The Road to “Normal”: Stages of the Victim Experience

I. SHOCK/DISBELIEF (Immediately afterward and up to 1 week later)

Physical Reactions
- Shock—Loss of concentration, blood pressure fluctuations, rapid pulse, pallor, etc.
- Disturbances in patterns of sleeping or eating
- Difficulty concentrating

Emotional Styles
- Controlled—Flat, emotionless, calm, composed, numb (internalized)
- Expressive—Upset, nervous, angry, anxious, tense, fearful (externalized)

Needs
- Medical—Physical injuries or preexisting conditions
- Emotional—Fear, helplessness, denial, guilt, degradation, anger, mood swings, depression, anxiety, fatigue, loss of concentration

Thoughts
- Tries to block memories
- Tries to “undo” the crime
- Thinks about it frequently
- Unable to cope or understand the experience

II. OUTWARD ADJUSTMENT (Up to 1 year later)

Physical Reactions
- Psychosomatic complaints

Emotional Styles
- Denial or avoidance
- Does not want to talk or think about the incident

Needs
- Return to normal routines

III. REORGANIZATION (1 year or more afterward)

Physical Reactions
- Possible increase in health problems or alcohol and drug abuse

Psychological
Nightmares
Flashbacks
Fear of crowds or people in general, fear of being alone, of sleeping, or of situations that remind the victim of the crime

Social
Trades freedom for security
Normal routine upset
Level of functioning reduced
Avoids leaving home
Drops out of school, absent from work
Avoids or clings to family and friends
Changes home, job, or telephone number
Strong need for a change of scenery or to “get away”
Family conflicts
Feeling of loss of support from intimates, violated trust
Feeling of loss of privacy
Angry at loss of freedom

IV. RESOLUTION (THE ROAD TO “NORMAL”)

General Condition
Feels safe and in control again
Able to trust again
Free from fear
Blames criminal, not self
Feels “normal” again
Expresses and resolves anger