

"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." –Leo Buscaglia

A Guide for Self-Care: Put Yourself First



The Office of the Victim Advocate will provide notifications regarding the offender's status, the offender's parole review, and will assist you in providing comments to the parole board. These notifications are important however; we recognize they may cause significant emotional distress, anxiety and fear for some individuals.

One may find it difficult to sleep, are fearful, withdraw from their friends and family, or have difficulty experiencing simple daily tasks among many others. The feelings and responses you may be experiencing are common, and our office is here to assist you throughout the process.

Common Responses You May Be Experiencing

Figuring out how to take care of yourself and protect yourself when you experience these responses can help you to cope with these responses in a healthy way:

- Shock, disbelief, confusion
- Grief, denial, depression
- Feelings of detachment
- Fatigue, nausea and dizziness
- Anxiety and panic
- Withdrawal from social activities
- Poor concentration and disorientation
- Flashbacks-feeling like the trauma is happening now
- Headaches, lack of sleep, elevated heart rate.

It is important to make sure that you are taking care of yourself during, and after this difficult time. We call this self-care. Self-care doesn't just mean making a plan; it also means putting that plan into action. Here are some tips for self-care.

Some physical self-care tips are:

Healthy Eating

This is often over looked. Sometimes our lives get so busy that we do not have time to eat a healthy meal, or maintain healthy eating habits.

Exercise

Getting some exercise, even if it is a 30 minute walk can help combat feelings of depression or sadness. It also helps promote a healthy lifestyle.

Sleep

The recommended amount of sleep for adults is 7-10 hours a night. It is important to get plenty of sleep so that your mind and body are able to function.

Some emotional self-care tips are:

Counseling

This can be accomplished through a counselor, psychologist, clinical social worker, therapist, or even talking with a friend.

Journaling

Some find it helpful to write down their feelings, fears, hopes, and dreams down.

Meditate

Some find relaxation techniques helpful. This could be as simple as sitting in a quiet room with your eyes closed and deeply breathing through our nose and out your mouth.

Other helpful tips to maintain self-care are:

Learn to say no.

This can be hard sometimes, but it is important to make sure that you are not over loading yourself. Being over stressed or overburdened can lead to under productivity. When we have too much on our plate that is the time when our physical and emotional needs are most often overlooked.

Maintain social connections.

It is easy to isolate ourselves or withdraw from loved ones when we experience something traumatic. Although it is okay to take time out for yourself and recharge, it is important to maintain contact with those who are important and support you, and learn to distance yourself from those who are negative influences in your life.

Find a balance to your life.

During and after a traumatic event it is easy to keep yourself busy so that you can avoid certain feelings that may arise from the event. Sometimes you will find yourself working too much, or sleeping too much, or even engaging in unhealthy behaviors such as over eating, or drinking too much.

It is important to set limits for yourself on activities and make sure you are finding time to care for your physical and emotional self.

Helping a Friend or Family Member Recover

For many victims and families of victims, life has forever changed. Life may feel empty and lonely. Life may not “mean” what it used to. What seemed important before may not seem important now. Many victims and their families find new meanings of life because of their new experiences. It is impossible to undo what has happened in someone’s life but there is opportunity for it to be good again.

What Can I Do to Help My Loved One?

Each crime victim’s experience is unique and there is no one size fits all. For those family and friends who want to support their loved one, finding ways to be supportive and maintain a healthy relationship can be challenging. Following are some tips to help your loved one that has been victimized.

Listen. Talking about the experience, when your loved one is ready, this may help them process their feelings. Let them lead the conversation, try not to ask too many questions and just listen.

Research. Gather information about other resources the victim can contact for additional support and assistance.

Reassure. Crime victims often question whether an incident was their fault or if they could have prevented it. They may need to hear that it wasn’t their fault and be assured they are not alone.

Empower. Following a traumatic event, victims can feel that their lives are out of control. Aide those in maintaining routines or offer possible solutions to get them back on track.

Be patient. Each crime victim has their own journey. Try to understand that it may take time and do what you can to be supportive. There is no timeline in the healing process.

Ask. Ask how you can help.

Suggestions for Supporting Others

- Validate victim’s feelings and confirm that their feelings are normal.
- Allow victims to respond in their own way.
- Check in with the victim on a regular basis and pay attention to any unusual behavior.
- Provide mutual support to the victim family, who also may be experiencing a wide range of emotions.

Tips for Helpers

- Do not push. Everyone recovers in their own time. When victims are pushed to “get better” they stop the necessary healing process.
- Get support for yourself. Crime adds stress to family and friends. If a victim becomes worried about you, he or she may ignore their own needs for healing.
- Discuss. Talk about future safety planning with the victim.

PA Resources

PCCD-Victim Compensation Assistance Program | 1.800.233.2339 | www.pccd.state.pa.us

PA Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) | 24 hour hot line: 888.772.PCAR | www.pcar.org

PA Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) | 1.800.932.4632 | www.pcadv.org

SAVIN – www.vinelink.com

You may contact OVA at 1.800.563.6399 for local referrals or visit <http://www.ova.state.pa.us>