


Mount Carmel Crime & Trauma Assistance Program



Coping With Trauma



MOUNT CARMEL



*Trauma wounds more than our physical bodies,
it also wounds our mind and spirit.*

This guide contains information that will help you understand the feelings you are experiencing and will provide you with valuable resources that can offer you further support.

Symptoms of Stress-Related Responses Commonly Experienced by Victims of Violent Crime

The following include physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms that many survivors of violent crime have reported to have experienced following the incident, or for some, up to several years following the violent event. You may or may not have experienced some or all of these, but know that they are normal reactions to a traumatic event.

Crisis Response

This period lasts from a few days to several weeks after the trauma. Often survivors exhibit one of two styles: expressed (emoting demonstratively — crying, shaking, etc.) or controlled (stoic reaction — being “strong” for self or others). Many survivors show pieces of both at different times.

After the Crisis: Reorganization/Disorganization

After the crisis, the survivor may realize that her/his life is changed forever. Figuring out how to get on with life can be a very important first step after the crisis period. Some people re-group, go on, but have underlying unexpressed feelings and issues that will seep out in various ways over time. They may decide at some point to look more closely at their traumatic experience and its effects to heal in a more thorough way, or they may simply “cope” day in and day out.

Survivors may experience any or all of the following reactions immediately after the crisis, or years following the crisis.

Physical Symptoms

- Pounding heart or jumping heartbeat
- Nausea
- Nightmares
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Awakening in the early morning hours, and unable to get back to sleep
- Difficulty staying awake
- Shortness of breath

- Sweating uncontrollably, and often without exertion
- Changes in eating habits, either eating less or more than normal
- Changes in weight, either loss or gain
- Easily startled
- Memory problems/easily distracted
- Extreme alertness
- Repeated re-living of the traumatic event in memories

Emotional Symptoms

- Fear
- Irritability or anxiety
- Flashbacks to the trauma
- Anger/rage at the assailant, any family members, friends, medical, legal, law enforcement or mental health workers who you feel failed to help you.
- Sadness with periods of tearfulness
- Grief
- Guilt
- Feelings of low self-worth
- Feelings of self-blame
- Resentment (toward yourself, your assailant, loved ones, law enforcement, witnesses, etc.)
- Worry about physical health
- Intense psychological distress
- Low ability or inability to tolerate minor frustrations
- Challenges controlling emotional responses
- Feeling numb to everyday experiences
- Feelings of detachment
- Spirituality: “why me?,” struggles with God, awareness of the fragility of life

Behavioral Symptoms

- Difficulty making decisions
- Fighting with others
- Difficulty completing tasks
- Relationship problems start or worsen
- Need to talk compulsively about the trauma
- Wanting to avoid thoughts, feelings or conversations related to the trauma
- Slower problem solving abilities
- Avoidance of going to the location of the incident
- Use of drugs or alcohol to deal with uncomfortable feelings
- Not participating in usual activities such as work or school
- Feeling a need to stay busy all the time
- Restlessness
- Withdrawal from friends/family

Many of the reactions to trauma are connected to one another. For example, a flashback may make you feel out of control, and will therefore produce fear and arousal. Many people think that their common reactions to the trauma mean that they are “going crazy” or “losing it.” These thoughts can make them even more fearful. As you become aware of the changes you have gone through since your trauma, and as you process these experiences during treatment, the symptoms should become less distressing over time.

*Adapted from the Florida Council Against Sexual Violence Website www.fcasv.org and Foa, E.B. & Rothbaum, B.O. (1998). *Treating the Trauma of Rape: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for PTSD*. Guildford Press, New York. Pp. 128-129.*

Trauma's Effect on the Brain

Many of the symptoms you have been experiencing since your trauma are due to actual changes in your brain. It can often feel like you are “going crazy,” but actually your brain is **still** trying to protect you from danger. These changes are temporary but the length of time it takes for them to subside is different for every person.

Traumatic events create *changes in the chemistry of the brain* that may remain even after the traumatic event is over.

