

If you have discovered or witnessed a crime or traumatic incident

Seeing someone commit a crime or witnessing a traumatic incident, or discovering the aftermath of it, can be shocking and extremely traumatic. What you saw or heard may be difficult to deal with, especially if the incident involved people you knew.

Our Support Workers are available to support you personally, or as a family or whānau, for as long as you need us. You can call us 24/7 on 0800 842 846 to be connected with a Support Worker.

Steps you can take

Report the crime or traumatic incident as soon as possible

This can assist police to keep you and others safe and get support. It also assists investigators and helps to prevent valuable evidence from being lost or destroyed.

- If a crime or traumatic incident is happening or has just happened, or you're concerned for the immediate safety of yourself or others, call police on 111.

- Otherwise, call the police non-emergency number on 105 or go online to report what has happened www.police.govt.nz/105support
- Go to your local police station and talk with the person at the front counter. They will advise you about what to do. You may be able to speak to an officer straight away. Consider taking a support person with you. Find your closest police station on the police website at www.police.govt.nz
- You may prefer to report the crime anonymously through Crime Stoppers. Phone 0800 555 111 or send an anonymous report at www.crimestoppers-nz.org/contact

Give a witness statement

The police may interview you at the scene and ask you to provide a witness statement. Your information can help investigators and is important for the justice process later, if there is a criminal court case or a formal report written about the incident. Your statement can also help those affected by the event, including the families and whānau of anyone harmed, to better understand exactly what happened.

- A police officer will write down or record what you saw, heard, or know. After a traumatic experience people's memories can sometimes be a bit foggy or uncertain. Things that happened can seem like a blur. Take your time and do your best.
- What you say must be true. Giving police false information is a serious matter.
- You'll be asked to read it through to check it's correct and sign to confirm it's an accurate report of what you witnessed.

Support the investigation and justice process

Police will investigate, and this can take considerable time. They may interview you more than once, to gather as much helpful information as possible. If there is to be a court case, they may talk to you about giving evidence in it. They will explain what giving witness evidence will involve and what you can expect. Police will also let you know when and where you would need to be at court. Sometimes there can be delays in a court case, so they will let you know if that happens. See further information by searching *being a witness* on our website www.victimsupport.org.nz

Blessing the site

For some families, whānau, and communities, a ceremonial blessing of the site where a person has died is an important step in helping them come to terms with the tragic loss of life. It is an acknowledgement of the spiritual impact of the tragedy on so many people. It commends the spirit of the person who has died and respects the dignity of them, and of their family, whānau, and community.

A blessing usually includes a simple prayer or karakia. For Māori, a blessing can include a clearing of the tapu on the site. Different cultural and faith groups bring their own approaches.



If you would like to attend a site blessing, or if you are a close family member and want to arrange one, you could contact your local church or faith centre, your local marae, your cultural leaders, the officer in charge of your case, a Police Iwi Liaison Officer, or speak to your Support Worker.

Seek financial assistance

If you have been asked to be a witness in court, you may be able to claim expenses to cover some of the costs (eg. travel). Speak to the officer in charge of your case or officer in charge of your case or your Victim Support Worker about any further assistance you may be entitled to, depending on the circumstances of the crime or incident.

Find ways to increase confidence in your future personal safety and security

Use the tips police suggest in their booklet *Keep Safe, Feel Safe*. Taking these actions can help to increase your confidence in your personal safety and security, and that of your family and whānau. See the police website www.police.govt.nz and search *Keeping Safe*.

Give yourself time to recover

See below for ways to cope with your reactions and the emotional impact.

For more about specific situations, see our information sheets online:

- if you discover or witness a homicide death www.victimsupport.org.nz and search *homicide*
- if you discover or witness a suicide death www.victimsupport.org.nz and search *suicide*.



Common reactions

Everyone's different and will react in their own way

Every situation is different, but most people find that unexpectedly witnessing a crime or traumatic incident is disturbing and distressing. Even if you weren't physically harmed you may still be psychologically affected by what you have seen or heard.

Witnesses often experience a wide range of strong reactions - shock and disbelief, fear, helplessness, anger, or grief. Some people may be overwhelmed. Others may be numb and unable to feel anything at first. Some victims can find themselves feeling guilty and constantly wondering ... Was there anything I/we could have done to have stopped this from happening? Could I have helped more?

