

Helping your child cope with the effects of crime

Victim Support

About This Leaflet

This leaflet gives information about how children can be affected by crime and explains what help is available. Crimes covered in this leaflet include those against children, the home or property, and against people that a child knows. It suggests things that you can do to reassure your child and to help them recover. It also gives information about Victim Support's free and confidential service and lists other sources of help.

As a parent or carer, you know your child best and have the most experience of coping with any problems your child has.

This leaflet is mainly about the experiences of younger children.

What Is Victim Support?

Victim Support is the independent national charity for people affected by crime. Trained local volunteers offer free, confidential support and information. People are referred to us by the police and other organisations, or contact us directly. The crime doesn't have to have been reported and it doesn't matter how long ago it happened.

Victim Support also runs the Witness Service. Trained local volunteers give victims, witnesses and their families' emotional support and practical information about what to expect when

they have to attend court. If you or your child has been affected by crime, Victim Support can help both of you to cope with the experience.

Victim Support normally only sees children under 16 with the permission of their parents or carers. However in certain circumstances this may not be possible. We understand that you are concerned about your child's welfare. Victim Support has policies and procedures in place to safeguard your child (copies are available on request).

More information about all our services is given at the end of this leaflet, including specialist help for more serious crimes.

The Effects of Crime

People react to crime in many ways. Although most victims don't suffer long-term harm, both adults and children can be seriously affected.

Fear, worry, guilt and anger are just some of the feelings that crime can cause, for both children and adults. But lots of other reactions are common too and quite normal. Boys are just as likely as girls to be upset by a crime and different children in the same family may react differently.

No child is too young to feel shock, fear and distress. However, young children may find it particularly difficult to

understand what has happened and why they feel the way they do.

Crime can trigger physical symptoms as well as emotional ones. Your child may complain about headaches, stomach pains, feeling sick and general aches and pains. Other reactions may include problems with eating or sleeping, poor schoolwork, a fear of the dark, or avoiding other people. Children, and those around them, may not realise or say that these problems are related to the crime.

How You Can Help Your Child

Children are much more able to come to terms with a hurtful experience when they have the love and support of their family.

Because you know your child best it is important for you to think about your child's needs and to be sensitive to any changes in their behaviour and feelings after a crime. And if you were affected by the crime as well, it might be difficult for you to realise that your child might not be affected in the same way as you.

If you (or other members of your family) have become anxious or distressed by the incident, these feelings can be picked up by your child. This may make them feel more anxious and afraid. It is important for you to address your own anxieties; possibly by seeking help or by

using relaxation techniques to help you through this time.

Reassuring Your Child

Children may find it difficult to tell parents or carers about things that have happened. They may think that they will get into trouble, or they might feel guilty.

Don't dismiss their worries. Let your child know that you're available to talk; when they open up, encourage them to discuss their fears.

In many situations we don't have a good explanation for why something happened. But giving as much information as you can and answering questions truthfully can help. If your child keeps wanting to talk about what happened, let them.

It is important to let your child know that you are glad that they told you. Your child will hopefully feel reassured to know that you are more concerned about their safety than the fact that, for example, their bike or mobile phone has gone.

Even if you think that your child was taking a risk, breaking a rule or being careless, this does not mean that they deserve to be assaulted or to have things stolen.

Your child may be very worried about how you might react. You may need to reassure them that what happened was not their fault. Taking reasonable steps to protect yourself against crime is part of

everyday life – but at the same time you won't want your child to spend all their time worrying about crime prevention.

You may feel that talking to your child about the crime could make things worse. But keeping quiet can make children wonder why nothing is being said and this may confuse or frighten them more. Avoiding the problem may allow fears to build up over time.

Some children will find it helpful, when they are ready, if you go back with them to the place where the crime happened. But in the wrong circumstances this could be a frightening idea – so once again be sensitive to your child's needs.

Other Things to Consider

Don't try to rush your child into returning to their old routines or habits. Children need to move at their own pace and encouraging them slowly and in stages may be more helpful. New activities (sports, clubs, etc) or new friends can help children to feel more positive. But once again, it is vital to let children develop at their own pace. Think about how you have successfully helped or encouraged your child in the past.

Give your child plenty of time to come to terms with their feelings. Reassurance will help your child to feel confident in a difficult situation.

Some children find it difficult to talk about unpleasant things that have happened. They may find it easier to draw pictures or write stories about it. Encouraging them to do this will help them.

Why not ask your child what would make them feel safer? Perhaps they will suggest something that you have not thought of.

Getting advice from your family doctor or your health visitor may be helpful, especially if your child has worries or health problems that you cannot help with.

How Victim Support Can Help

We can offer a trained volunteer who you can talk to in confidence. They can see you and other members of the family to go through the issues raised in this leaflet and discuss different ways to help you and your child to cope with the effects of the crime.

Practical Help and Support

A volunteer can go with you and your child to the police station if you want them to. They can help you to deal with other agencies, such as schools. They can also give you information about police and court procedures, repairs, insurance, home security and compensation.

Help At Court

If your case is going to court, Victim Support's Witness Service can help children, you and other family members to understand and cope with the experience.

Help For You

Your child may not be the only one needing support. Both you and other family members may be having strong feelings.

Some parents or carers feel very angry or upset themselves at what has happened. Others may find it difficult to be as supportive to their own child as they would like to be.

Victim Support is there to help all of you.

Contacting Victim Support

Victims of crime are usually put in touch with us by the police. But anyone can also contact us directly, whether or not they want to report the crime. Contact information, and details of the Victim Supportline, are on the back of this leaflet.

Contact with Other Organisations

As well as the list on page 15 of this leaflet, our volunteers or the Victim Supportline can put you in touch with

other organisations if you need different kinds of help.

