the human condition.

Structure your day – keep busy. Maintain as many normal activities as possible. This will help restore your sense of control over your life.