



find the strength

Helping your child after a crime

Information for
parents and carers

www.victimsupport.org.uk

If you or your child has been affected by crime, we can help both of you to find your strength again.

We normally only see children under 16 with the permission of their parents or carers. We also understand that you are concerned about your child's welfare and we have policies and procedures in place to safeguard your child (ask us if you'd like to know more about this).

There's more information about all our services 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 affects children too

It's not just adults who suffer crime – children do too, whether as direct victims or when it affects the family or community.

This leaflet explains how children can be affected and gives ideas for how you can help them find the strength they need to carry on. It also gives information about Victim Support's free and confidential services and lists other sources of help. It focuses more on younger children but may help with older age groups too. There's also lots of information about crime and young people on our website and at www.are-you-ok.org.uk.

As a parent or carer, you know your child best and have the most experience of coping with any problems your child has. But we can help support you to do that.

What is Victim Support?

Victim Support is the independent national charity for people affected by crime. We help over 1 million victims of crime every year – including a lot of children and young people. Our trained local volunteers give free, confidential support and information. People are referred to us by the police and other organisations, but you can also contact us directly for help and information.

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

How you can help your child

It's much easier for children 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 feel 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 relaxations 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 there to talk; when they open up, encourage them to discuss their fears.

It's often hard to explain why a crime 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's important to let your child know that you are glad that they told you that they've been a victim. 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.

At Victim Support we believe that victims are never to blame for a crime. So 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 to the scene of the crime with them. 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

Think about how you have successfully helped or encouraged your child in the past.

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 speed.

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 events. 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 you haven't thought of.

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

How we can help

You can talk to one of our specially trained volunteers in confidence. They can help 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 find your strength again.

In some places we have specialist services for young people. Please contact your local office to find out exactly what help we can offer in your area. Contact details are on the back of this leaflet.

Practical help and support

One of our people can go with you and your child to the police station if you want. 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, our Witness Service can help children, you and other family members to understand and cope with the experience. There are also special facilities and procedures for young witnesses at court that we can explain and help to arrange. Should your child need to be a witness, a special information pack is available from the police.

Help for you

Your child may not be the only one needing support. Both you and other family members may be feeling hurt by a crime.

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.

We're there to help all of you.

Contacting us

Victims of crime are automatically put in touch with us by the police. But you can also contact us directly, whether or not you want to report the crime.

Contact information, and details of our Victim Supportline, are on the back of this leaflet. Our website also has local and national contact information.

Other sources of help

As well as the list on pages 14 and 15 of this leaflet, we 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 some of the things that bullying involves were done to adults, they would be treated as a criminal offence (eg violent attacks, theft and extortion).

Bullying is serious and it is important that action is taken. Help or information is available from your local Victim Support office, and from many other organisations (see pages 14 and 15 for a list). For example, we can help you to raise the issue with the school if you want.

Crimes against the home or property

If a crime is committed directly against a child, they may be affected in obvious ways. But children are 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 done to help make 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 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 CD 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. We can help with fixing home security after a burglary. You should also be able to get home security advice from your local police crime prevention officers.

Crimes against people your child knows

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 your child is feeling.

Children may also need a lot of help to understand what is going on after a crime. 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.

Help with other types of crime

You may be worried about other, possibly very serious, crimes that are not covered in this leaflet.

We have specially trained volunteers to give support after rape and sexual assault, racial harassment, domestic violence, and murder and manslaughter.

If you are worried about the welfare of someone else's child, we can put you in touch with an organisation which has responsibility in this area.

Other organisations

Anti-Bullying Alliance

www.anti-bullyingalliance.org

The Alliance brings together over 70 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

www.childline.org.uk

Tel: 0800 11 11

Textphone: 0800 400 222

Freephone national 24-hour confidential helpline for children, run by the NSPCC.

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline

www.nspcc.org.uk

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.

Family Lives

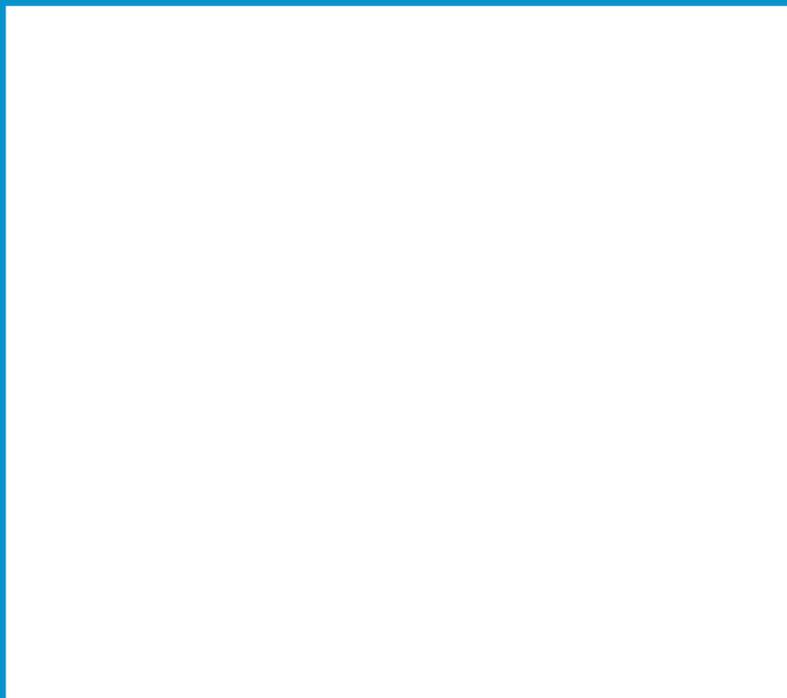
www.familylives.org.uk

Tel: 0808 800 2222

Textphone: 0800 783 6783

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

Contact your local Victim Support office



Our Victim Supportline **0845 30 30 900** gives information and support for anyone affected by crime.

You can contact us using Text Relay by adding 18001 before any of our phone numbers.

Help us support other victims and witnesses. Text **VISU13** and an amount to **70070** to make a donation.

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