

Here's what you can do...

- Pray: God is there and He is still good.
- Talk about what happened
- Talk about how you feel
- Attend a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, if available
- Do not "Monday morning quarterback." You can compound your stress dwelling on what you or others could have done differently. There are no "if only's" or "I should have's" - if you could have prevented what happened, you would have.
- Take care of yourself physically: Eat regular meals and a balanced diet, and drink plenty of water, even if you don't feel like it. Get adequate rest and exercise, and maintain as normal of a routine as possible.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine and drugs. Any medication should be taken sparingly and only under a doctor's supervision. Substances may be addictive and can interfere with your healing process.



Placer County Law Enforcement Chaplaincy is here to help. For immediate assistance, call the Chaplain at 530-889-5824, 24 hours a day.

▶ Placer County Law Enforcement Chaplaincy

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Placer County
Law Enforcement Chaplaincy

Post Shooting Trauma



"On a Mission of Compassion"

POST SHOOTING TRAUMA

“I just shot someone! I thought I would feel OK. I know I did the right thing tactically – but I don’t feel so good. I sure don’t feel like a hero. What on earth is wrong with me? Am I losing my mind? I’m really confused...”

These and many more emotions are typical of officers who have been involved in a traumatic incident – specifically shooting someone or even killing a suspect.

The traditional attitude of law enforcement towards catastrophic events is to “gut it out.” Many problems that officers have experienced following a traumatic event are the result of their not having been trained and prepared for the emotional and psychological reactions that can occur, and “gutting it out” often just complicates the problem.



What are some of these emotional and psychological reactions you might experience? Listed below are a number of reactions that officers have had when they have been involved in a shooting. Look them over and see how many of them you can identify from your own experience. It will help you to articulate your feelings to others who care about you and want to understand. It will also help you understand what is going on inside you and that this is normal. You will come to realize that you are not losing your mind or going crazy.

WHEN A COP SHOOTS SOMEONE...

Initial Response (within a few hours)

- Shock
- Psychological numbness (disbelief)
- Denial of feelings (fear and anxiety)
- Confusion begins to break through
 - Questioning of actions and tactics
 - “Covering all bases”
 - Retreat to the familiar, ranging from “choir practice” to wanting to go home and hug the wife and kids

First Day: Feelings begin to break through:

- Feelings of isolation (threatened and insecure)
- Fear and anxiety (What will happen now?)
- Existential feelings (What is life about, why risk your life, what about, “Thou shalt not kill”?)
- Fragility (human weakness)
- Needing someone to talk to
- Afraid to share feelings
- Guilt

First Week: Doubts and fears:

- Questioning actions
- Did I really have to shoot?
- Depression and remorse
- Confusion intensifies
- Dead person’s image is burned into mind

Second Week

- Psychological blocking (hard to remember details)
- Trauma strikes again (re-living the incident)
- Obsessive thoughts
- Feels like he/she is falling apart

- Ambivalence (wanting and not wanting to talk)
- Trying to forget the incident (anxiety attacks, physical illness, nightmares, unexpected crying)

Month’s End: Ineffective coping mechanisms:

- Macho façade
- Alcohol consumption
- Sleeping pills
- Macabre humor
- Isolation

Second Month to 20 Years

- Nightmares
- Insulation
- Isolation
- Alcohol abuse
- Family disruption
- Agitation
- Flashbacks
- Tension
- Nervousness
- Sexual promiscuity or impotence
- Depression

The emotions you may feel after a shooting can be very complex and confusing to you. The list of emotions in this brochure is a way of taking your own pulse. It does not mean you will experience all these feelings. In fact, it is possible that you will feel OK in a short period of time. If, however, you do identify with some of these emotions, it will help you to talk over your feelings with a chaplain or other professional. For your own sake, reach out for the help that is available.