



CRIME VICTIMS
ASSISTANCE CENTER



Support, Help and Resources

www.cavac.qc.ca

An unsettling day...
un



...the next day

Before yesterday...

recently life ran its course with its ups and downs, with its share of happiness and pain. Now I don't know anymore. I'm afraid and I feel lost.

Yesterday...

something happened to me. I don't know how to say it, I would want to forget it! A nightmare! A kind of jarring began to grow inside me; a deep shaking inside. I was so scared to die. Yes, I really thought that I was going to die.

Today...

I'm alive, but what a life? I'm afraid. I cannot do most things; distinguish between the shadow and the light. Everything is so confused, little things frighten me. I'm afraid I'm going mad. **I'm afraid...**

If you experience these perceptions and sensations, you are probably affected by post-traumatic stress.

This pamphlet was created with you in mind. Inside you will find information about the symptoms, where help can be found, the types of medications prescribed, etc.

Post-traumatic stress

Post-traumatic stress is characterized by a set of intense physical and psychological reactions that manifest themselves after one has experienced a traumatic event such as an armed assault, rape, a natural disaster, kidnapping, physical assault, etc.

The most common symptoms are recurring nightmares, obsessive or haunting thoughts, an inability to sleep (insomnia), a loss of appetite, night and day fears (panic attacks), constantly being on the look out for any little noise, movement, or stranger (hyper vigilance). In conjunction with these rather severe reactions there are also confusing emotional states such as rage, fear, guilt, anxiety, and helplessness.

All the above reactions are attributed to the consequent stress of a traumatic shock and can be considered as "normal" under such circumstances.

But how to overcome such an ordeal?

A universal solution that works for everyone does not exist. The following information may nevertheless be useful to you.

These reactions are normal...



The symptoms of post-traumatic stress

- **States of psychological distress**
(confusion)
- **Recurring nightmares**
- **Loss of appetite and interest**
(including usually stimulating activities)
- **Impression of being disconnected from intimate relations**
- **Persistent physical and moral fatigue**
- **Problems with memory, concentrating, and sleep**
- **Avoidant behaviour**
(avoiding places, individuals, and activities that are reminders of the event)
- **Social withdrawal**
- **Exaggerated startle response, jumping at the smallest noise or movement**
- **Feelings of extreme vulnerability**
- **Sadness and irritability**

*Source: Robert Bluglass and Paul Bowden
Principles and Practice of Forensic Psychiatry
Churchill Livingstone, 1990.*

The support network

- **Family, friends, neighbours**

You may certainly feel the need to be alone at times, yet it is important you do not isolate yourself. If you live alone, your solitude is probably more overwhelming and worrisome, especially during the weeks following the traumatic event. Invite close ones to keep you company, and accept their invitations even if you don't always feel like it.

Do not hesitate to ask someone close to you to accompany you on outings that are still stressful to do alone. Victims of post-traumatic stress have a tendency to isolate themselves at times, not wanting to impose. This only serves to increase their fear and anxiety.

- **Medical help**

It is very important that you consult a medical doctor as soon as possible after the traumatic event, even if you believe that no physical harm has been done to you. Whether it is at the emergency ward of a hospital, a CLSC, or at your family doctor's office, a medical examination is often necessary for the assessment and care that you need, as well as for an eventual absence from work or for a legal process.

- **Psychotherapy**

Psychotherapy is complimentary to the medical help you receive and the help from your close ones. Psychotherapy encourages the expression of emotions and the distress created by the traumatic event. It gives you support and guides you in the identification of means that will allow you to gradually regain a quality of life comparable to the one you had before the event.



Did your doctor prescribe some medication?

Medication is sometimes recommended by doctors, particularly during the most acute period of symptoms. Anxiolitics, anti-depressants, and hypnotics (sleeping pills) are the most commonly prescribed. All medication has undesirable effects, but not all patients have the same sensitivity to these effects. Hence, one patient may tolerate a medication well while someone else may be inconvenienced by the same medication. For example, the new antidepressants are generally better tolerated than their predecessors.

In choosing a medication, your doctor considered the aspect of negative side effects and has prescribed the medication that is best for your clinical profile. It is very important that you follow the prescription carefully in order to insure the efficacy of the treatment. Do not hesitate to ask the doctor about all the information that you judge necessary.

- **Anxiolitics:** Act against anxiety and panic attacks. They are prescribed when needed and may cause addiction.
- **Antidepressants:** Act to stabilize the moods, encourages a psychological disposition that allows better daily functioning. These medications are in general prescribed for a relatively extended period (six months or more) and do not cause addiction. It is essential to follow the exact prescription period and dosage.
- **Hypnotics:** Act directly on sleep functions. They are prescribed as needed and may cause addiction.

The reactions of your immediate social environment

Spouse, friends, and family also feel affected by the traumatic event you experienced. They search for ways to express their sympathy and affection for you and this support is precious for you. But sometimes your close ones don't know how to express themselves. They are afflicted by what has happened to you; they feel sad, angry and a strong sense of helplessness. Some feel guilty that they could not be there to protect you at the time of the traumatic event.

