

Judicial System

For many, this may be the first involvement with law enforcement or the judicial system. It's very common for people to expect what they have seen on television or movies to apply to their current circumstances. Unfortunately, these expectations are often unrealistic or a distorted snapshot of how things truly operate.

Texas has laws and regulations in place aimed at protecting victims. For cases involving prosecution, court advocates can provide you with information, education, and support that will help reduce fears and uncertainties.

Criminal case resolution by plea agreement is a practice that is often utilized. Through both negotiation and agreement, this approach to resolution can prevent the need for testifying in court.

Benefits of Counseling

If it is safe to do so, consider seeking help from a counselor. Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Reviewing and processing the event can help you clarify what actually occurred.
- Legal and judicial decisions can be discussed and utilized as part of the promotion of healing and resolution.
- Development of coping skills/strategies can support the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network can help to decrease the negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from traumatic experiences.

You can utilize the traumatic experiences as an opportunity to build and practice assertiveness, confidence, and even protective instinct skills.

Who can help?

The Victim Services Unit within the Travis County Sheriff's Office can provide assistance with information about your case status, Crime Victims' Rights, Crime Victim Compensation, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to appropriate helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.



Resources

SAFE Alliance

Travis County Family Violence and Sexual Assault Shelter and Crisis Center
(512) 267-7233 (SAFE) 24 hours
www.safeaustin.org

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1 (800) 799-7233 (SAFE)
www.thehotline.org

Office for Victims of Crime

1 (800) 851-3420 www.ovc.gov

Victim Information Notification Everyday

1 (877) 894-8463 www.vinelink.com

2-1-1 Texas - Resource Directory

Medical providers / other resources
2-1-1 or 1 (877) 541-7905
www.211texas.org

Strangulation/ Suffocation

Victim Services Unit

5555 Airport Blvd
Austin, TX 78751
512-854-9709



Name/ID Number:

Direct Number:

Mailing Address:

PO Box 1748
Austin, TX 78767

Escalation of Violence

You have the right to be safe at all times. You do not deserve to be harmed or threatened, and you should never feel afraid in your relationship. Strangulation/suffocation is one of the most lethal forms of domestic violence and is a strong indicator of significant escalation of violence. A victim who is strangled/suffocated by his or her partner and survives is more than 7 times more likely to be murdered by that partner¹.

Despite common misconceptions, strangulation/suffocation is not about the external injury or risk, it is about the internal damage that occurs to the brain and other internal organs as a result of deprivation of oxygen and blood, no matter how brief the event. Unconsciousness can occur within seconds and death within minutes. Approximately 50% of strangulation/suffocation victims have no external signs of injury, and, of these, only 15% have injuries that can be photographed. Moreover, symptoms may not appear until hours, days or weeks after the event. You are ***strongly*** encouraged to seek medical attention following a strangulation/suffocation to rule out potentially fatal internal injuries. This is especially important for women who are pregnant at the time of strangulation/suffocation. Experiencing physical violence during pregnancy can be extremely dangerous and can result in significant complications or even miscarriage^{2,3}.

Signs and Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of strangulation / suffocation may include (not a comprehensive list):

- Dizziness and/or disorientation
- Changes in breathing
- Difficulty breathing and/or swallowing
- Hoarse and/or raspy voice
- Loss of memory
- Headache, nausea, vomiting
- Changes in mental status (ex: restlessness, combativeness, mood swings, psychosis)
- Changes in vision and/or hearing
- Pain, Soreness, Stiffness (especially in the head, neck and throat areas)
- Physical injuries such as redness, scratches, bruising, ruptured capillaries (petechiae)

¹ Glass, Nancy, et al (2008). Non-Fatal Strangulation is an Important Risk Factor for Homicide of Women. *Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 35 (3), 329-335.

² Strack, Gael & Gwinn, Casey (2011). One the Edge of Homicide: Strangulation as a Prelude. *Criminal Justice*. The American Bar Association, 26 (3).

³ Strack, G.B., McClane, G.E., & Hawley, D. (2001). A Review of 300 attempted strangulation cases: Part I: Criminal Legal Issues. *Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 21 (3), 303-309.

Documentation

Some injuries of strangulation/suffocation may not be immediately noticeable. Taking photographs of the injuries is also encouraged. Interruption of your attendance at work or your inability to work resulting from injuries should be reported to your employer. If you currently do not have a physician or medical insurance, it is possible that Victim Services personnel can assist you in locating available resources in the community. You may consider obtaining all treatment records resulting from this incident ambulance, hospital, physician, pharmacy. It is also good practice to save all receipts and bills related to or resulting from the incident. Receipts and documentation may also become important when applying for assistance through Crime Victims' Compensation a program that may assist with out-of-pocket medical expenses that result from a crime.

Common Reactions

Recognize that healing from a traumatic event takes time. Give yourself the time you need. Many different reactions are understandable and do not mean that you are "going crazy." You may also find yourself reliving the incident, trying to find an alternative response or different outcome. You may see these possibilities in retrospect (now that the immediate danger has passed), but do not forget the reality of what happened. During the strangulation/suffocation you were powerless and in a state of fear. Always remember you are not to blame and that your actions were understandable given the potentially life-threatening circumstances of the strangulation/suffocation. Common reactions of victims of strangulation/suffocation are similar to those who survive other traumatic events and may include:

- Shock
- Panic
- Anger
- Helplessness
- Intrusive thinking (mind wandering, flashbacks to the event, or sense of reliving the event)
- Nightmares
- Exaggerated startle response
- Embarrassment
- Sense of vulnerability
- Sense of violation
- Desire to seek revenge

These responses will likely diminish with time. However, if reactions are especially long lasting or troubling, you may need to consult with a helping professional for assistance.