- These changes include:
 - Adrenaline increase — increases heart-rate. Can make you feel “on edge” or nervous.
 - Cortisol increase — causes a slowing of responses in the brain. Can cause problems with concentration and memory.
 - Serotonin decrease — leads to depression, panic attacks, and flashbacks.
 - Endogenous opioids increase — Can cause you to feel “emotionally numb.”

Traumatic events also create *functional/structural changes in the brain*.

- These changes include:
 - Over activity in the amygdala — This part of the brain stores the sensory experiences of the trauma and acts as an alarm system when something around you represents danger (is a reminder of the initial traumatic event).
 - Under activity and shrinkage in the hippocampus — This part of the brain assists in the interpretation of all of your senses. When a person has PTSD, the hippocampus is not able to perform its' normal inhibitory function, so they may chronically overreact to circumstances around them as threatening and dangerous.

Duration of effects depends on a myriad of factors including: severity of the trauma, longer lasting traumatic experiences, general characteristics of the victim, and whether or not the person receives treatment.

Coping After a Traumatic Event

Most people will experience a range of reactions experiencing a traumatic event. This is normal and to be expected — you are not going “crazy.” Given the trauma you have experienced, it is really important to take care of yourself and have support available. The following suggestions are intended as a guide only. You may already have ways of coping that work well for you. Remember, people can and do deal with the impact of trauma on their life. You will not always feel like this.

- seek out support from people who are important to you, try not to isolate yourself
- write down how you are feeling
- get plenty of rest even if you find it difficult
- make time for relaxation
- get regular exercise such as walking, cycling or swimming
- talk it through with someone you trust e.g. friend, therapist, family member
- try to eat regular and well balanced meals
- after an assault you may find your use of alcohol, drugs or other stimulants such as coffee, cigarettes and chocolate increases. It is important to keep in mind other coping strategies may be more healthier

Sometimes you may notice that you feel overstimulated, frightened, irritable or edgy. Other times you may find that you feel under-aroused, numb or disconnected. The following examples are ideas for how to cope when feeling either way.

Calming/Organizing Activities

- Place heavy blankets on lap
- Herbal tea, drink of water
- Chewing gum
- Rocking or steadily swinging
- Strong hugs or massages from safe people
- Soothing scents like vanilla or lavender
- Gentle stretches/yoga
- Singing loudly

Alerting Activities

- Holding ice
- Cool room
- Air blowing across skin (roll car windows down)
- Standing on your toes/balancing
- Quick paced/offbeat/loud music
- Light touch (feather)
- Aerobic exercise
- Singing loudly

Traumatic memories and feelings can often be overwhelming and we tend to hold them in each of our senses. Therefore, it is helpful to think of ways that we can cope that utilize all of our senses. The following are some ideas that you may find beneficial.

- **Sight:** Avoid TV (use library tapes instead), buy a flower, display cards from friends, put pleasant photographs where you can see them often, draw or color pictures, wear a bracelet/watch/necklace you like to look at, look up when you walk, look around.
- **Smell:** Incense or oils (put on self, pillowcase, burn the incense), candles, dryer sheets, baking something, bath stuff, wear perfume, flowers, avoid aversive smells.
- **Taste:** Keep a candy dish full of hard candy/mints/gum, buy some special treats/beverages (tea, hot chocolate, cold drink- make sure you have ice cubes), breath drops.
- **Hearing:** Avoid the TV, avoid radio stations with lots of commercials (try 90.5 FM), buy some new tapes/CDs, headphones when appropriate, voices you like either on an answering machine/on the phone/in person.
- **Touch:** Animals (real or stuffed), blankets, clay, wear comfy clothes, koosh balls/dolls, worry stones, lotion or oils, back rub from a safe person, hugs, showers, run fingers through something that feels good (beads, dry oatmeal).
- **Imagination:** Imagery... previous vacation, favorite place, safe place (therapy office, home...), safe person. Can use guided imagery tapes as well.

Triggers

You may be experiencing emotional and/or physical reactions, but don't know why. You may be having these reactions related to "triggers." A trigger is a piece of an event that intrudes into the present and reminds you of what happened in your past.