You might experience some disturbing thoughts or memories about what you witnessed, nightmares, or flashbacks, as if it were happening to you again. Often people will try to avoid anything that brings back bad memories for them.

You may find yourself wanting to make sense of what happened and why. It may be hard to remember things, or to concentrate. Some victims find they remain on alert for potential future threats and feel more unsafe than before. You might find you're more irritable than usual. You might want to avoid others or need to be near others more.

Physically, sleeping might be more difficult or your appetite may change. Other common physical symptoms can include a racing heart, a tight chest, shakiness, nausea, digestion problems, body aching, or headaches. Existing health conditions might worsen. You might find you are exhausted.

Coping with the impact

All the reactions listed above are normal responses to a traumatic situation, but they often affect people more, and for longer, than they expect.

Looking after yourself is important

Encourage others who have been affected to do the same. Eat healthy food. Drink enough water. Keep up routines and get good rest and sleep, as best you can. Do some simple exercise. Take some slow, deep breaths. Spend time with people you can relax with, or with a pet. Spend time in nature. If you find

keeping busy helps, find useful tasks to do. See a doctor if you're unwell, extremely anxious, or are having difficulty sleeping. Draw on any cultural or spiritual beliefs you may have. Accept caring offers from others if that would help.

Flashbacks

If you have a flashback, it feels as though you're back in the middle of your traumatic experience or reliving some aspect of it. This can be in vivid detail and during a flashback it can be difficult and confusing to connect back to the present and to what is real. To better understand flashbacks and ways to manage them, see our information sheet *Dealing with Flashbacks*. Ask your Support Worker or see our website www.victimsupport.org.nz and search *flashbacks*.

Talk about what happened, when you're ready

When you're ready, talk to someone you trust about what happened, such as a trusted family or whānau member, a close friend, your doctor, a counsellor, a psychologist, a respected elder, rangatira, or a Support Worker. If any aspects of your story are particularly disturbing, speak to a professional. Talking honestly about how things are can help release the stress and emotional tension inside.

More tips for coping with your reactions

To understand more about trauma and grief, and to learn ways to manage your reactions, please see our information sheets available online, or ask your Support Worker.

- *Coping with Trauma*
- *Dealing with Flashbacks*
- *When you are Grieving*



Your reactions are normal responses to a traumatic event. Even though it may not feel like it now, they will gradually lessen in the weeks and months to come.

If they don't lessen or get worse, and if they disrupt your daily life and work, it is best to seek the help of a professional who has experience supporting people after trauma. Some people may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). If you have concerns, see your doctor, a counsellor, a psychologist, or ask your Support Worker about help that is available to you.

If your reactions trouble you

- Visit your doctor. They can do a health check and support you with any ongoing issues, such as sleeplessness, anxiety, flashbacks, or depression.
- Consider talking with a counsellor or psychologist. They can help you work through your reactions and the consequences the crime has had.
- Find a doctor, counsellor, or psychologist at www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/in-crisis/find-a-gp-or-counsellor/

How we can help you

We are here for you 24/7.

Our Support Workers are available to support you personally, or as a family or whānau, for as long as you need us. Even if the crime did not happen to you personally, being a witness can be traumatic and we will support you if you need our help. You can call us 24/7 on 0800 842 846 to be connected with a Support Worker.

Our support is completely free and confidential, and available throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

What we can offer

You don't need to report what you witnessed to police to receive our help. Our Support Workers can support you with:

- someone to listen, talk with, and support you to cope through trauma and loss

- help to understand your rights and make informed choices
- information and help to answer your questions
- help to access local support services and counselling to suit your situation
- practical support and assistance to deal with things like the coronial process, which you may be asked to provide evidence for
- someone to assist and support you as a witness at any court trials, hearings, and dealing with police and other government agencies
- help to prepare Victim Impact Statements and attend family group or restorative justice conferences
- financial assistance for victims (including witnesses) of serious crime.

We are committed to providing quality support to strengthen the mana and well-being of all those who have witnessed a crime or traumatic incident.

If English is your second language

If you require support in your first language, Victim Support can use Ezispeak to connect with an interpreter over the phone. Call us 24/7 on 0800 842 846 and let us know. We will try to match you to a Support Worker who speaks your language.



Our service is free, personal, and confidential

24/7
365
days of the year

CONTACT

Victim Support

Get Help: 0800 VICTIM (0800 842 846)
enquiries@victimsupport.org.nz
victimsupport.org.nz


Manaaki Tāngata
Victim Support

