

PERSONAL REACTION TO ROBBERY

Robbery is stealing/theft using violence or the threat of violence

Having something stolen can have an adverse effect on us however, in a robbery; it is the direct or threatened violence that may have a considerable impact on the victim. The impact may cause personal reactions and feelings (stress) that we are not used to. It is important to remember that under these circumstances, stress is the normal reaction of a normal person to an abnormal situation.

Some of the feelings and reaction people may have during and after a robbery are:

#1 The Robbery, Your Reactions may be dependent upon:

The suddenness of the occurrence, your perception as to the degree to which your life is threatened.

They may also be based on the Robber's behaviour:

- Loud, dramatic, aggressive
- Quiet, authoritative, demanding
- Foul or obscene language
- Space Invasion
- Jumping or coming from behind a counter
- Physical contact or attacks
- The proximity or discharge of firearms

The robbery may be for some people, an accumulative last straw for their emotions. Many or your reactions will be automatic and over which you have no control:

Events may seem to be in slow motion, a robbery of only minutes can seem like it took hours to occur

You may focus exclusively on certain portions or areas of what is occurring; your senses may be directed entirely to what is happening to you.

You May Feel:

Fear:

- For yourself, your safety
- Concern for your family, your fellow employees

Anger:

- Directed at the attackers

- At other employees for their reactions
- To have to give up your money

Helplessness:

- You are not in control of the situation
- Frustration
- Confusion

Statements Robbery Victims have made:

- “I thought I had blown it because the robber screamed, “No one pulled the alarm”, but I already had”.
- “The steno was hyper-ventilating in the corner. I thought the robbers would become angry and shoot all of us”.
- “They were very loud – shouting and telling us to move”.
- “They dragged two customers who were leaving, back into the bank. One was an older lady who they roughed up”.
- “I have been robbed 4 times. When the 2nd robbery occurred, I forgot the looks of the first guy. When the 3rd robbery happened, I forgot the face of the 2nd guy”.
- “When the robber held the gun to my head, I could see the hammer coked. I thought about trying to grab it – to put my thumb between the hammer and the chamber.”

#2 THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH: The robbers have fled

Reactions:

The most immediate feeling is relief that the crisis is over, that you survived it, that you did not get hurt

You may feel:

Anger

- at having to go through the robbery, at the system that allows such things to happen, that the robbers got away or won't be caught, at having to give up your cash, why it took so long for the police to arrive, at why no one, (management, the police, the system) did anything to help or prevent the robbery.
- You may cry or tremble as your feelings are overwhelming, you are relieving tension.
- You may need to be alone, need time to think as a coping mechanism as you try to adjust and evaluate everything that happened

Helplessness

- You may feel that if this can happen at work; that anything can happen anywhere to you or to those close to you.

- The robbery can affect your self-perception, why me? What singles me out for the attack? Am I different than other?

Guilt

- Did I do something wrong? Did I do anything to cause the robbery? About giving the money away, about pulling the alarm.
- While you are experiencing these feelings and reactions, there may be additional responsibilities placed on you by having to:
- Take inventory, count cash, answer questions from management/police, remember exact descriptions and details, prepare to resume business and face customers again.

Statements that other robbery victims have made;

- “After police left, the first thing we did was count the cash. We have to balance.”
- “I wanted to be alone so I volunteered to answer the phone.”
- “The manager seemed overwhelmed and did not seem to know what to do.”
- “After the police investigation, the manager pulled out a bottle.”
- “I felt angry at the manager because after the hold-up he did not seem to care.”
- “The thing that annoys me the most is that they will never be caught – they were wearing masks and left no fingerprints.”
- “We all went for lunch but it seemed strange to be in a restaurant.”
- “I can’t remember their faces.”
- “My Husband heard about the robbery on the radio. He didn’t believe I was all right and had to come to the bank to see for himself.”

#3 THE END OF THE DAY

Going Home:

The stress and emotions of the day may leave you tired or fatigued; this is your mind and your body attempting to recover from the ordeal.

You may FEEL:

Alone particularly single people or single parents with no immediate support base at home.

You may:

Have a loss of appetite, don’t want to or have the energy to eat, want to talk, not want to talk, worry about the robbers coming to your home to harm you because you were a witness, have a diminished interest in affection, all your feelings are focused on the robbery, not want to listen to other’s problems, find others are not interested at all or are not interested enough in what happened to you, experience sleeplessness and bad dreams, which are common.

This is your mind trying to assimilate and understand what happened.

Statements other Robbery Victims have made:

- “I woke up during the night and saw him at the foot of my bed.”
- “My husband listened to me for awhile but I don’t think he really understood what happened to me.”
- “You can’t understand it if you haven’t experienced it.”

#4 THE NEXT FEW DAYS (24 – 72 HOURS)

In addition to the feelings and reactions mentioned previously, there may now also be:

Feelings of vulnerability and apprehension, (if it happened once it can happen again), the degree of stress experienced is sometimes dependant upon the potential for re-occurrence, feeling unsafe of constantly being in danger, (your guard is up), you may startle easily due to sudden movements or loud noises – this is due to your mind still being occupied with the robbery and your body still being geared up to protect you, a feeling of loss of self worth.

You are:

Anxious, unsure, uncertain about how you should be feeling or acting, you may be more deliberate about normal everyday things you do, you may not be as sociable or friendly, you may experience particular short term memory loss. You may have difficulty understanding or explaining the robbery to yourself or others. Why me? What did I do to deserve this? Am I different? I’ve already had my share of suffering.

You may have dreams or nightmares about the robbery, every night or several times each night, you may feel tight, wound up, keeping everything inside.

Some statements from other Robbery Victims:

- “When I got in my car the next morning, I did not scrape the windows and I 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.”
- “I got a call from personnel asking if I was alright. That was nice.”
- You may experience some, many, all or none of these feelings and reactions depending on who you are, what has occurred previously in your life and your perception of the robbery.

#5 COPING: What to do about it:

Refrain from excessive use of alcohol or drugs, it may make you feel worse

Regular rest, diet & exercise are all important but perhaps the most effective coping skill is to talk. Talk about what happened, how you felt then and how you feel now

Talk to your colleagues, supervisor, employee assistance group, your family including your children, friends, those who you feel close to and who understand you.

You can also talk to Advocates of the Victim Service Unit who are trained in the reactions and feeling of crisis.

If you can let your feelings out, talk them out, your stress reactions should start to diminish within a few days or weeks

#6 FOUR TO SIX WEEKS

During this time frame, most people's feelings and reactions will diminish. There may be short relapses due to memory associations but generally most people are beginning to cope.

It is not unusual for people to experience; dreams, sleeplessness, depression, irritability, social withdrawal, resentment and/or bitterness.

If they are not diminishing or are interfering with your lifestyle to a great degree, then perhaps you should seek professional advice.

Trauma is the inability to cope with your personal reactions after a reasonable amount of time.

WHO CAN HELP?

If, after the first few days, you find you are completely overwhelmed and cannot cope with your feelings, to the extent that your reactions are markedly interfering with your work, your family or your lifestyle, professional advice can be obtained. Seek assistance through your employee assistance staff, a referral from the Victim Service Unit or from Alberta Mental Health.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. You are not alone.

There are many financial institutions, grocery stores, drug stores and service stations robbed in Edmonton and area on a yearly basis. Anyone who is robbed will experience some feelings about the robbery, some will be minor, some will be severe. If you are having problems, call us. Together we will try to help.