

PERSONAL REACTION TO ROBBERY

Robberies may have very adverse effects on a victim. The direct or implied violence may cause personal reactions and feelings that a victim is not used to, regardless of the degree of violence.

Victims may personalize the robbery and regard their reactions as unusual. Stress may occur.

REMEMBER - Robberies are abnormal events. Unusual reactions are likely very normal.

Your reaction to a robbery may depend upon:

- the suddenness or degree or warning
- the extent to which your personal safety is threatened
- the behavior of the robbers
- the number of previous robberies in which you were involved
- your level of stress prior to the robbery
- your state of physical and emotional health
- the amount of support you receive immediate after the robbery

THE BEHAVIOUR OF ROBBERS

Most robbers are only interested in obtaining money and not in physically attacking their victims. They often use threats in order to frighten; then they complete the robbery and escape. They usually do not remember the faces or appearances of their victims. Their behavior may include:

- loud, foul and obscene language
- quiet demands
- jumping across counters
- commands to lie on the floor
- threats with a weapon

Statements Made By Robbery Victims

- "I thought I had blown it because the robbers screamed 'no one pull the alarm' and I had pulled it already." (Manager)
- "They were very loud - shouting and telling us to move."



COMMON REACTIONS OF VICTIMS

Many of your reactions during a robbery will be automatic. You may not be conscious of what you are doing. Events may seem to be in slow motion. Several minutes may seem like an hour. You may focus exclusively on one or two aspects of what is happening and not notice other events, which are occurring.

These reactions are common:

- fear for one's personal safety or the safety of colleagues
- helplessness about being unable to do anything
- confusion about what to do or how to respond to the robbers' demands
- anger at having to surrender money or goods
- concern that the robber may remember who you are
- physical reactions such as trembling, or the inability to move

THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH

After the robbers have fled, the most immediate reaction is one of relief that:

- the crisis is over
- you survived it
- you were not severely hurt

This may be followed by feelings of:

Anger

- at having to go through a robbery
- at a system which allows it to happen
- at the robbers because they got away
- at having to give up cash
- at the police for not arriving earlier

Helplessness

- that you could do nothing during the robbery
- that if you can be robbed at work, at home, or on the street, then anything can happen to you
- that you have been victimized

Guilt

- that you did not behave properly during the robbery
- that you could have prevented it
- that you should have remembered details of the robbery

Frustration

- because your employer gave you responsibilities after the robbery (counting the cash)
- because you had to answer many questions
- because you could not remember details of the robbery
- because you had to return to work

Statements Made By Robbery Victims

- "After the police left, the first thing we did was count the cash. We have to balance."
- "The manager seemed overwhelmed and did not seem to know what to do."
- "I felt angry at the manager because after the hold-up he didn't seem to care."
- "The thing that annoys me is that they will never be caught - they were wearing masks and left no fingerprints."
- "I can't remember their faces."

THE END OF THE DAY

The evening after a robbery can be particularly difficult. The stress and emotions resulting from the robbery may leave you tired and fatigued.

It is common to:

- feel alone and frightened, especially if you do not live with anyone
- want to talk about the robbery at great length
- not want to talk about it at all
- worry that the robbers may come to your home because you are a witness
- lose your appetite
- lose interest in exchanging affection with your partner or children
- not want to listen to the problems of others
- find others not interested in the details of the robbery
- experience restlessness and sleeplessness
- wake up suddenly after falling asleep

Statements Made By Robbery Victims

- "I woke up during the night and saw him at the foot of my bed."
- "My husband listened to me for a while but I don't think he really understood what happened."

THE NEXT FEW DAYS

The effects of a robbery may not disappear immediately. In the days following, you may continue to experience unusual feelings such as:

- apprehension and vulnerability; if it happened once, it can happen again;
- being unsafe. Your "guard" may be up. You may react to sudden movements or loud noises;
- diminished self worth. You may be uncertain, irritable, forgetful, and unsociable;
- being preoccupied with the robbery. You may re-live it through recurring thoughts. You may identify people who you think looks like the robber.

Statements Made By Robbery Victims

- "When I got in my car the next morning, I didn't scrape the windshield and I immediately locked my doors."
- "I really don't like talking about this. What good will talking do?"
- "I didn't feel anything until I saw the robber in court. He wore the same clothes and I felt sorry for him."

COPING

Victims can do some things which will help to recover from a robbery. You should:

- refrain from excessive use of alcohol
- exercise regularly
- maintain a proper diet
- rest regularly
- continue contact with people who provide support
- discuss the event with colleagues, supervisors, friends and family - people who will listen and not condemn you
- be honest with yourself regarding your stress levels and ability to cope

ONE WEEK TO ONE MONTH

During this time period, the unusual reactions will begin to diminish for many victims. You may have a brief relapse after a difficult day or a stressful event, but your recovery will likely continue.

It is not uncommon to continue to:

- dream about the event
- suffer from sleeplessness
- have periodic episodes of depression or irritability
- withdraw from people

If the unusual reactions continue so that it is affecting your personal life, family, or your work, then professional help should be sought.

WHO CAN HELP?

Victims often feel that they should be able to cope on their own. Only "weak" people obtain professional help. This is an incorrect assumption.

People who have been severely victimized frequently have the feeling that they are "going crazy". It is important for victims to receive assurance that it is the robbery, not them, which caused their distress.