

Victims and Witnesses: *Dealing with a Traumatic Event*

Experiencing a traumatic event can cause unusually strong emotional reactions. Some people report almost no reaction to a critical event, while others report a variety of physical, emotional and social responses. You may find yourself faced with feelings unlike those you have previously experienced. These feelings may come and go and vary in intensity and duration. It is important that you realize that these are normal reactions to an abnormal event.

The following are possible reactions to a traumatic incident.

Physical Symptoms That You May Experience

- Restlessness
- Headaches
- Upset Stomach/Nausea
- Changes in Appetite
- Nightmares/ Flashbacks
- Sexual Problems
- Tenseness
- Tremors/Shaking
- Dizziness
- Sleep Disturbances
- Fatigue/Loss of Energy
- Muscle Aches

Emotional Reactions

- Fear/Anxiety
- Depression/Grief
- Confusion
- Shocked/Dazed
- Easily Startled
- Feeling Numb
- Inability to Concentrate or Memory Lapses
- Avoidance of Situations That are Reminders of the Incident
- Guilt/Blaming Yourself

Sadness

Anger

Emotional Exhaustion/Withdrawal from Family and Friends

Feeling Lost/Abandoned

Moodiness, Irritability

Re-experiencing the Incident Repeatedly in Your Mind

Difficulty in Solving Problems or Making Decisions, Feeling Overwhelmed

There is no "right" or "wrong" way to react or feel as a victim. You are not alone and you are not crazy! It is important to talk with family members, friends, or a counselor about your experience. Getting help from a professional does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply means that the particular event was too powerful to handle alone.

Things to do to take care of yourself:

Realize you have experienced something out of the ordinary and are in need of extra special TLC for a while.

Eat well balanced and regular meals (even when you don't feel like it). Avoid junk food, sugar and coffee.

Resist the urge to take drugs or alcohol in order to "escape." This generally leads to feeling more depressed in the long run.

Surround yourself with people who care about you. Don't hesitate to ask someone to spend time with you.

Talk about your feelings. Sharing your experience with others can help you put the incident in perspective.

Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.

Record your thoughts and feelings in a journal. Writing helps work through your feelings. It also provides a record of your progress.

Take time to relax, listen to music, read a book. Alternate with periods of physical activity.

Avoid making impulsive decisions, such as resigning from your job, until you have worked through the crisis. Realize that this is not a good time to make major life decisions - if you must, seek help and support from a trusted friend or relative.

Remember:

What Happened to You was NOT Your Fault!