



Being a witness to a traumatic or violent event can have a very deep impact on people, especially children. The impact of this experience is often referred to as "vicarious trauma", meaning that even if you were not physically hurt or actually involved in the event you can still be affected psychologically by what you have seen, heard or experienced.

Common reactions can include

- prolonged crying and sadness
- fear
- nightmares and difficulty sleeping
- anxiety
- nausea or headaches
- difficulty concentrating
- disorientation and confusion
- uneasiness
- intrusive thoughts about the event.

These reactions are normal, and may continue for days, weeks or even months.

Resurfacing feelings of grief and anxiety

Some people may be especially vulnerable to vicarious trauma, including those who have recently experienced a loss or a significant life change, and those who have experienced wars or other major crises. Traumatic events can trigger memories of past losses or events that happened many years ago and can bring back feelings of anger, grief and sadness. If you are experiencing resurfacing emotions from past events as a result of witnessing a recent event, remember that this is normal.

- Spend time with people who love and care about you – talk about the recent events and about past losses or experiences that might be affecting you now. Talk about your fears and concerns.
- Expect that your mood and feelings may be intense and constantly changing. You may feel more irritable or upset by things than you normally would, or your mood may change dramatically from day-to-day or hour-to-hour.

- Your sleep or eating patterns may be disturbed. It may be difficult to maintain a normal schedule if you are experiencing trauma. It is important to try and maintain a regular pattern of eating and sleeping to ensure that you have the strength to cope with stress.
- Don't be too hard on yourself. Acknowledge that you have been traumatised by an event or experience and that your body and emotions are trying to deal with this. Try not to tell yourself negative things or expect yourself to be back to normal immediately.

Helping children to cope

- Let your child be more dependent on you. Children being more physically or emotionally dependent may be a sign that they need extra support or attention during this difficult period. Give more hugs if they need them!
- Spend more time with your child. Make an effort to keep family routines and to be together as much as possible. Try to cancel up coming events and plans that mean you will be away from your child.
- Talk to your child about the events. Ask your child what they heard or saw. Answer questions honestly and dispel any misinformation. Try to use words and phrases that won't confuse a child or make the world more frightening.

The Victims Support Line

The Victims of Crime Bureau provides a 24-hour telephone support, information and referral service. You can phone the service and talk to a trained support worker.

Victims Support Line

Phone (Metropolitan area only) (02) 8688 5400
Freecall 1800 633 063
TTY (9am-5pm) (02) 8688 5575
National Relay Service 133 677
Website www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs

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This information is available on the Victims Services website www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs ('Forms and Publications'). It can also be provided in alternative formats such as Braille, audiotape, large print or computer disk. Please contact Diversity Services on (02) 8688 8460 (voice), (02) 8688 7733 (TTY - for people who are Deaf or have a speech impairment) or diversity_services@agd.nsw.gov.au

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