Information for Specific Types of Crime

Crimes against Children

Any child can become a victim of crime. Some common types of crime against children are theft or mugging, assault, racial harassment and bullying.

Children who have been victims of crime sometimes feel shock, anger, a desire for revenge, fear of going out alone, or fear of returning to where an attack took place (which could include school).

They may also have problems sleeping, become withdrawn, or be worried about a court case that is coming up.

Bullying

Bullying is very common and causes a lot of distress. Some people think that bullying is not a crime as it is usually carried out by children against children. But if adults were subjected to some of the things that bullying involves it would often be treated as a criminal offence (e.g. violent attacks, theft and extortion).

Bullying is serious and it is important that action is taken. Help or information is available from your local branch of Victim Support, and from many other

organisations (see page 15 for a list). For example, a trained Victim Support volunteer could, if you wish, help you to raise the issue with the school.

Crimes against the Home or Property

If a crime is committed directly against a child, they may be affected in relatively obvious ways. But children are more often indirectly the victims of crimes. This means that they are affected by crimes against their parents or relatives, or against family property. For example, a child may be seriously affected by a burglary at the home, whether or not they were there, even if they were asleep when it happened.

Children can react to burglary in many ways. Some become afraid at night, have disturbed sleep, bad dreams, fear of the dark or of sleeping alone. Others may be very unsettled at home, frightened of being left by themselves or of going into rooms on their own, or worried that a burglar will come back. This can affect a child's behaviour, making them search the house or refuse to leave the home.

The circumstances of the crime can make a difference – for instance, how the burglar got into the house, if the child's room was disturbed, or if the child discovered the burglary.

Things You Can Do

These are things that other parents have found helpful in making children feel safe again at home:

- * Giving the child a personal alarm or a torch might give them a greater sense of security or control.
- * A nightlight left on all night, or until you go to bed, may help to reduce a fear of the dark. If you don't want your child to rely on this, think of it as a temporary measure – your child may need to adjust gradually to sleeping in the dark again.
- * Music from a radio or tape may help a child to relax and feel calmer. Leaving the bedroom door open will let your child know that they can call out for you and may help to reassure them.
- * Involving your children in talking about or improving home security can help them to feel secure. If new locks are being fitted, let your children watch. You should be able to get home security advice from your local police crime prevention officer.

Crimes against People Known To The Child

This kind of crime can be particularly difficult as parents or carers will have to deal with the situation and with their own feelings, as well as those of their child.

We know that children can have very strong reactions to crimes committed against people who are close to them – such as a parent or carer. Typically they may be anxious about a loved-one's well-being and safety, as well as concerned about their own security.

Violent or aggressive behaviour between family members is particularly distressing for children.

Children may need a lot of reassurance in these situations. Take time to find out exactly how the child is feeling.

Children may also need a lot of help to understand what has happened and why other things are happening as a result. For example, if someone has been injured and is in hospital, you may need to explain what a hospital is, why the person has cuts and bruises, and that hospital is where people usually go to get better.

Other Organisations

Anti-Bullying Alliance

www.anti-bullyingalliance.org

The Alliance brings together 65 organisations into one network with the aim of reducing bullying and creating safer environments in which children and young people can live, grow, play and learn.

Childline

Tel: 0800 11 11

Textphone: 0800 400 222

www.childline.org.uk

Freephone national 24-hour confidential helpline for children, run in partnership with the NSPCC.

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline

Tel: 0808 800 5000

Textphone: 0800 056 0566

Email: help@nspcc.org.uk

A 24-hour freephone service providing counselling, information and advice to anyone concerned about a child at risk of abuse.

Parentline Plus

Tel: 0800 800 222

Textphone: 0800 783 6783

www.parentlineplus.org.uk

A 24-hour freephone confidential helpline for parents and carers on all aspects of parenting. Also provides secure email helpline via the website.

Thinkuknow

Hosted by CEOP, this is the UK node for internet safety and awareness.

Thinkuknow provides information advice and tools for parents and teachers to promote safe and responsible use of the internet.

<http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk>

South West Grid for Learning (SWGFL)

The South West Grid for Learning is nationally acclaimed as a key organisation dealing with e-safety issues in the education sector. It provides a range of training and resources to help schools and families understand e-safety messages.

www.swgfl.org.uk/safety

The Hotline

To make a report about content that you have encountered on the internet which you suspect to be illegal, contact the hotline.

<http://www.iwf.org.uk>

Childnet

Childnet provides a range of resources for parents, children and teachers. Childnet is a non profit organisation which is working with others to 'help make the internet a great and safe place for children'.

<http://www.childnet.com>

Childline Online

Childline is 24-hour service for children and young people up to 18 years of age. It is open 365 days a year (even Christmas Day!) offering support to young people through the Childline listening service (0800 1111) over the phone and through the website Childline Online. You can contact Childline for a chat or to talk about any problems you might have including internet related ones.

<http://www.childline.org.uk>

Get Safe Online

Get Safe Online is a national awareness and information site (sponsored by the UK Government) focusing on the issue of IT security, specifically; phishing, spyware and identity theft.

<http://www.getsafeonline.org>

Insafe

The European e-safety awareness-raising network aims at empowering users to benefit from the positive aspects of internet use whilst avoiding the potential risks.

<http://www.saferinternet.org>

Contact your local Victim Support branch

Victim Support & Witness Service
Royal Court
St Peter Port
GY1 2PB

Tel: 01481 713000

Fax: 01481 710024

E-Mail: victimsupportgsy@cwgsy.net

Victim Supportline
0845 30 30 900

Victim Support National Centre
Hallam House
56-60 Hallam Street
London, W1W 6JL

Tel: 020 7268 0200