Triggers can be anything that reminds you of the event including, but not limited to:

- Smells
- Sights
- Sounds
- Weather
- Things people say
- Things people do
- Objects
- Situations

When confronted with a trigger, you may have physical symptoms such as:

- Racing heartbeat
- Sweaty palms
- Sinking stomach
- Sensitivity to touch
- Fear
- Anger
- Sadness
- Confusion
- Flashbacks

While meeting with your therapist, you will learn to identify these triggers and learn to manage them. After you have learned to identify and manage your triggers, the trauma can lose some of its power and control over you.

Utilizing coping skills such as those found in this packet can help you manage these triggers.

How Others Can Help You

When you were victimized, the people who care about you were also victimized. They are now what we call “co-survivors.” They are attempting to deal with the reality of what has happened to you, how that has changed you, and how they can be helpful to you. **Co-survivors need as much information from you as possible about what you know is helpful/not helpful.** Many times co-survivors experience a strong sense of helplessness and frustration. Sometimes because of that they will say and do things that can be unintentionally hurtful. Communication is a very important part of making their role as a co-survivor useful to your recovery.

We have developed a list of suggestions made by other survivors. You may wish to change or add to this list and give a copy to co-survivors in your life.

- Don't be afraid to talk about what happened. It is on my mind all the time anyway so bringing it up isn't going to upset me.
- Don't feel like you have to fix anything or have the perfect answer. Just listening and letting me know you are there for me is usually all I need.
- Sometimes I have intense feelings I can't explain. Please try not to take my moods personally and believe I am doing the best I can.
- When I become afraid please _____ to help me feel safer.
- Certain things make me think about what happened and are hard for me to be around right now. Those things are...

Statements for Co-Survivors to Avoid

- *“Don't worry.”*
- *“It's in the past.”*
- *“Don't cry.”*
- *“It's all in your head.”*
- *“Just forget about it.”*
- *“Why didn't you...?”*

Statements for Co-Survivors to Consider Instead

- *“How can I help?”*
- *“I’m hear to listen.”*
- *“I can see this is very difficult.”*
- *“It’s okay to cry.”*
- *“Remember to breathe.”*
- *“It takes time to heal.”*
- *“No lifestyle choice or amount of carelessness gives another person the right to be violent.”*

If the survivor seems “spacey,” remind them of current time, place, and situation. Offer to participate in counseling sessions or to help locate resources.

Co-survivors will need support too. Encourage them to determine safe people to talk to. Services are available through our program if necessary.



Taking Time to Relax

It may seem difficult to relax right now, but it is one of the most empowering things you can do for yourself. Relaxation takes us into the present moment, into the here and now. Relaxation techniques are effective in calming our bodies, thoughts, feelings and our spirit. These techniques can be practiced any where at any time of the day or night. There is no right or wrong way to practice relaxation techniques, you will discover what works for you. It is also important to point out that these techniques may not be helpful to you depending on how you are feeling at the time.

Conscious Breathing Technique

- Find a comfortable upright position to sit in.
- Close your eyes (if that is comfortable for you)
- Breathe in on a count of four.
- Hold your breath for the same four count.
- Exhale on the same four count.
- As you feel your lungs fill with air, imagine that your belly is soft and expanding as you breathe in. Repeat until you are relaxed.

Breathe in Peace and Calm, Breathe Out Tension and Worry

Again you will want to sit in a comfortable upright position. This time, instead of controlling your breath, just pay attention to how your body is naturally breathing. Also pay attention to any tension or discomfort in your body. Imagine breathing in a sense of peace and calm into those areas of tension. As you exhale, imagine that tension leaving your body. You may even think to yourself, “I am breathing in peace and calm, I am breathing out tension and worry.”

Breathing While Tensing and Relaxing the Muscles

This technique also begins with following your breath and becoming aware of any tension your body is holding. Now you will tense up all the muscles of your body at the same time and then release that tension and relax your muscles. Repeat this several times. Finish this technique by following your breath as it naturally happens.