Some look for ways to encourage you by trying to distract you, to "change your mind", to make you forget. Others show their presence by always being by your side, never leaving you alone. It is probable that in spite of all their efforts you feel not understood. Sometimes a person's distress is felt by their close ones who absorb and react almost as intensely to the traumatic event. It remains important that you communicate to them what you are experiencing: your feelings, needs and wants. Your close ones also have their limits. They cannot understand everything, nor can they guess about your needs.

**Help them
help you!**

**Do not hesitate
to refer them**

CAVAC's free and confidential services are also available for family members and relatives.



The workplace

It is possible that you have decided to take a break from your work for a while after having consulted your doctor.

Returning to work can constitute a source of anxiety for many.

Do you dread the questions?

No one can force you to tell everything that happened to you, unless you feel trustful and you want to talk about the reasons for your absence. Nevertheless, it would be preferable if you could confide in one person that you trust at your workplace. This way you may receive an understanding helping hand if you happen to have a problem concentrating on your tasks because of an outburst of emotion that influences your usual level of productivity.

If you feel inconvenienced by indiscrete or too insistent questions, remember that it is neither impolite nor disrespectful to inform your colleagues that you prefer not to talk about it at work, that it disturbs you, etc. Most people will understand your restraint and will respect it.

Worried about losing your job?

We recommend that you communicate with the Commission des normes du travail. There are specific regulations that have been implemented regarding your situation.

Was the traumatic event a criminal act?

If you made a complaint to the police and the suspect has been arrested or is being sought, it may be necessary that you appear before the court. This stage is particularly demanding and maybe you have thought of "dropping it", or refusing to appear.

Frequently, victim's testimony is heard months after the criminal act. Just when you start to get better, you are asked to remember!

No matter what your decision will be, do not make it before having received all the information that will guide you in your choice.

The investigating police officer and the criminal and penal prosecuting attorney can help in this regard. If you must appear in court, we recommend that you are accompanied by a person you trust who can reassure you.

CAVAC can help you!



Support and compensation services

• CAVAC network

Throughout Quebec, the CAVAC network (Crime Victims Assistance Center) offers front-line services that are free of charge and confidential. Assistance focuses on providing the tools to enable crime victims to regain a sense of control over their lives as quickly as possible.

Available assistance includes:

- Post-trauma and psychosociojudicial intervention
- Information on crime victim rights and recourses
- Technical assistance
- Accompaniment in process
- Referrals to specialized services

The CAVAC network can also help witnesses and a victim's close relatives.

• CALACS

These centres offer services to women victims of sexual aggressions only. They offer individual or group support, information and escort services.

• IVAC

This compensation program is administered by the CSST (Commission de la santé et de la sécurité au travail). Everyone who has been physically or psychologically injured during a criminal act can benefit from what is offered by this program. IVAC may cover costs of medication, psychotherapy, compensation for lost salary, etc. For more information and to receive the compensation request forms you can contact the CSST office in your area.

Beyond the symptoms?

There is hope!

“Bent over with me at the front of the ship, “the poor sailor” releases his enthusiasm: It’s so beautiful I feel that here I will recover.” (1)

Between the moments of distress, fear, and forgetfulness, you hold on to what you love: close ones, things that are close to your heart, dreams that you had that can return all of the sudden with a pressing need to be fulfilled. You have lived through an ordeal that may have made you confront the fear of death. When we are taken so far, the meaning of life is profoundly questioned.

Healing is a process that will take you back to the essential: a strong taste for life and to overcome fears.

The journey can sometimes horrify you; it can discourage you because it seems so long. So talk about it to someone who can listen and who can help to rediscover the hope within you.

(1) Translated from Kauffman, Jean-Paul, L'Arche des Kerguelen (Voyage aux Îles de la Désolation), Flammarion, 1993.*

**Jean-Paul Kauffman is a French reporter that was taken hostage in Lebanon, tortured and confined during almost three years.*



Some useful telephone numbers

- **CAVAC**

Crime Victims Assistance Center

Montreal area (514) 277-9860

1 866 LE CAVAC (1 866 532-2822)

www.cavac.qc.ca

- **Centre de santé et de services sociaux (CSSS)**

811

www.msss.gouv.qc.ca

- **IVAC (CSST)**

Indemnisation des victimes d'actes criminels

Montreal area (514) 906-3019

Toll free 1 800 561-4822

www.ivac.qc.ca

- **CALACS**

Centre d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel

Regroupement québécois des CALACS

Montreal area (514) 529-5252

Outside of Montreal 1-877-717-5252 (Toll free)

www.rqcalacs.qc.ca

- **SOS Violence conjugale**

Toll free : 1 800 363-9010

- **Tel-jeunes**

Montreal area (514) 288-2266

Toll free : 1 800 263-2266

www.teljeunes.com

- **Commission des normes du travail**

Toll free 1 800 265-1414

www.cnt.gouv.qc.ca

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