



Help Starts Here.

If Your Child is a Victim of Crime

A key concern of parents is keeping their children safe. When children or youth are victims of crime, this can be very hard for parents as well as the young victims. Parents may not know what to do to help their child through this difficult time.

Young people experience various types of crime, in various contexts. Child abuse, bullying, and dating violence are terms commonly associated with crimes against children and youth, but they don't reflect the whole picture. For example, children and youth may be victims of assault, robbery, and related offences involving physical violence or threats of violence; offences related to neglect; sexual offences such as sexual interference, sexual exploitation, or sexual assault; and property offences such as theft. Young people may be victimized by adults, older children or youth, or their peers—by strangers, acquaintances, boyfriends or girlfriends, family members, adults in positions of trust or authority, or others involved in their lives. If your child is a victim of crime, **help is available for you and your child.**

How may child or youth victims be affected?

Being victimized can shatter a young person's view of the world as a safe place. Children and youth may be affected by crime in many ways, emotionally and physically.

At different development stages, children may express emotions differently. For example, young children may become "clingy," be afraid to leave their parents, and return to earlier behaviours such as thumb sucking. Older children may withdraw from family and friends, have physical symptoms of emotional distress (such as stomach aches), and develop problems at school. Older teens may have reactions similar to adult victims, such as shock, anger, fear, anxiety, depression, a sense of violation, shame, and powerlessness. They may feel alone and lose trust in people. Denial is common ("I'm okay").

Children and youth who have physical injuries may have other difficulties because of the pain of their injuries and the physical recovery process.

Each young person will react individually—not necessarily like others their age. Children and youth at any developmental stage may "act out" when they find it hard to express their feelings.

Children's reactions may be affected by things such as the nature of the crime, their injuries, and the response and support of their families.

How may parents and other family members be affected?

Parents may experience similar feelings to youth or adult victims of crime. They may initially respond with shock and disbelief. If there are no visible signs of harm to their child, it may be difficult (or too upsetting) for them to believe that their child was victimized.

Some parents may blame themselves for not keeping their child safe. They may become depressed. And they may be afraid that their child will not fully recover or will be harmed again. Some may become afraid to let their child out of their sight.





Most parents feel angry with the person who committed the crime and some may want to seek revenge. Some parents may be angry with their child, particularly if the child was victimized while doing something the child wasn't supposed to. Parents may worry that they are bad parents or will be perceived that way because of the crime.

Crimes against children may affect the whole family. Older siblings may feel more protective. Some may even feel guilty that they weren't able to protect their younger brother or sister. Younger or older siblings may be confused about what has happened or scared about what may happen. Some siblings may feel left out as the family's attention is focused on their brother or sister.

Family dynamics may change. Dealing with the crime may trigger strong emotions, especially if it brings up emotions from past events.

How can you support your child?

Parents can be a great source of support to their child after a crime. Here are a few ways.

Assure your child that he or she did the right thing in telling someone.

Many children are afraid they will not be believed. Some have been threatened not to tell anyone and may be afraid that they shouldn't have.

React calmly.

When parents act very upset, children are more likely to blame themselves. This may make them think that it is better not to talk about bad things.

Let your child know that talking usually helps, and be there to listen.

Children need opportunities to talk about their reactions, without being pressured to do so. Parents can help by allowing children to express their emotions freely, without trying to have "answers" for everything and without assuming they know what their child is feeling.

Reassure your child that what happened is not his or her fault.

Children often worry that they are to blame for the incident, particularly if they were victimized while breaking a rule (e.g., being somewhere they weren't supposed to be). Parents can help by not being judgmental and by reinforcing that the crime was not the child's fault.

Accept that your child may "act out" but set limits.

Children may need to express anger and may behave differently than usual. Parents can help by accepting this while also conveying the message that violent or destructive behaviour (e.g., throwing or breaking things, hitting siblings) is never appropriate.

Understand your own feelings and take care of yourself.

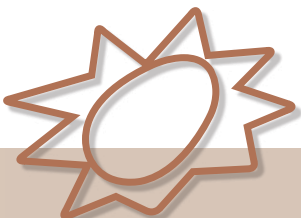
It is important for parents to understand their feelings and needs and to take care of themselves. Otherwise, they may have difficulty keeping their emotions in check and focusing on their child's needs.

Discuss with your child any steps to take.

It helps children to know what will happen next and why (e.g., going to the doctor, talking to a victim service worker, or reporting the crime). With an older child, options can be explored, and decisions made, together. (See [Steps to Take if You or Your Child Needs Help.](#))

Watch for signs that your child needs additional support or help.

Children may have delayed reactions to victimization, or may mask their feelings for a period of time. Also, some children who were victimized in the past may have negative emotions re-emerge when something significant happens in their lives. Parents are in the best position to recognize changes in children that suggest a need to seek professional help, such as counselling or psychotherapy.





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Information for Victims of Crime

What about reporting to the authorities?