General Health Habits

There are some important post trauma activities you must do, regardless of how you feel. It is important to have a daily schedule. Your best chance at a schedule is to plan realistic events around exercise, rest and eating periods. It is important that you see a therapist to help you with your PTSD symptoms. The therapist may refer you to a psychiatrist for medication. Taking your medication as prescribed is also important. It is important to maintain your health and strength during this difficult time. Good health habits include:

Exercise

Implementation of a realistic set of exercises is important. Optimum is 3-4 times per week for the first 6 weeks is a realistic standard. If you have exercised infrequently, your goals will be different than those of a more athletic person. Begin with a goal of an aerobic activity for about 20-30 minutes. Try to work up to your level of exertion. If you feel slightly energized when done, you have reached your level of exertion. As your physical stamina improves and you are exerting yourself a little more in each session, increase the length of the exercise session each week. Starting too ambitiously will certainly produce burnout. Think of exercising as something you will continue to do for the rest of your life. Start small, stay consistent, and slowly build your time and intensity. Make a goal to commit to 3-4 times a week and do what your body can tolerate.

Rest

A frequently neglected fact of exercise is that the activity results in muscles “tearing down” rather than “building up”. The “building up” period comes when resting. For this reason it is a good idea to rest immediately after exercise, for a more productive result. During this time your body can most easily begin to rejuvenate to perform at higher functional levels, thereby maximizing the benefits of the exercise.

The other form of rest that is so critical is a regular (6 to 8 hour) sleep schedule. Since sleep disturbance is often a problem with PTSD, achieving 6 to 8 hours of sleep per night can be quite challenging. If this problem is a serious one, professional consultation with a doctor is advisable.

Nutrition

We have better information available about the benefit of good nutritional habits than ever before. Sometimes, trauma survivors report loss of appetite and “forgetting” to eat. Sometimes, they report eating only “comfort” foods, like ice cream and mashed potatoes. It is important to try to balance your food intake from the 4 major food groups (fruits, vegetables, grains, and proteins). B vitamins help the body cope with stress. Good sources of B vitamins include green leafy vegetables and whole grains. It is also important to eat regularly, at least three or four times a day, to keep your blood sugar stabilized. If you have doubts about the type of foods you should be eating, or what would be optimal, ask your physician to refer you to a nutritionist. They can be helpful with developing a nutritional plan individualized to your tastes and needs. Combined with adequate rest, and exercise, nutrition helps support your body in its battle with symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Tomaro, Michael P., PhD. (n.d.) PTSD; www.Fearofflyingdoctor.com. May 26, 2009.



Sleep is Essential

Sleep is essential to good health and the healing process. Sleep is often affected by trauma and it is important to address because decreased sleep affects memory, mood, and the ability to concentrate, learn, and engage in logical, safe reasoning.

Common Sleep Problems Following a Trauma

- Flashbacks and troubling thoughts can make falling asleep difficult.
- You may feel the need to maintain a high level of vigilance, which affects sleep.
- Nighttime and darkness can bring about anxiety and restlessness.
- Taking naps during the day might be helpful, but if overdone also interferes with efforts to sleep through the night
- Once asleep, nightmares and night terrors can frighten you back to consciousness and getting back to sleep can be very difficult. It is estimated that 60% of survivors experience nightmares in the first 3 months following the trauma.
- Many survivors use alcohol or other drugs to numb the emotional and physical pain following trauma. These substances worsen sleep problems and impact the healing process.
- Medical Problems may be associated with the trauma such as chronic pain or stomach and intestinal problems.
- Attacks of Anxiety or Panic interrupt sleep. Symptoms may include: heart beating fast, feeling light headed, difficulty breathing, sweating, hot flashes, cold sweat, confusion, and fear.

Sleep Tips to Consider

- **Sleep in a location where you will feel most safe.** While the bedroom is optimal, it may contain negative associations. Make changes to the room or sleep in a different room. Take extra steps to secure your home or the room: secure locks, have access to a phone, and arrange furniture to promote a sense of security. It may be helpful to initially have a friend, family member, or pet stay in the room, or in a nearby room, while you are sleeping.

