

If you are a victim of a hate crime

A hate crime is an act of violence motivated by bias against race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender or gender identity. Although they continue to be on the rise, less than half of all victims file complaints with authorities.

Hate crimes have a broad effect –they victimize not only the immediate target but can also impact many members of the group represented by the direct victims and affect families, communities and sometimes the entire nation.

Potential Effects of Trauma

Individuals who have been victims of a hate crime may experience physical, emotional, and mental health-related symptoms. Seek medical advice if the symptoms persist.

Physical

- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Chills or sweating
- Lack of coordination or tremors
- Heart palpitations or chest pain
- Headaches
- Sleep disturbances
- Stomach upset or loss of appetite
- Startled responses

Emotional

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Guilt
- Grief
- Depression or sadness
- Anger or irritability
- Numbness
- Feeling lost, abandoned or isolated
- Wanting to withdraw or hide

Mental

- Slowed thinking or an inability to concentrate
- Confusion or disorientation
- Memory problems
- Intrusive memories or flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Difficulty in making decisions

Tips for Coping

If you have experienced trauma, the following suggestions may help you cope:

- Find someone to talk with about how you feel and what you are going through. Keep the phone number of a good friend nearby to call when your emotions intensify, or you feel panicked.
- When a painful emotion comes up, allow yourself to feel it—although it's difficult to be in the moment, it will not last forever. Avoiding pain may seem easier in the short-term but can have a significant impact on your mental and physical health over time.
- Spend time with others, as well as make time to spend alone.
- Take care of your mind and body. Rest, sleep and eat regular, healthy meals.

- Exercise, though not excessively, and alternate with periods of relaxation.
- Re-establish a normal routine as soon as possible to help to bring back a feeling of control over your life.
- Undertake daily tasks with care. Accidents are more likely to happen after you have experienced severe stress. Allow yourself to reschedule activities or skip chores if you aren't feeling up to the effort.

Some things to avoid include:

- Blaming yourself --it wasn't your fault.
- Using alcohol or drugs to relieve emotional pain. Becoming addicted not only postpones healing, but also creates new problems.
- Making life changing decisions in the immediate aftermath. Your perspective has been affected by the traumatic event --give yourself time to begin the healing process before initiating any major transitions.
- Bottling up your emotions since they need to be expressed.

For some hate crime victims, life is forever changed. Part of coping and adjusting is redefining the future. What seemed important before may no longer be now. It is essential to remember that emotional pain is not endless and that it will eventually ease. It is impossible to undo what has happened, but in time, life can be good again.

Tips for Family and Friends

You can help a loved one that has been a victim of a hate crime by doing the following:

- Spend time with the individual and be there to simply listen while they share their feelings and experiences.
- Show respect, compassion, and empathy for their feelings with responses like "That sounds hard to manage" or "I'm sorry things are difficult right now."
- Don't take expressed anger or other feelings personally.
- Offer your assistance, even if they haven't asked.
- Help with everyday tasks, like cleaning, caring for family or running errands.
- Give them time to be alone and decompress.

Tips for Parents

How you respond can make a difference in how your child copes with and recovers from trauma—they will be aware of and affected by your reactions. Do your best to remain calm in front of your child and focus on their needs.

It's important to help your child regain a sense of control in their life. Maintain a normal routine. Whenever possible, give you child simple choices, like where to eat or what to wear. Listen when your child says they do not feel safe. Ask questions and offer reassurance. Your child may begin "acting out" so set appropriate limits. For instance, it's normal and okay to express anger, but not acceptable to throw or break things.

Some additional ways you can help include:

- Not questioning your child. As soon as you are aware of a crime against your child, notify law enforcement personnel. Seeking information is a natural reaction, however, it could cause undue stress and interfere with an investigation.
- Not blaming your child. A child is never responsible for the actions of the offender. Validate that the crime was wrong and that you are sorry it happened. Remind them often that you love them.

- Not correcting anything your child tells you about the incident. They may have a difficult time describing what happened or putting it into words. Respond by saying, “I’m really glad you told me that,” or, “thank you for telling me that,” but don’t correct them about specific details.
- Verbalizing your support. Let your child know it is important to talk about what happened and to tell the truth. It is normal for them to feel nervous. Let them know that they are not in trouble and didn’t do anything wrong.
- Keeping your feelings under control. Expressing anger, shock or judgement can make your child feel ashamed. Showing anger towards the offender can scare a child or make them think they did something wrong. Never try to confront the offender in or out of your child’s presence. Law enforcement should be the only ones to interact with the offender.

Traumatic events often cause behavioral and emotional changes that affect your child’s moods, daily activities and relationships. A counselor or therapist can help give ideas and resources to help you and your child deal with these emotions.

You Can Get Help

If you believe you are the victim of a hate crime or believe you witnessed a hate crime:

- Report the crime to your local police.
- Quickly follow up the report by contacting your local branch of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

Thousands of programs throughout the United States provide services and sanctuary to crime victims including state government agencies, private nonprofits, and faith-based organizations. Crime victim assistance programs may offer crisis intervention, counseling, emergency shelter, criminal justice advocacy and emergency transportation. Although compensation and assistance are provided most often to individuals, in certain instances, entire communities may be eligible for assistance in cases of multiple victimizations. You can obtain information about compensation and assistance through your local prosecutor’s office.

Sources:

The U.S. Department of Justice: www.justice.gov

Office for Victims of Crime: <https://ovc.ojp.gov/>