

After the Crime

*Support for Survivors of Crime
and Their Loved Ones*



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Wisconsin Department of Justice



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THIS BOOKLET IS FOR YOU IF...

- You are a victim or witness of a crime;
- You are affected by the pain and suffering of someone you know who was a victim of crime;
- You are impacted by crime and violence in your community; or
- You want to learn more about how to help yourself, a family member, a friend, a child, or others who are affected by crime.

THIS IS YOUR BOOKLET. Share it with others whom you think will benefit from it. Keep it for future reference, or pass it along to a friend when you are done with it. Copies of this booklet are available online at www.doj.state.wi.us/cvs, or by calling the Wisconsin Department of Justice Office of Crime Victim Services at (800) 446-6564.

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The Butterfly

A man found the cocoon of a butterfly. For days he visited the spot in hopes of seeing the butterfly come out. One day, a small opening appeared. He sat and watched the butterfly as it struggled to force its body through the opening. It seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could, and it could go no further. The man walked away sadly.

What the man did not understand was that a butterfly's struggle to move through its cocoon passes fluid from its body into its wings, a process necessary for flight.

In its own time, when the time is right, the butterfly *will* emerge from its cocoon, ready to fly.

--Author Unknown

{ “**H**ave patience with all things,
but chiefly have patience with yourself.” }

-- St. Francis de Sales



I. Introduction

If you or someone close to you has been a victim of a crime, we are sorry for the circumstances that have led you to this booklet. While crime can seem commonplace in our society, the experience that survivors and their loved ones go through is anything but ordinary.

Being affected by a crime can cause very strong emotional reactions that can interfere with day-to-day living. Even so-called “minor” crimes can create a great deal of anxiety, stress and other emotions.

This booklet describes some common reactions after a traumatic experience. It also offers tips from other survivors and information about how to help someone who is hurting as a result of crime.

Whether you were a direct victim of crime, or affected by the victimization of someone else, healing is a process that is different for everyone. It takes determination, patience, and the support of others to find your unique path to healing.

II. For Family & Friends

When a crime occurs, it is like dropping a pebble into water. Around the dropped pebble, rings form, reaching out farther and farther. Crime can violate your sense of security and trust in the world. It often affects not only the victim, but also others close to them.

It is not unusual for people to have strong emotions, such as sadness, anxiety, fear, and anger when someone close to them is a crime victim.

It's most important for survivors to feel supported, to know they are loved and accepted in the aftermath of crime, to feel that their grief and trauma can be acknowledged, and trust that they won't be abandoned.

It may be hard to know what to say or how to help. You might even be frustrated with how your loved one is reacting in his or her time of crises but there are some things you can do to help. The following suggestions might be helpful:

What You Can Do:

- ✱ Be a good listener. You don't have to have all the answers.
- ✱ Do not criticize or try to manage survivors' reactions.
- ✱ Reassure survivors that they are not alone.
- ✱ Help survivors to focus on personal strengths that might help them cope.
- ✱ Help survivors return to, and maintain a routine to help them regain a sense of control over daily life. However, realize that they may have trouble focusing on even the simplest of tasks. Your encouragement and patience *will* help, but be prepared that it may take some time.
- ✱ Offer to help find services and support groups.
- ✱ Know that it may take time to heal. Avoid comments such as "it's time to move on," or "that's in the past." Sometimes trauma can resurface, even years after the event, triggered by memories, anniversaries, the offender's release, or new leads in an unsolved case.
- ✱ Read this booklet to understand more about what survivors may be going through.



III. Common Reactions to Crime

It's normal to experience strong reactions after a crime. Stress reactions might appear immediately after the crime, or later. They may last a few hours, days, or longer. They may start or stop suddenly without warning. Children may show signs of stress in their behaviors. You can read more on page 14 about how children react to crime. Common reactions to a traumatic event often include:

Physical Reactions such as chills, thirst, upset stomach, lack of energy, sweating, dizziness, headaches, rapid heart rate, weakness, change in sleep patterns.

Mental Reactions such as confusion, nightmares, a sudden flood of feelings or images related to the crime, difficulty concentrating or remembering things, difficulty making decisions, disorientation.

Emotional Reactions such as fear, guilt, grief, sadness, panic, denial, anxiety, depression, intense anger, irritability, emotional outbursts, feeling overwhelmed, feeling numb.

