

If You Witness a Serious Collision: A Guide for Coping in the Aftermath

You are not alone!

Witnessing a road collision can be shocking, frightening, and deeply distressing. Whether you saw it happen, helped at the scene, or arrived shortly afterwards, your mind and body may still be trying to make sense of it all.

This guide is here to support you.

Common Reactions after Witnessing a Serious Incident

It's normal to feel:

- Shock or numbness
- Intrusive thoughts or images
- Guilt, even when you did nothing wrong
- Anger, sadness or helplessness
- Sleep problems or restlessness
- Avoidance of reminders (e.g. roads, sounds, conversations)

These are natural responses to an unnatural situation. Your brain is trying to process something overwhelming.

Ways to support yourself in the First Days and Weeks

Ground yourself in the present

Try the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Talk about it, if you feel ready

Sharing what happened with someone you trust can help. You don't have to go into detail – even saying “I'm struggling” is a good start.

Write it down

Journalling or note-taking can help organise your thoughts and create a sense of control.

Give yourself worry free time

It can help to set aside a short “worry window” each day – 10–15 minutes – where you allow yourself to think about what happened. Outside that time, gently bring your focus back to the present.

Rebuild Simple Routines

Sleep, eat, and move when you can. These basics help your body and mind recover.

If you're still feeling overwhelmed

Reach out. Support is available.

You might need extra support if:

- Flashbacks or nightmares are frequent
- You feel stuck or numb for more than a few weeks
- You're avoiding normal activities or feel unsafe
- You're having thoughts about harming yourself

You can speak with your GP, contact Aftermath Support, or call a trusted helpline.

Aftermath Support is here for you

We provide free, trauma informed emotional support to those affected by serious road traffic incidents – including witnesses.

Ways to get in touch

Call: 0151 777 2562

Email: support@aftermathsupport.org.uk

Visit our Website: aftermathsupport.org.uk

Find us on social media:

- Facebook – www.facebook.com/aftermathsupport
- Instagram - @aftermathsupport
- X/Twitter - @aftermathsupp
- LinkedIn – www.linkedin.com/aftermathsupport