

What to Do After a Scary Encounter

Immediate steps, documentation, and recovery after a threatening situation

You trusted your instincts. You got to safety. Now what? This checklist guides you through the hours and days after a scary encounter — from immediate documentation to longer-term recovery.

Immediately After (First Hour)

Get Safe

- I'm in a secure location (home, friend's place, public building)
- I'm not alone — someone knows what happened
- I've locked doors/windows if at home
- If being followed: I did not go directly home

Decide: Report?

You are never obligated to report, but documentation creates a record. Consider:

- If physical contact or direct threat: strongly consider police report
- If stalking/harassment: report creates paper trail for future action
- If "just" creepy: document privately (notes, photos) for your records
- Workplace incident: report to HR/security in addition to police

Your feelings are valid even if the encounter doesn't feel "serious enough" to report.

Document Everything (Within 24 Hours)

- Written description: what happened, in order, with as much detail as possible
- Physical description of person(s): height, build, clothing, distinguishing features
- Vehicle description if applicable: make, model, color, license plate (any part)
- Exact location and time
- Names of any witnesses
- Screenshots of any digital communication (texts, DMs, etc.)
- Photos of location, any damage, or injuries
- Saved this documentation in multiple places (phone, email, cloud)

Build your complete protection system

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Write what you remember now. Memory fades quickly, and details matter if you decide to report later.

Practical Security Steps (First Week)

If They Know Where You Live/Work

- Varied my routine — different times, different routes
- Informed building security, doorman, or front desk
- Told trusted neighbors to watch for anything unusual
- Reviewed home security (see Home Security Audit checklist)
- Considered temporary change: staying with friend/family

If They Have Your Information

- Changed passwords on important accounts
- Enabled two-factor authentication
- Googled myself to see what's publicly findable
- Considered: identity monitoring service
- If harassment continues: documented for potential restraining order

Emotional Recovery

After a scary encounter, you may experience anxiety, hypervigilance, trouble sleeping, replaying the event, or feeling unsafe in previously comfortable places. These are normal trauma responses.

Self-Care Steps

- Talked to someone I trust about what happened
- Allowed myself to feel whatever I'm feeling (no "should")
- Maintained basic routines: sleep, food, movement
- Limited alcohol/substances (can intensify anxiety)
- Did something grounding: walk, bath, time with pet/loved ones

When to Seek Support

- Symptoms lasting more than 2 weeks
- Difficulty functioning at work or in relationships
- Panic attacks or severe anxiety
- Intrusive thoughts or flashbacks
- Avoiding all activities or places that remind you of the event

Seeking help is strength, not weakness. Trauma specialists can make a significant difference.

Moving Forward

- Identified what I did right (trust instincts, get safe, etc.)
- Identified what I'd do differently next time
- Considered: self-defense training to build confidence and skills
- Considered: upgrading protection layers (awareness, tools, training)
- Reconnected with activities and places I enjoy
- Gave myself permission to take the time I need

Resources

- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233
- RAINN (sexual assault): 1-800-656-4673
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- Stalking Prevention: victimsofcrime.org/stalking-resource-center