Police

Parents may wish to report a crime against their child to the police. This may help ensure children's safety as well as successful prosecution of persons who commit crimes against them. Older children and youth may have their own views about reporting the crime. For some, involving the justice system is important to the healing process. Victims can get help from Victim Services and other agencies whether or not the police are involved.

Child Protection Social Workers

If anyone believes that a child (a person under 19) needs protection, that person has a legal duty to report the matter to the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

The circumstances in which a child needs protection are set out in the Child, Family and Community Service Act. This includes specific circumstances in which a child has been, or is likely to be: harmed by the child's parent; or harmed by someone else and the child's parent is unable or unwilling to protect the child.

The Helpline for Children is the place to call to make a child protection report or ask questions about reporting. (See **resources** section on back page.) When a report is made to a child protection social worker, the worker will determine the most appropriate response. This may include, among other things, making a report to the police or conducting a child protection investigation jointly with a police investigation.

What is B.C.'s victims legislation?

Victims of crime have rights. The Victims of Crime Act sets out victims' rights to be treated with dignity and respect and to obtain information.

The Crime Victim Assistance Act provides for benefits to help with recovery from injuries and other costs resulting from violent crime.

What kind of help is available?

In addition to help available through schools (e.g., teachers, counsellors) and family doctors, there are various types of resources available to help child victims and their families. (See **resources** section on back page.)

Police

Police respond to reports of children or youth in immediate danger or possible criminal offences. They investigate offences and provide information about other agencies that may be able to help.

Victim Services

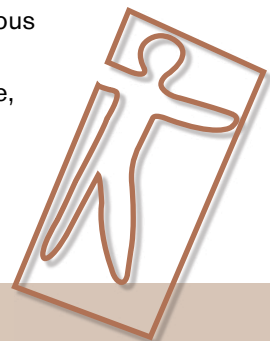
Victim Services are located in community agencies or police stations. They provide emotional support, justice system information, safety planning, referrals to counselling and other services, help in accessing **crime victim assistance benefits**, and support to victims going to court. The VictimLINK line provides information and referrals to all victims of crime (or their parents), and immediate crisis support to victims of family and sexual violence. Call 1-800-563-0808.

Victims who are injured from violent crime (or their parents) can apply to the Crime Victim Assistance Program for benefits under the Crime Victim Assistance Act. Call 1-866-660-3888.

Other Services

Community agencies, health clinics, and hospitals provide emergency and longer-term services to help children and youth recover from physical and emotional trauma. BC NurseLine provides telephone access to health information and advice from registered nurses. Call 1-866-215-4700.

Child protection and family support services are provided through the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Child, youth, and family services are also provided by various community agencies. Some agencies provide specialized services, for example, to particular cultural communities or to children with disabilities and their families.





The Youth Against Violence Line is a service that young people can call to seek assistance or report incidents of youth violence or crime. Parents can also call for information on topics such as gangs, bullying, harassment/intimidation, or other youth-related issues. Call 1-800-680-4264

The VictimLINK line can connect victims (or their parents) to a network of community and government resources, including social, health, and justice resources such as Victim Services, counselling resources, and transition houses. Call 1-800-563-0808.

Steps to take if you or your child needs help

- If your child is in immediate danger or needs urgent medical help, contact the police or ambulance services, by calling 911 or the emergency number for your community.
- If you believe that your child, or another child, is in need of protection, contact the Ministry of Children and Family Development by calling the Helpline for Children.
- Contact Victim Services in your community by getting information from VictimLINK. Victim Services can help you and your child directly and can also refer you to other community agencies.
- If the situation is not urgent but you want to report a crime, call the non-emergency number for police in your community.
- If the situation is not urgent but your child may need medical care, take your child to the doctor.
- Seek any other help and support your child needs, such as counselling. Seek support for yourself and other family members if needed.
- If you have questions about crimes against children and youth, or your child's rights, don't hesitate to ask a Victim Service Worker.

Please note: *This information sheet provides general information only. It is not a legal document.*

Resources

BC NurseLine

- Call toll free in B.C. at 1-866-215-4700, 24 hours every day
- If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call 1-866-889-4700
- Translation services in over 130 languages on request

Crime Victim Assistance Program

- Call toll free in B.C. at 1-866-660-3888
- E-mail: SGCrimeVictimAssistanceProgram@gov.bc.ca

Helpline for Children

- Call 310-1234 (no area code required), 24 hours every day
- To use the TTD (Telephone Device for the Deaf), call 1-866-660-0505

VictimLINK (victim services information and referrals)

- Call toll free in B.C. at 1-800-563-0808, 24 hours every day
- If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call Information Services Vancouver TTY service at 604-875-0885; if calling from outside the Lower Mainland, call collect
- Multi-lingual

Youth Against Violence Line

- Call toll free in B.C. at 1-800-680-4264, 24 hours every day
- If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call Information Services Vancouver TTY service at 604-875-0885; if calling from outside the Lower Mainland, call collect
- Multi-lingual