- **Create an environment in which you can sleep well.** Have a comfortable bed and pillow, block out or eliminate unnecessary light (although some people prefer a nightlight), reduce noise (or use white noise such as a sound machine or a fan) and establish a comfortable temperature.
- **Establish a bedtime routine that includes engaging in relaxing, non-alerting activities close to bedtime.** Such as taking a warm bath, reading, listening to music, practicing a relaxation exercise, gentle stretches or self-massage. Avoid activities that are mentally or physically stimulating before bedtime such as watching TV (particularly the news), paying bills, or watching an action movie.
- **Don't go to bed hungry or too full.** Eat your last meal 3 to 4 hours prior to bedtime to allow it to digest. If you are hungry have a healthy snack. For example a bowl of multi-grain cereal, fruit and yogurt, or a cup of herbal tea with wheat toast.
- **Go to bed when you feel ready to sleep.** It is helpful to try to go to bed at the same time each night but don't try to force sleep. This can add to the pressure of wanting to get to sleep. Developing a habit of lying in bed awake or watching the clock is counter productive. If you can't sleep, get up, and try another relaxing, non-alerting activity for a half hour. Then try to go back to bed.

During the Day

- **Consume less or no caffeine,** particularly after lunch.
- **Avoid alcohol.** Alcohol may help you fall asleep but it has the opposite effect later and will wake you up during the night. Also the sleep inducing effect tends to disappear.
- **Avoid nicotine in the evening.** If you smoke it probably feels like a stress reducer, however, it is also a stimulant. Smoking close to bedtime makes it more difficult to go to sleep.
- **Exercise,** but not within three hours before bedtime.
- **Try to expose yourself to morning sunlight.** This increases the amount of melatonin you naturally create in your body. Melatonin is a hormone that assists with sleep/wake cycles.
- **Take only 20-minute naps during the day.** It is fine to nap if you are tired but try to limit each nap.

- Wake up and get out of bed at the same time every day. A consistent sleep schedule helps to regulate and set the body's "internal clock" which tells us when we are tired and when it is time to sleep.

In addition, consider talking with your primary care physician, psychiatrist or counselor. If there is other issues that are compounding the problem such as symptoms of restless leg syndrome or sleep apnea consider consulting with a sleep medical specialist.

Additional Information about Nightmares

Nightmares are one of the most common symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Nightmares can happen at any time during the sleep cycle. Certain medications, health conditions and withdrawal from alcohol or other sedating drugs like marijuana may also contribute to disturbing nightmares. Nightmares may resolve within the first three months after a trauma without additional treatment. However, if you are concerned about coping with nightmares or they have lasted longer than three months there are both psychological treatments and medications that have been found to be effective in reducing nightmares. Discuss cognitive behavioral treatments with your counselor. This may include changing the ending of the nightmare and rehearsing while awake. Also learn and use relaxation and grounding techniques. These techniques are helpful with going to sleep and can be useful to calm yourself after a nightmare.

Witness Justice (n.d.). Help and Healing for Victims of violence; www.witnessjustice.org/resources/leep. cfm. April 16, 2009.



Searching for Peace, Strength, and Hope After Trauma

Trauma wounds more than our physical bodies, it also wounds our mind and spirit. Often survivors or witnesses of traumatic circumstances feel disconnected with those things in which they had previously found meaning, value or a purpose for living. They may even feel disconnected from God or others close to them. This is normal.

It will take time to fully integrate your feelings and thoughts that surround this issue. Take heart. Time can be your best friend. It allows you the chance to reflect, remember, and refocus your energies in ways most healthy for you.

As you journey toward wholeness you may find yourself on one of three paths. The first path takes one towards an *inward journey* of reflection and remembrance. What spiritual resources have you found helpful to you in the past? Are they accessible to you now? You may want to journal your thoughts, pray, meditate, or speak with your religious leader or counselor those aspects of our experience that take us to the darkest places within our souls. Spend some quiet time just attending to the emotional needs you have and allow yourself to ask for help along the way.

