

Summary

Resolution of traumatic stress is a healing process. It is important to allow yourself time to grieve your losses, such as physical injury or feelings of security and to give yourself permission to heal at your own pace.

Although one of the elements of the healing process is being able to talk about the event and your reactions to the event, some people may not be able to provide the support you need. It's important you use many sources, including family, friends, co-workers and possibly professional counseling and victim support groups.

Your life history, values, social support, impact of the event, and degree of personal responsibility are all factors affecting resolution of trauma.

As a long-term goal, it is important to integrate the event into your life. This will help you to make plans for the future with a new sense of strength and vitality.

Practical Help for People Who Have Been Exposed to the Traumatic Effects of Robbery...



For Bank Employees

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When A Bank Is Robbed

We've all seen a pebble drop into a pool and the ripples produced by the impact of that pebble. A similar ripple occurs from person to person when crime victimization happens.

As a bank employee, you have been exposed to a crime in your work setting. Even those who were not directly confronted will experience reactions from exposure to the robbery or an attempted robbery of your bank.

How people react to these events varies from person to person and is affected by individual factors such as how you usually handle stress and what kind of support you have both inside and outside of work.

Your reaction may be immediate or it may be delayed. You may experience symptoms that are physical, emotional, or cognitive (involving your thinking ability).

Generally speaking, in time these reactions should diminish.

It is important to realize that these are normal feelings, behaviors and reactions to an abnormal event.

Common Reactions To A Traumatic Event

Physical:

- ❖ Nausea
- ❖ Sweating
- ❖ Dizziness
- ❖ Headaches
- ❖ Hyperventilation
- ❖ Sleeping problems
- ❖ Stomach discomfort

Emotional:

- ❖ Anxiety/Fear
- ❖ Grief
- ❖ Anger
- ❖ Loss/Isolation
- ❖ Withdrawal
- ❖ Numbness
- ❖ Overwhelmed

Cognitive (Thinking):

- ❖ Impaired judgment & thinking
- ❖ Difficulty making decisions
- ❖ Short-term memory problems
- ❖ Repeated memories of the crime
- ❖ Forgetfulness
- ❖ Poor attention/concentration

Employees who have been through a robbery or an attempted robbery report having a variety of experiences, including:

FEAR – Being afraid of leaving the bank, of being in public, or of being victimized again. They are afraid the robber will find them or will come back.

HYPER-ALERTNESS – They find that they startle easily; they “jump” when suddenly approached by customers or when they hear loud sounds.

GUILT – They feel that they could have done something differently; they wonder if they could have prevented the crime, or if they didn’t do something they should have.

ANGER – They are enraged that their life has been disrupted and they no longer feel safe or in control.

ISOLATION – They feel that they are the only ones who are having reactions to the event; they experience isolation from family and friends who they feel cannot understand what they have been through.

There are a number of other behaviors that are common after a workplace trauma:

- ❖ Paranoia about their own and their family’s safety
- ❖ Irritability, which may be directed at their family and friends
- ❖ Loss of motivation – feeling blue or depressed
- ❖ Increased absenteeism
- ❖ Chronic fatigue
- ❖ Increased drug/alcohol use
- ❖ Reliving the trauma and their feelings of vulnerability and helplessness when they hear of similar events

Coping With The Aftermath of Crime Victimization

Awareness and understanding are crucial in beginning to deal effectively with this event in your life. You can begin by being aware you WILL react in some of the ways listed here. Remember that your reactions are normal.

1. You may find that you react to sights, sounds, smells, and textures that were present at the time of the crime and which remind you of it.
2. Sometimes, being exposed to a traumatic event may trigger memories of past events in your life that also were traumatic or which involved loss or loss of control. Perhaps you have been in a robbery before, have been an assault victim, or have lost someone in death. You may find yourself reacting anew to feelings about these earlier events.
3. Feelings of vulnerability and helplessness are frequent after victimization. One of the first things to pay attention to is your need to feel safe again. For a short time, take any precaution that makes you feel safer. Some examples might include:
 - ❖ Having someone drive you to work and pick you up at the end of the day.
 - ❖ Following procedures that will protect you from as much risk as possible while at work in the bank.
 - ❖ Making your daily schedule as predictable and routine as possible for a while to return control and stability to your life.
 - ❖ Taking care of yourself physically. Consciously be aware of good nutrition and getting adequate sleep.

- Trying to maintain your personal routines.
- Ensure that you include pleasant or fun activities in your week.

In taking measures such as these, you are not only making yourself and your family safer, you are restoring a sense of being in control. We suggest that you continue to do what it takes to feel safe for as long as you need.

Recovering From Trauma

Be aware of your support systems. They will play a very important part in helping you to resume your normal functioning after the crime. Typically, people find these three levels of support:

1. The most important system for you may be your work group. Very possibly, these people have gone through the trauma with you and know how you feel. Use each other to talk about your feelings and support each other.
2. The next level of support may be your family. They will need to know what is happening with you and what to expect. They will react to your experience, but may not have the information needed to deal with it as you do. Please remember that children are very perceptive. Don’t underestimate their ability to understand and deal with life’s trauma.
3. The third level of support may come from the community. You may find this support in friends, counselors, clergy, or other important people in your life.

You may find yourself withdrawing from these support systems, and sometimes misdirecting your anger at them. It is very important to use them for talking and communication. Here is a brief strategy that may help you discuss your experience:

1. Find a person (family member, friend, clergy member, trusted acquaintance) with whom you are comfortable. Feel sure they are receptive and non-judgmental.
2. Share with them what you saw, heard, touched, smelled, etc. Recreate the experience. Then you can deal with it as you remember it, not as you fantasize it.
3. After you have re-created the incident, try to attach the feelings you experienced. You may react to some parts of the incident that others may not. Work to deal with reaction to associated feelings.
4. As you express your feelings, understand they are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. They also may relate to past traumas that were never dealt with.
5. Talk (over a period of time) for as long as it takes to get to associated feelings.
6. Share everything that has happened since the incident – nightmares, irritability, and other changes in your behavior you may have noticed. As you talk about these reactions over time, they will begin to fade.
7. Some reactions may continue for a time or resurface after being triggered by another event. If you feel reactions are disrupting your daily life, and seem to be increasing rather than subsiding after 5-6 weeks, you might consider contacting a counselor.