



Coping With Victimization

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*People who have not **personally** experienced **victimization** can never fully **understand** the painful **reality** and **consequences** of being a **victim**. No one ever expects to **become** a victim. Often **victims** are left with many **puzzling** emotions.*



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Common Victim Reactions

Your feelings are normal and natural, even though they seem unusual. Victims, family and friends may feel overwhelmed by their reactions to crime. Shock, numbness, denial, disbelief, fear, anger, guilt, distrust, frustration and loneliness are realities victims must face.

There is no right or wrong way to feel. Family members who have been victimized experience unique emotions at varying points in their recovery.

You may be filled with disbelief about the incident. The shock and loss of control over life and personal safety may leave victims very confused.

Anger is a common reaction. Victims often feel angry at the defendant, the disruption in their life, the criminal justice system and even towards those closest to the victim. Try to direct the anger where it belongs—at the offender. Talking can be a useful method to release these feelings.

Grief, sorrow and depression frequently follow loss or injury, even of property that is valued. Grief and sorrow can last for a lengthy period of time—be patient and know that what victims are feeling is okay.

Guilt is normal. Victims often second-guess themselves, saying “I should have...,” “If I only had...” No one chooses to become a victim, but many victims feel responsible for what happened. Victims are not to blame for the crime. The criminal is at fault.

Fear is hard to evade. Crime is sudden and frequently life-threatening. Once victims have experienced crime, it may be difficult for them to feel safe. Victims may face fears of staying at home, leaving home or trusting anyone. With the passing of time, these fears will lessen.

Your feelings may become heightened at various times. Certain events may cause varying emotions to return to the victim. Observing someone who looks like the criminal, hearing sounds that remind the victim of the crime, arrest or trial of the offender, or an anniversary date that has special significance may cause a flood of emotion.

Don't be Afraid to Seek Help

Talking about the crime experience is often the best treatment for healing. Friends and family need to listen to the story—often times repeatedly. Victims need non-judgmental support and assurance to recover at their own pace.

Take steps to help ensure a sense of well being. Install new locks, security system or additional lighting. Learn personal safety techniques or carry personal protection to increase security.

Don't isolate yourself. Interaction with others may speed your recovery. Friends and family may be able to provide a more reasonable sense of reality to the situation.

Seek support. Talk with a victim services provider who can offer support, factual information about the criminal justice system and provide referrals to other resources.

Suggestions for Supporting People

- ▶ Encourage victims to express their feelings
- ▶ Validate victims' feelings and confirm that their confusing emotions are normal
- ▶ Tell them you are sorry about the incident
- ▶ Provide mutual support to family and friends who may also share a wide range of feelings
- ▶ Offer to attend criminal justice proceedings with victims
- ▶ Express that they are not to blame for what happened
- ▶ Try not to project your personal feelings—everyone responds to crisis in their own way and in their own time
- ▶ Develop a list of resource numbers for additional assistance and request outside help if needed.