Behavioral Reactions such as withdrawal (not wanting to talk with or be around people), change in appetite, inability to sit still, crying, increased drug or alcohol use.

What You Can Do:

- ✿ Talk to a doctor if you are worried or have questions about any of these reactions.
- ✿ Take care of your health with good nutrition and rest. See page 10 for tips on sleeping.
- ✿ The misuse of prescription or illegal drugs and alcohol will likely make stress reactions worse.
- ✿ Talk about your feelings with a trusted, supportive person.
- ✿ These reactions are a natural response to a traumatic event. Many people in your situation have had similar experiences.
- ✿ Don't be afraid to seek professional help. There are many services available to help victims of crime. See page 22 for more information.



IV. Tips for Sleeping

Sleep disturbances is a common reaction to a stressful or traumatic event. It can be very difficult for survivors to relax enough to fall asleep. Some survivors experience nightmares that make it hard to sleep through the night.

Lack of sleep can affect your overall health, and make the day's activities seem overwhelming. If you are experiencing sleep disturbances (too much or too little sleep), consider discussing this with your doctor.

What You Can Do:

- ☞ Sleep in a location where you feel most safe.
- ☞ Try not to force sleep. Go to bed when you feel ready to sleep.
- ☞ Sleep experts recommend a quiet, cool, dark environment to promote sleep. If the dark bothers you, keep the room dimly lit.

- ⌘ Consider asking a trusted friend or family member to stay nearby if you think it will help you fall asleep.
- ⌘ Close to bedtime, avoid activities such as watching some television programs, or conversations that make you more mentally or physically alert.
- ⌘ Do something relaxing at bedtime, such as reading or listening to music.
- ⌘ Try to keep a regular sleep schedule as often as possible.
- ⌘ Some survivors have reported that yoga or other relaxation techniques have helped. There are many free sources of information about relaxation exercises and techniques online. If you don't have internet access, most libraries provide access to free internet service.
- ⌘ Caffeine, alcohol and nicotine can interfere with your ability to fall asleep and the quality of your sleep.



V. For Parents of a Crime Victim

If your child was a victim of a crime this is a very difficult time for the entire family. Please learn about the services available to assist you. Though this is a painful situation, do not lose hope.

Research has shown that victimized children who receive support can and do go on to lead healthy productive lives. In fact, children often have a natural ability to recover from stressful experiences if they receive the proper support. What you do now to get the right professional services for your child will make a world of difference!

You cannot control what has already happened, but you can help your child move forward in a healthy way. You do not need to try to do this alone. There are organizations and professionals specially trained to help you provide the support and assistance your child needs and deserves. Many of these services are free of charge. See page 22 for information about how to find services.

What You Can Do:

- ⌘ **Assure your child it's OK to talk to you about what happened.** If the child believes the circumstances were his or her fault, let them know what happened is not his or her fault.
- ⌘ **Watch for signs that your child is in distress.** See page 14 for examples of behaviors that might indicate your child is struggling with what has happened.
- ⌘ **Survivors often need long-term professional care and follow-up to fully recover from the crime.**
- ⌘ **Communicate with other caregivers and school officials so they can help you watch for signs of stress/trauma, which might appear (or reappear), even months after the crime.**
- ⌘ **Read page 19 for suggestions about how to help your child adjust.**
- ⌘ **Take care of yourself.** This can be a hard time for you. It is a sign of strength to seek counseling or other support so you will be best able to support your child.
- ⌘ **Get information.** Page 22 will help you start to find services in your area. Sometimes it takes a couple of tries to find someone with whom you feel comfortable. Don't give up. Keep looking until you find the help you need.

VI. How Children React to Crime



Children who have witnessed or experienced a crime might have a variety of stress reactions. They might also have these reactions when someone they know has been a victim of a crime, or when they are worried about something they have seen on television.

It can be difficult to have a conversation with children about what they are feeling, especially with younger children who may not know which words to use. However, you can watch for signs that your child might be distressed.

Children often express their feelings more through their actions than their words. Page 18 of this booklet has some tips on how to help children heal after a crime or traumatic experience. Page 22 offers resources for finding services for children.



Common Reactions of Children to Crime

(These may occur even months after the event.)

Physical:

Head or stomach aches; sleep disturbances such as insomnia, nightmares, or bedwetting; nausea; weight gain or loss.

