

The Road to “Normal”: Stages of the Victim Experience

I. SHOCK/DISBELIEF (Immediately afterward and up to 1 week later)

Physical Reactions

Shock—Loss of concentration, blood pressure fluctuations, rapid pulse, pallor, etc.
Disturbances in patterns of sleeping or eating
Difficulty concentrating

Emotional Styles

Controlled—Flat, emotionless, calm, composed, numb (internalized)
Expressive—Upset, nervous, angry, anxious, tense, fearful (externalized)

Needs

Medical—Physical injuries or preexisting conditions
Emotional—Fear, helplessness, denial, guilt, degradation, anger, mood swings, depression, anxiety, fatigue, loss of concentration

Thoughts

Tries to block memories
Tries to “undo” the crime
Thinks about it frequently
Unable to cope or understand the experience

II. OUTWARD ADJUSTMENT (Up to 1 year later)

Physical Reactions

Psychosomatic complaints

Emotional Styles

Denial or avoidance
Does not want to talk or think about the incident

Needs

Return to normal routines

III. REORGANIZATION (1 year or more afterward)

Physical Reactions

Possible increase in health problems or alcohol and drug abuse

Psychological

Nightmares

Flashbacks

Fear of crowds or people in general, fear of being alone, of sleeping, or of situations that remind the victim of the crime

Social

Trades freedom for security

Normal routine upset

Level of functioning reduced

Avoids leaving home

Drops out of school, absent from work

Avoids or clings to family and friends

Changes home, job, or telephone number

Strong need for a change of scenery or to “get away”

Family conflicts

Feeling of loss of support from intimates, violated trust

Feeling of loss of privacy

Angry at loss of freedom

IV. RESOLUTION (THE ROAD TO “NORMAL”)

General Condition

Feels safe and in control again

Able to trust again

Free from fear

Blames criminal, not self

Feels “normal” again

Expresses and resolves anger