

Witnessing a suicide

Anyone who is involved with a suicide may experience stress and trauma reactions. You might experience these reactions if you:

- Were a witness.
- Arrived on the scene of a suicide or were almost involved in the scene of a suicide.
- Had heard about the suicide through media or friends.
- Are reminded of other traumatic incidents in your life.

Although you may not have known the person who died, you can experience trauma and stress reactions. Everyone's experience of traumatic events will be different. How people are affected, cope and recover varies greatly.

When someone dies by suicide, a fight, flight or freeze response may be activated. Your safety, the safety of family, friends and others, and the safety of the person who died has been threatened. Some people feel a sense of helplessness, loss of power and control, and isolation. Common reactions can include nightmares and difficulty sleeping, heightened fear or worry, irritability, feeling detached and slower than normal. Experiencing some or all of these reactions is normal and can last for days, weeks or months. Usually these reactions decrease over time.

Fight, flight and freeze responses are normal automatic responses activated when something poses a real or imagined threat to your safety. It helps people to act in stressful situations.

Fight	Confront the threat	Hands fisted, tight jaw, anger, nausea, crying, urge to stomp, kick and smash. You may experience: strong reactions to small irritations; an unusual desire to be physical; grinding teeth; wakefulness; feeling of having to be alert.
Flight	Outrun or escape the threat	Restless, running, shallow breathing, fidgety, restless, darting eyes. You may experience: a sense of having to remain alert; jump at noises and movements; sleeplessness; loss of appetite.
Freeze	Decide you cannot confront or outrun the threat	Dread, feeling stuck, holding breath, frozen or numb, shutting down physically, mentally and emotionally. You may experience: loss of appetite, sleeplessness, wanting to be alone or afraid of being alone.

Recovering from the experience: How to live without being overwhelmed by thoughts or feelings:

Re-establish safety. Remind yourself that your experiences are normal responses to a stressful situation. Reassure yourself that the traumatic event is over, that you are safe now, and that seeing mental images of the event is normal and will decrease over time.

Take time. Recovery takes time. Recognise that you need time and space to make sense of what happened.

Connect with others. Spend time with people who care about you. It can be comforting to know you are not alone.

Allow yourself to feel a range of emotions. It is okay to feel anger, rage, sad and alone. It is also okay to laugh and feel joy.

Self-care. Try to maintain regular eating and sleeping patterns. Take time to do activities that you enjoy.