Behavioral:

Increased risk-taking (especially with teenagers); change in activities or friends; self-destructive behavior (such as use of drugs and alcohol, cutting); change in school performance; change in eating habits; drawings or play may depict strong emotions; in younger children, a return to an earlier behavior that was outgrown (such as bed-wetting).

Emotional:

Sadness, outbursts, fearfulness, trouble being away from caregivers, asking the same questions about the event repeatedly, anxiety, fear of being alone.

Destructive and extreme behavior is a signal that your child needs professional help.

Contact a professional if you are concerned about, or need help evaluating, any of these reactions.

VII. How Children Grieve

A crime may result in a major loss, change, or death that causes a grief/trauma reaction in children and adults. Children grieve differently than adults. They have many of the same feelings, but they often express these feelings through their behavior. Their reactions and grieving may change as they enter new developmental stages. Children have a changing view of what death means as they get older, which may impact how they understand the information they have about a death.

Birth to Two Year Olds: Children this age sense that things are different and that caregivers are upset. They may have trouble sleeping, might cry more than usual, or act fussy. Their reactions will largely match the distress of those around them.

Three to Five Year Olds: Grieving children in this age group may return to an earlier behavior that was outgrown, such as thumb-sucking or bed-wetting. Though they may be upset about death, they probably do not fully understand it is permanent. Aggressive behavior is common. They may have worries about who will care for them.

Six to Nine Year Olds: Around the age of six, most children begin to understand that death is permanent. Children in this age group may become aggressive and angry with others as they grieve a major loss. They may become withdrawn. It is not uncommon for them not to want to leave home, to lack energy or to have trouble sleeping. They may feel personally responsible for the situation, especially if they aren't given age appropriate, factual information about what happened.

Ten to Thirteen Year Olds: Grieving children in this age group tend to move in and out of grief. Their emotions overwhelm them easily. They understand that death is final.

Teenagers: Grieving teens often internalize grief and appear to be handling it well when they are not. Some externalize grief by acting out in dangerous or inappropriate ways. It is common for feelings of grief to appear in teenagers' art, writing, or music.



VIII. Helping Children Heal

When a child has been a victim of crime or is affected by a crime against someone they care about, they may feel helpless, afraid and unsure of how to handle their feelings. There are many things you can do that will help them work through their feelings in a healthy way.

Studies have shown that children are very resilient. That is, with time and the proper family and professional support, they are able to live a healthy, happy life even after a tragic or scary event. In order for this to happen, it is important they receive the counseling or medical services they need, and they have someone to help them manage their feelings over time.

Caregivers can help children heal and regain a sense of security. There are many services available to assist children and their families when a child is victimized. Page 22 provides some tips for finding appropriate professional services.



What You Can Do:

- ✂ If your child seems to feel responsible for the circumstances that led to the crime, assure him or her that the crime was not his or her fault.
- ✂ Maintain familiar routines as much as possible. It will be reassuring to your child. Don't skip celebrations and fun activities.
- ✂ Encourage your child to talk and ask questions. Your child might be afraid of making you upset. Tell him or her that it is OK to tell you about all feelings, even feelings that are sad or scary.
- ✂ Don't downplay the impact of the crime. However, make a point to speak optimistically about your child's future and capabilities.
- ✂ Don't make promises you may not be able to keep (for example, promising that the perpetrator will go to jail). It's alright to admit you don't have all of the answers. Instead, reassure your child that whatever happens next, you will face it and get through it together.
- ✂ Reinforce the positive. Remind your child of his or her strengths and of your love and support.
- ✂ Be patient. Acting out is normal. Set gentle, yet firm, limits if your child acts out.
- ✂ Express your own emotions in a healthy way.
- ✂ Make sure your child gets enough sleep, exercise and proper nutrition.

IX. When an Unsolved Case Gets New Attention

Some crimes are not solved right away. Some are never solved. However, with advances in investigative techniques and forensic science (such as DNA), unsolved cases sometimes get new attention. If this is happening in your case, it is understandable to feel a range of emotions.

There may be excitement at the possibility of finally getting some answers. At the same time, you may feel a sense of dread about learning more details. Years of emotion may suddenly rise to the surface. Strong emotional reactions may appear similar to those you felt when the crime first occurred, such as anger and despair at the injustice of the crime. You might experience stress reactions, such as those listed on page 8.

