



# Crisis and trauma reactions

Have you been the victim of a crime or trauma (this includes being a witness or family member of a victim)? Traumatic events like this can affect people in different ways. Here's a summary of some common reactions to trauma, and some helpful ways to cope.

## Common reactions to crime and trauma.

In the weeks and months after a crime or trauma it's common to experience a number of reactions. These can affect you physically, mentally and/or emotionally. You may also notice changes in behavior.

This is a painful time and these reactions are a part of the healing process, so acknowledging them is important.

## Examples of common reactions:

### Physical:

- fatigue – feeling exhausted or generally tired and unwell
- sleep problems – such as insomnia, disturbed sleep or nightmares
- under-activity or lethargy – feeling like you just can't be bothered
- hyperactivity or feeling unable to stop and relax
- frequent colds, headaches, general aches and pains, or digestive problems
- lost appetite, or conversely comfort eating
- feeling constantly on edge, such as sensitivity to sudden noises or movements.

### Mental:

- difficulty with concentration
- flashbacks
- difficulty problem-solving
- absent-mindedness or forgetfulness
- difficulty making decisions.

### Emotional:

- feeling as though nothing matters
- anxiety, fear and worry about the future
- guilt or self-blame for some aspect of the trauma; thoughts of 'if only'
- emotional numbing – inability to feel clear-cut emotions
- over-sensitivity – becoming upset or angry more easily than usual
- anger: with the offender, police, another family member or self
- irritability, 'snappiness' or short-temperedness

- feeling overwhelmed by practicalities
- thoughts of revenge
- anxiety or worries about the future
- depression, extreme sadness and the feeling of loss
- feelings of helplessness – the feeling of loss of control over your life.

### Behavioural:

- turning to alcohol, drugs, gambling or other behaviours likely to cause harm
- avoiding people or places
- turning to work or other activities to avoid thoughts
- making erratic decisions.

### Coping mechanisms.

Accepting what you're feeling and giving yourself permission to feel sad, angry, hurt or whatever is a good start.

- Talking to a trusted friend, counsellor or minister may be helpful. There are also 24 hour phone lines available such as LifeLine (0800 543 354).
- Let other people help out in practical or supportive ways.
- Try to get enough sleep and exercise; physical activity is a good stress reliever.
- Eating well helps too. If you can't face eating much, keep up fluids (non-alcoholic). If your loss of appetite continues, consult your GP.
- Try taking multi-vitamin/mineral supplements. Vitamin B group is helpful in times of stress. Take as directed.
- If you can, try not to take excessive quantities of cigarettes, coffee and sugar, as these may only add to emotional arousal.
- Try to keep alcohol use down, or if you have a problem doing this seek help from your GP.
- If you have to use anti-depressants or medications to help with sleep or anxiety, make sure your GP monitors these and explains to you which of these medications can be habit forming. There are herbal alternatives from natural health shops should you prefer these preparations to pharmaceuticals.
- Try to take one day at a time, or one hour at a time.
- Try to avoid making major decisions in times of turmoil.

