

## MY EXTERNAL RESOURCES

people

activities, hobbies, passions

People around you are often ill-informed about the consequences on health of a potentially traumatic event. **Your loved ones can make inadequate inquiries or be particularly clumsy in their efforts to support you.** Unsuitable injunctions such as *You will be fine, it's already been a month, Get on with it, If I were you, ... or you should ...* are quite common. People may also dramatize or, on the contrary, minimize the facts, asking intrusive and potentially judgmental questions, such as *But why didn't you ...?*

These verbal or non-verbal reactions can make you feel that they do not understand or support you, or even that they are judging you. These negative feelings will add to everything you are going through. Always remember that there is a simple explanation to the way people around you react: they too are distraught and they do not know what to do. This is why **it is vital to talk about your feelings and needs with those closest to you: you are not responsible for what happened to you. The way you are reacting to such a traumatic event is quite normal.**

### What if nothing works?

Sometimes, it is too difficult to mitigate these reactions and their impact on you. Feel free to seek professional help in order to prevent the situation from deteriorating. **Contact your LAVI counselor, or your doctor or psychotherapist.**



More information here

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**LAVI** | CENTRE GENEVOIS DE CONSULTATION POUR VICTIMES D'INFRACTIONS

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## TRAUMATIC EVENTS

### MY MINI LOGBOOK

Since the event, I hardly know myself, and my everyday life is not the same as before.

**Suffering violence can be a shocking experience, causing physical and psychological injuries.** The effects of violence depend on the severity of the event and its intentional nature. If the offence was so violent that it left you with an intense sense of dread, and you thought you were going to die, it may have caused what is known as **psychotrauma**. A variety of immediate and future reactions can develop following such a trauma. **These are normal reactions, to an event that was not normal.**

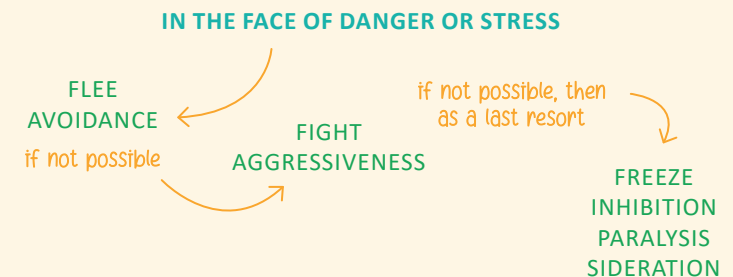
Since the event, you may be thinking: *I should have done this, I shouldn't have done that* or *I should have known better*. You may be asking yourself: *Why did I react like that?*

**These thoughts make you feel ashamed and guilty. They are common among people who have suffered a traumatic event:** once out of danger, they tend to replay the events, putting the blame on themselves. It also is an attempt by our brain to find some meaning in the event, when often there is none.

You may feel that you no longer recognize your normal way of functioning and reacting. You may even be afraid of "going crazy". **These feelings are common and normal, though the event was not. It's not your fault! Be kind with yourself.** Time heals.

## MANIFESTATIONS OF SHOCK

The 3 F's: flee, fight, freeze



When the body suffers a violent event, it naturally activates survival reflexes. **These reflexes are designed to protect us.** Our brain has instinctive skills for dealing with threat and danger: its first instinct is to flee. If escape is impossible, the brain will activate a fight reflex. And if this also is impossible, the brain will plunge into a state of “freezing” known as sideration, resulting in sensory, motor and/or thought paralysis. This freezing state stems from the need of self-protection: it can be seen as a kind of short-circuit, that protects us from the enormous stress of a very violent event and causes a dissociation between mind and body.

### Reactions vary widely and diminish over time

Your body may have reacted with a complete loss of consciousness, but the most common reaction is to feel totally cut off from your body and your emotions. People who have experienced such trauma say that *it is as if you were looking at yourself from the outside, as if you were anaesthetized.* This body reaction can also affect your memory processing capacity. It explains why memories of an aggression are often fragmented. Amnesia can be total or partial. You may have difficulty situating events in time and space (date, time, place). You may also have elusive but very intense memories (flashbacks), in the form of images, thoughts or sensations (noise, smell, sound, taste...), that pervade you and are reactivated without your control. You may feel that the events you have endured are not real. You may also have an altered perception of yourself. Anxiety haunts you and you may even feel you are constantly in danger. These feelings generate restlessness and irritability and are often associated with sleep disorders, nightmares, difficulty concentrating, lack of appetite, and so on. Sometimes these symptoms are so unpleasant that, to avoid arousing them, you try to avoid all places, people and other things that might remind you of the events.

**The consequences of this state of shock can appear quickly or slowly after the event. They vary from one person to another. It is quite normal to suffer these consequences. Their frequency and intensity should diminish over time.** After one or several violent events, it is natural to experience psychological and/or physical reactions due to the stress generated by the situation. These reactions should gradually diminish over the following weeks. If symptoms persist beyond three months, this may be a sign that you suffer a post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Do not stay alone. You can talk to your LAVI counsellor, psychotherapist or doctor. There are effective treatments that can help you feel better and return to your normal life.**



## NOTES & QUESTIONS

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### Criminal proceedings and recurrence of symptoms

After filing a complaint, it can take a long time before you are summoned by the judicial authorities. Your symptoms may have subsided and you may feel that you are back again in control of your life. Nevertheless, when you receive news of the criminal proceedings, for example a letter from the authorities or your lawyer, your symptoms may reappear, sometimes strongly. **This is perfectly normal.** You are not “falling back” into the state you were in shortly after the attack. The physical and/or psychological manifestations reappear, because this reminder of the attack brings back memories, images and reactions associated with it.

### RESOURCES FOR GETTING ON THROUGH THIS ORDEAL

After experiencing one or several violent events, it is important to respect your body’s basic needs: more than ever you will need rest, good nutrition and frequent hydration. Reduce your outside obligations if you can, and take care of yourself. For example, enjoy leisure activities that relax you or bring you renewed energy, and call on the presence and support of your loved ones.

If you are having trouble identifying what it would take to feel better in these difficult times, try to remember what helped you in the past. And perhaps you might get ideas if you ask yourself: *What advice would I give to a friend?*

**Identify your needs and limits, feel they are legitimate and communicate them to those close to you. To regain your strength, you need to feel safe. Try to identify what you need to feel secure. What could you put in place or change in order to ease the pain? Who could be a resource for you?**