It's as if a wound has been reopened. It is common to have strong mental, emotional, or physical reactions to that. These reactions may make survivors, family, and friends feel guilty or disloyal and question why something that should be "good news" is causing such anxiety or sadness.

All of these feelings have been reported by people who have gone through what you are going through. Do not feel guilty or dismiss your feelings. Respect your right to feel how you feel.

What You Can Do:



- ✱ Consider giving this booklet to a friend or other trusted person to help them understand how this might be affecting you.
- ✱ Do not hesitate to seek professional counseling or other help from a professional to support you through this process.
- ✱ Learn about your rights and the services available to you (read page 22). There may be different options open to you now than there were when the crime occurred.
- ✱ There may be a lot of media attention about the case. It may be helpful if a trusted friend acts as your representative to respond to media calls, or to make statements on your behalf. Find practical tips for interacting with the media at: www.doj.state.wi.us/cvs (in the red "Quick Links" box), or call us directly at (800) 446-6564 to have information mailed to you.

X. Victims' Rights & Services

Victims of crime in Wisconsin have special constitutional and statutory rights when they report crime to law enforcement. These rights help keep you aware of what is happening in the case. They provide a chance to speak with a prosecutor, to make statements to the court, and to be told when hearings are held so you can attend if you wish.

Under some circumstances, victims of crime may be eligible for assistance to pay for certain expenses related to the crime (called "Crime Victims Compensation"). Also, if there is a conviction, victims can seek a court order for restitution from the offender.

There are various services and support groups, many of which provide services free of charge, which may be of interest to you. The Wisconsin Department of Justice has an online victim resource directory that you can search to find what is available in your county or nearby (www.doj.state.wi.us/cvs).

What You Can Do:

Call the Department of Justice Victim Resource Center (1-800-446-6564), or visit us online at www.doj.state.wi.us/cvs to get information about:

- ☞ Your rights as a victim of crime;
- ☞ The criminal justice process;
- ☞ Victim services and support groups;
- ☞ Crime Victim Compensation;
- ☞ Restitution; and
- ☞ How to get information about your case.



Dial 2-1-1 for Resources Close to Home

211 is a free service available in all Wisconsin counties providing information about health and human services in your community. Information can be provided in more than 90 different languages.

Call the National Center for Victims of Crime

(1-800-394-2255, TTY: 1-800-211-7996) for referrals to services anywhere in the country.

XI. Tips from Other Survivors

Studies have been done on how crime and other traumatic experiences affect survivors. Their studies have shown that there are specific things that tend to help both adults and children return to a healthy life after a traumatic event:

- ✂ **Identify your strengths.** Think about when you have made it through tough times in the past. What helped you then? How can you use your strengths and abilities in this situation?
- ✂ **Ask for help.** Find support when you need it. There are many free services and support groups available to help you (see page 22).
- ✂ **Respect your right to decide to whom and when you will talk about the crime,** especially with people who have not been supportive in the past.
- ✂ **Be aware of your options with the media.** Find practical tips for interacting with the media at: www.doj.state.wi.us/cvs (in the red “Quick Links” box), or call us directly at (800) 446-6564 to have information mailed to you.
- ✂ **Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.** Plan your day the night before. Sticking to a regular routine as much as possible will help you feel in control of your life.

- ✱ **Pay attention to your physical health** (rest, nutrition, exercise). Keeping your body healthy helps protect against some of the negative physical and mental effects of stress.
- ✱ **Spend time with friends.** Maintain important and supportive relationships. Talk with people you trust about your feelings. Share the information in this booklet with loved ones.
- ✱ **Focus on the things you can control.** Survivors know all too well that there are many things in life that cannot be controlled. You will benefit by concentrating on things over which you do have control. Making daily decisions, no matter how small, will likely help you feel more in control of your life.
- ✱ **Practice slow, deep breathing.** Deep breathing has a calming effect on the body and may help you relax if you are feeling nervous or anxious.
- ✱ **Look to the future.** Survivors who find and focus on some positives in the future have an easier time recovering than those who do not.
- ✱ **Do things that you enjoy.** Having fun might not seem like a priority right now, but it is very important to healing. If you have children, having fun together is an important part of their healing, as well.
- ✱ **Be patient.** Everyone recovers in their own time. There will be good days and bad days. Celebrate your progress, and respect your right to feel the way you feel.

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