The second journey you may embark on is the *outward journey*. This journey allows us the opportunity to utilize those resources, be they spiritual or otherwise, that assist us with reconciling the trauma emotionally, and spiritually. Who or what is helpful to you on your outward journey? Who or what is least helpful to you? Along this path we are visited by many negative emotional companions such as anger, fear, anxiety, bitterness, and un-forgiveness. It is okay to be where you are. You are not alone, we are here with you. Recovery is a snapshot in time. Each day you will find yourself at a different place along the path and in time the negative emotional companions will be replaced by positive companions such as love, joy, peace, faith, and hope.

The third journey one travels as they process this experience may be an *upward journey*. Is there something you find helpful connecting to outside of yourself that brings you comfort, clarity, or congruence? Would it be helpful for you to explore or access this resource with your spiritual advisor or our staff chaplain? We are here to help as you reconcile your past, reflect upon the present, and refocus your energies for the future! May you find blessings on the journey ahead.

Safety Plan

1. Take steps right away if any of the following apply to you:

- You are unable to manage your symptoms such as triggers, flashbacks, strong emotions such as fear, anger, or sadness.
- You feel overwhelmed, hopeless, helpless or worthless.
- You are taking risks that are endangering your life and or the lives of others.
- You feel like hurting yourself, hurting others, destroying property or committing a crime.
- You're thinking a lot about dying and have thoughts of suicide or have planned how to kill yourself.

2. Rather than hurt myself (or another), I will do the following to remain safe:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3. I will call the following people, who can help me feel safer:

Name _____

Phone # _____

Name _____

Phone # _____

Name _____

Phone # _____

4. I will call the following professionals for help:

Therapist Name _____

Phone# _____

Physician Name _____

Phone# _____

Net Care: (614) 276-2273 Suicide Hotline: 614 221-5445

5. I will go to the emergency room at: _____

I, _____, contract to follow this Safety Plan.

Signature _____

Date: _____

Trauma Focused Treatment

Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening.

Trauma results in lasting adverse effects on an individual's functioning and mental physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

Trauma can be experienced after a one time event or after multiple events throughout the lifespan.

CTAP is trauma focused and provides clinical case management, individual and group therapy for:

- Physical, sexual, emotional abuse, assault, neglect, or trauma
- Human trafficking
- Vicarious and secondary trauma
- Community violence
- Hate, discrimination, bias
- Co-survivors of crime and trauma

Trauma Informed Services

It is the mission of the Crime and Trauma Assistance Program to serve the community in a healing capacity and provide trauma informed best practices for treatment with a focus on high quality care. CTAP aims to create a safe physical and emotional space through trauma informed care practices, putting people at the center of all we do.

Screening and Assessment

CTAP accepts self referrals and professional referrals for the program. Referrals are screened for their level of care treatment needs and will either be scheduled with one of our highly skilled trauma trained clinicians, or connected to a provider in the community to meet their treatment needs.

Clinical Case Management

CTAP has a clinical case manager on staff to assist clients and referrals with case management needs, including addressing barriers to trauma treatment. These needs and barriers include transportation, food access, housing, education, severe mental health, social activities, support groups, insurance, and addiction services.

Clinical Counseling

CTAP provides individual and group clinical counseling treatment for children and adolescents ages 5 and up, adult victims, survivors, and co-survivors of crime and trauma.

Our clinicians are highly trained in trauma informed and best practice therapeutic interventions. Various evidenced based treatment modalities are utilized to meet the specific needs of the client. Some of these interventions may include:

- EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)
- TF-CBT (Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)
- DBT (Dialectical Behavioral Therapy)
- Brainspotting
- Play Therapy
- IFS (Internal Family Systems)
- Horticultural Therapy
- I-Rest Meditation/Yoga

Training and Consultation

CTAP provides trauma training and consultation services to local, state, and national trauma providers, agencies, and organizations.



The counseling services provided through the Crime & Trauma Assistance Program (CTAP) are free of charge. That's thanks to the generosity of Mount Carmel Foundation donors, Mount Carmel Health System and grants from various local, state and federal agencies..



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