



Ministry of Public Safety  
and Solicitor General

# Dealing with the Aftermath of a **SERIOUS CRIME**

If you have been a victim of a serious crime you may suffer physical and/or emotional effects. These effects are not only painful but may be confusing and frightening to you as well. You may also feel frustrated by the incident itself and by the criminal justice system.

This pamphlet is designed to:

- answer some of your questions;
- help reassure you that what you are feeling is common to many victims;
- give you some suggestions for how you can help yourself cope with this difficult time; and
- assist you in getting more information, or further help, if you need it.

## What You May Experience

You may find yourself experiencing some of the following reactions if you have been a victim of a serious crime, or if a serious crime has been committed against someone close to you. Your reactions will probably change as the days, weeks and months go by. Sometimes you may experience a wide range of emotions within a very short time. It is important to remember that these are normal reactions to the incident.

### *Shock and Disbelief*

No one ever really expects something like this to happen to them or can ever really “prepare” for it. You may experience disbelief that this has really happened to you. Usually people have a feeling of being “emotionally numb” for a period of time after the incident.

### *Sense of Violation*

Part of the reaction to becoming a victim is a sense of personal violation. This feeling of violation and loss can be both financial and emotional. It may seem as if your privacy and sense of personal security and trust have been taken from you.

### *Anger and Frustration*

Anger at the offender who has violated you or your privacy is a very common feeling. You may feel frustrated because you are not able to directly show or tell the offender how you are feeling. You may also feel frustrated and angry at the police and the criminal justice system, especially if the police have not found the person(s) who have done this to you.

### *Fear*

After any type of a serious crime you may be frightened that this will happen to you again. You might also be afraid that the criminal might victimize you again or try to “get back” at you for having made a report to the police.

### *Suspicion*

Many victims of a serious crime find themselves suspicious of strangers in their neighbourhood, as well as in their community. You may find yourself having difficulty trusting others. The police encourage citizens to phone and report any suspicious persons or activities that they might witness, and to report at once any further contact with the offender.

### *Stress*

After such a traumatic experience, you may experience a lot of stress and may find yourself developing physical symptoms such as sleeping or eating difficulties. The anxiety and fear that you may also be experiencing can add to the stress, as may your frustrations with the police and criminal justice system. Stress can even cause a form of depression to occur.

### *Guilt*

Victims often feel guilty about their victimization, as if there might have been something that they could have done to prevent the incident. You are not to blame — when someone else breaks the law, it is not the victim’s fault.

## What You Can Do

You have been through an experience that can be both frightening and very disruptive to your life. Remember that what you are feeling is perfectly normal and that these feelings will usually pass in time. In the meantime, there are things you can do to make this time easier for you and to make things better for yourself in the future.

## Looking After Yourself

Dealing with the effects of a serious crime can be very stressful. It helps if you take care of yourself, both physically and emotionally.

- If you are frightened, get someone to stay at your house with you, or stay at a friend's or with a member of your family. If going out alone frightens you, ask someone to go with you.
- Talking about the experience is a very good way to relieve your feelings. Family and friends can be a great support.
- Try to eat regularly, even if you eat small amounts, and try to get lots of rest. Exercise is also important. Rest, exercise and sleep will help you cope more easily with the stress of this event.
- If you have been physically injured or fear that you may experience physical effects as a result of this crime do not hesitate to go to the Emergency Department of a hospital or to your own doctor.
- Signs of stress, such as difficulty sleeping, depression or anxiety usually fade with time. Should any physical or emotional symptoms continue, you may want to see your family physician for advice.
- Ask the police or your local Victim Services Program to do a security check on your home and to talk with you about ways that you can protect yourself. These precautions will make you feel safer—and that you have some power to protect yourself.

## Dealing With the Criminal Justice System

If you are a victim of a serious crime, you will probably have to deal with the police, you may also have to go to court. The police will ask you questions as part of their investigation. Also, if they find the person who they believe is responsible for the crime, you may have to go to court as a witness. Sometimes this can be a confusing experience. There are people who can assist you every step of the way.

Victim services are available to provide you with information, practical help and emotional support. You may be able to reclaim property that was taken from you or you may be able to receive compensation for personal injury.

### Crime Victim Assistance Program

- In the Lower Mainland, call:  
**604 660-3888**
- Elsewhere in B.C., call:  
(toll free) **1 866 660-3888**



### VictimLINK

For help and information  
24-hours-a-day, call:  
(toll free) **1-800-563-0808**

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