



Coping After a Robbery

A robbery can be a disruptive event. Whether a weapon was presented or not, it is still reasonable to feel like your life was threatened. When we experience a disruptive event, our brains try to make sense of what happened. This guide offers tips to aid in the recovery process following a robbery.

COMMON REACTIONS

- Shock and disbelief - feeling that this is "unreal" or could not have happened
- Anger - may be at victims, perpetrator, situation, or others
- Confusion or difficulty thinking clearly
- Difficulty making decisions
- Poor concentration
- Going over and over the event in your mind
- Wondering "what if," thinking about how things might have been if you acted differently
- Depression or sadness
- Anxiety or fear that a robbery will happen again
- Hypersensitivity - heightened awareness of things that remind you of the event
- Changes in level of activity - feeling fidgety and moving around more than usual, or lethargic
- Difficulty sleeping or eating
- Irritability or feeling on edge
- Blaming - the perpetrators or coworkers
- Physical reactions - rapid breathing, increased heart rate, headache, stomachache, or shakiness

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- During a disruptive event, our body's natural survival mechanisms kick in. Our brains send chemicals like adrenaline and cortisol to help us react in a way that would increase our chances of survival. Our brain also stores the memory of the threat, so it can react more quickly if a similar event is encountered.
- Adrenaline and cortisol may tell your body to freeze, temporarily taking away your ability to react to the event in the way we may have wished.
- Anything that reminds our brains of the threat, such as a sight, sounds, or smell, can trigger our adrenaline and survival mechanisms, even if there is no real threat present
- Your brain may try to make sense of the event by way of flashbacks, dreams, and thinking about the event over and over again - don't be alarmed if this happens.
- Because our brains are trying to make sense of the event, it can slow down the recovery process if we try to deny our feelings or fight reactions. It may be helpful to realize that if flashbacks or dreams occur, it is a normal part of recovery and will usually diminish over time. If we are able to accept our reactions and not fight them, they typically go away faster.
- Everyone reacts to a disruptive event their own way and with varying intensities. Factors that impact how we react, include: previous experiences (especially if unresolved), physical and/or mental health status prior to the event, relationship to others involved in the event, the specifics of the event (how threatening or dangerous,

presence of a weapon, degree of injury caused, etc.), social supports and coping strategies, religious beliefs, and other life stressors.

- Expect recovery. With the help of social supports and coping skills most people begin to feel better within a few weeks. It takes time to recover so be patient with yourself and know that most people who experience a disruptive event do not develop post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Avoid using alcohol or drugs to cope, as they prevent your ability to work through the thoughts and emotions brought up by the event. They also interfere with sleep, which makes it harder for your body to recover from stress.
- Be cautious of consuming caffeine or other stimulants, as they can increase anxiety and interfere with sleep.
- Don't be surprised if this situation brings up past experiences, even if you have worked through those already. This is common and often diminishes as time passes.

COPING STRATEGIES

- Eat healthy and drink lots of water - your body and mind need the nutrients to recover from stress and expel the stress chemicals.
- Engage in regular exercise - this helps to boost chemicals that improve mood, reduce stress, and improve sleep.
- Try to maintain your usual sleep routine. If having trouble sleeping, get up and do a relaxing activity for a little while to distract your mind from worries.
- Help someone else - be a support to your coworkers; offer assistance to the person and/or family of the injured colleague, such as making a meal or babysitting.
- Do some things you enjoy - part of taking care of yourself is making time to relax and have fun; this gives you a break from grieving and helps to maintain balance.
- Talk to someone - family, friends, coworkers, a counselor, faith mentor, or anyone else with whom you feel comfortable sharing your feelings and is helpful to you.
- Return to routine - as soon as you can, engage in your normal routine; this may help you regain your sense of control and predictability of life.
- Think about other times when you coped with difficult situations. What positive coping strategies worked for you then? Can you practice those now?

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE

- If you are unable to care for yourself or dependents.
- Experience significant impairment in your ability to function at work or in your personal life.
- Feel intense sadness or depression for more than two weeks.
- Have increased use of drugs or alcohol.
- Have thoughts of harming yourself or others.



An abnormal reaction
to an abnormal event
is normal behavior.

- Viktor Frankl