



For most people, the work we do is a very important part of how we view ourselves in our community. The paid work we do is also important in “paying the bills” and maintaining a certain standard of living. Our places of work are generally regarded as safe environments.

An armed hold-up can threaten these beliefs and bring our very livelihood into question.

People will react to an armed hold-up in a wide variety of ways. There is no predicting how any particular individual will react and the same individual may react differently in subsequent hold-ups. The challenge for co-workers, family, friends and counsellors is to be supportive and helpful despite the wide range of reactions.

The aim of this fact sheet is to explain what can happen to a person who has survived an armed hold-up and to offer some ways in which people can be helpful in the recovery process.

### Reactions

The reactions that may be experienced after an armed hold-up can be frightening and bewildering. They may seem strange and abnormal and well beyond anything you have experienced before. The important point to remember is that these reactions are normal, temporary and will pass.

### Physical Reactions

A rapid increase in adrenalin gives us the power to fight or flee, but commonsense and an instinct for survival take over and we can do neither. This in-built biological response that has been pent-up may come out later in a variety of physical and emotional reactions.

Many people become extra-sensitive to normal events such as doors opening, car doors slamming or a person reaching for their wallet. Headaches and a sense of tightness around the forehead and chest may also be associated with a feeling of panic and dizziness. There may also be a tendency to hyperventilate and feel dizzy which can be quite scary. Sleep disturbances are also very common - both getting to sleep and staying asleep as well as nightmares and dreams.

### Emotional Reactions

An initial feeling of numbness and disbelief can lead to later reactions of self-blame and lowered self-esteem. The feeling of “time standing still” can give a sense of unreality to the armed hold-up.

During times of trauma, our minds seem to have an ability to capture tiny pieces of information and store them away. These can come flooding back after a hold-up in the form of “flashbacks” or vivid and intrusive pictures of some aspect of the event.

A feeling of isolation can develop soon after the hold-up and persist for some time. This feeling may be reinforced by insensitive comments from customers, friends and even family members who give you the benefit of their “advice”.

*This fact sheet has been developed to provide general information to victims of crime. It is not intended as a replacement for medical, therapeutic or legal advice. If you have particular concerns please contact your general practitioner, counsellor or Victim Support Service.*

Furthermore, trust in the world can generally be shattered and you may find it difficult to go out in public unaccompanied.

The feeling of having been over-powered and feeling helpless during a hold-up can lead to frustration and anger. This anger may be directed toward the offender(s) but it may also build up and “leak out” so that people that are nearest or dearest may be the ones who “cop” it.

## **Getting Better**

One of the most powerful things that you can do is to be gentle on yourself; recognise that although your reactions may be very painful, they are normal. Your body and mind need to react in certain ways to regain a sense of control and trust.

Try and maintain your routines (work, caring for children, hobbies, exercise etc.). Even though you may not feel much like eating, try and fuel your body and mind with nutritious food – this is the time it is really needed! Avoid taking alcohol and drugs to dull the memories. This usually makes the recovery process longer and more difficult.

Talking to trusted friends and family members who care is a great release. If you feel uncomfortable talking to customers and other people about the hold-up, you can use a simple phrase such as “I would rather not talk about that”.

If persistent reactions are troubling you then, consider talking with a counsellor who is skilled in working with people suffering from the effects of trauma.

## **A Note to Friends and Family**

This is a time when listening is more important than doing. You cannot take away a person’s pain but you can be a sounding board and reduce the sense of isolation that most trauma victims feel.

Do not minimise or trivialise the hold-up and do not advise your loved one to “put it behind you” or “forget about it”. They will not be able to and you may lose their trust.

Your loved one may appear to be over-reacting but remember that they are trying to deal with an extreme event. Many people who have survived an armed hold-up have confronted the prospect of death. This experience takes a while to come to terms with. Trust in the world, and in people, will have to be re-established. It is only through re-experiencing trusting relationships that this can happen.

## **Where to Find Help**

Your family doctor is a good place to start for advice and referral. The Community Health Centre in your area is also a good source of counselling and support.

Your employer may have a nurse or occupational health and safety provider who knows about helping people who have been through a trauma. Victim Support Service has professional counsellors who help people deal with the after-effects of trauma through individual counselling or group support.

## **Further Information**

If you would like more information, please contact Victim Support Service on (08) 8231 5626 or view our website at [www.victimsa.org](http://www.victimsa.org)