

Remember, involvement in a traumatic event can produce upsetting responses such as disturbed sleep, diminished appetite, and difficulty concentrating. These responses will likely subside with time. However, if reactions are especially long lasting or troubling, you may need to turn to a professional for assistance.

## Benefits of Counseling

Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Reviewing the incident and processing the event can help victims clarify what actually occurred.
- Legal and judicial decisions can be discussed and utilized as part of the promotion of healing and resolution.
- The disruption due to trauma can make daily functioning difficult. Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies, allowing for the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network helps to decrease the negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from the traumatic experience.

Survivors can utilize the experience as an opportunity to build and practice assertiveness, confidence, and protective instinct skills.

## Judicial System

For many, this may be their first involvement with law enforcement or the judicial system. It is very common for people to expect what they have seen on television or movies to apply to their current circumstances. Unfortunately, these expectations are more than often, a distorted and unrealistic snapshot of how things truly operate.

Arizona has laws and regulations in place to protect victims. For cases involving prosecution, a court advocate can provide information, education, and support that will help reduce fears and uncertainties.

Another consideration that is often practiced is that of resolution by plea agreement. By negotiation and agreement, this approach to resolution can prevent the need for testifying in court.

As with any situation, education and information about how the judicial system operates, can assist the victim and their family in the reduction of trauma.

## Who can help?

The Mesa Police Department Victim Services Unit can assist with information regarding Victims' Rights, Victim Compensation, case status, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to other appropriate helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.

## Resources

**Community Information and Referral**  
(602) 263-8856

**EMPACT Crisis Hotline**  
(480) 784-1500

**Arizona Criminal Justice Commission**  
1110 W Washington Ste#230  
Phoenix, AZ 85007  
(602) 364-1146  
acjc@azcjc.gov

**National Criminal Justice Reference Service**  
(NCJRS)  
P.O. Box 6000  
Rockville, MD 20849-6000  
1-800-851-3420

**Office for Victims of Crime**  
U.S. Department of Justice  
810 Seventh Street NW., Eighth Floor  
Washington, DC 20531  
(202) 307-5983

# Victim Services Unit

## Adults and Trauma



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Victim Services Unit  
130 N Robson  
Mesa, AZ 85201  
(480) 644-4075

**This brochure provides information for you and your family about the effects that may be experienced following a distressful and traumatic event.**

Trauma occurs when an event is unusually frightening or threatening. The source of trauma can be any unexpected event or possibly one that is violent. It is important to remember that a traumatic event can have a wide range of reactions.

### Common Physical Responses

Common short-term physical reactions may include:

- Nausea
- Shortness of breath
- Headaches
- Lack of energy
- Weight loss or gain
- Hyperventilation
- Change in sleeping or eating patterns
- Rapid pulse

### Common Emotional Responses

Common emotional responses may include:

- Embarrassment
- Feelings of guilt
- Intrusive thinking (mind wandering, flashbacks to the event, or sense of reliving event)
- Nightmares
- Avoidance of places/activities/people that remind you of the trauma
- Mood swings (sudden and unprovoked fear, anger, crying, irritability, giddiness)
- Poor concentration
- Forgetfulness or memory lapses
- Difficulty showing emotion
- Inability to recall an important aspect of trauma
- Disinterest in previously valued activities
- Exaggerated startle response.

### Coping with a Traumatic Event

Successfully coping with a traumatic event is primarily related to the following factors:

• **Your perception of the type and severity of the event which disrupted your life.**

How you put the traumatic event into perspective is important. In an attempt to make sense out of what happened, it is important that you do not blame yourself. It is also important to understand that strong emotional reactions are common after a traumatic event. The feelings may be new and scary, but they will not last. However, that does not mean that there will not be ups and downs along the way to recovery. Time will heal—there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

• **Your willingness to talk about the event.**

It is important that you be willing to talk about the event with others. Open communication will assist in your recovery. Only you can decide who you'll talk to, when you will talk to that person, and how much detail you'll provide.

• **Your ability to handle everyday stressors.**

The amount of everyday stress you deal with can effect recovery from a trauma. A healthy amount of stress in our lives, helps us to learn and create skills for coping. The degree to which any stressful situation or event impacts daily functioning depends partly on the nature of the stressor itself and partly on personal and external resources, such as having an optimistic personality or a strong support system.

### Tips for Recovery

• **Remain in touch with friends and loved ones.**

Sometimes there is a tendency for victims to pull away from interactions with others. Often, friends or loved ones do not know what to say and, as a consequence, they either say nothing or say something to which the victim reacts negatively. It may seem to you that friends have abandoned you. You can help by telling friends what you need from them; i.e., "I feel really

uncomfortable with physical contact right now," "I appreciate it when you just hold me without asking a lot of questions", or "I'd appreciate it if you would call me every day and just ask me how I'm doing."

• **Return to a regular routine.**

When something terrifying or incomprehensible happens, the victim's immediate perception is that everything is dangerous and out of control and that he/she is never safe. Although these feelings are understandable, they may have been distorted by the overwhelming nature of the event that took place. It is important to maintain at least part of your normal routine. It will help you to deal with those "out of control" feelings. If you can maintain at least part of a normal routine, you can begin to deal with these feelings. Little by little, by going to work, shopping, driving, eating, being with family members, exercising, etc., a more healthy and accurate perception of life begins to redevelop. You begin to realize that not all the world is dangerous and not everyone is out to get you. With these little successes, you slowly regain self-confidence and start to regain stability.

• **Find some "normal things" to do.**

You may not want to participate in relatively complicated human experiences such as going out for drinks, dating, or having sex. However, participating in more simple activities like going to a mall, going out to eat with friends, going to church, or going to a movie may help reinforce a more realistic perception of the world. You may need a friend to act as a social coordinator for a few weeks to suggest and initiate some safe casual activities.

• **Get information about the case.**

Even if there is not an identified suspect, talking with the police or detectives can help you begin to regain some sense of control. Sometimes information that is seemingly unimportant can be helpful to the police investigation.

If the suspect is identified and criminal charges are possible, the prosecutor and courts will be involved. Your cooperation will be vital to successful prosecution.