

Carjacking

Carjacking is the ambushing and theft of a vehicle. Unfortunately it is a serious threat in many countries where humanitarian workers operate. In addition, humanitarian workers are often specifically targeted due to the desirability of their vehicles. For example in South Sudan, NGO Toyota Land Cruisers have been almost exclusively targeted in recent years.

Carjackers rely on an element of surprise to carry out their crime. Particular high risk areas are anywhere you naturally have to slow down or stop, often referred to as a 'choke point'. This will include traffic lights, parking areas, fuels stations, and outside residences or compounds, especially if you have to wait for gates to open. Other tactics involve creating a hazard forcing the vehicle to slow or stop, including staging accidents.

Carjacking can pose a serious risk as the aim of the attacker is to take the vehicle as quickly as possible. As a result tensions are likely to be high, and the assailant may be armed, aggressive and nervous. If you are the victim of a carjacking your aim is to escape unharmed and alive.

To reduce the risk of being carjacked

- Understand the threat in the area you are travelling- is it an issue in this area, is a specific type of vehicle being targeted, what tactics are commonly being used, are there particular high risk areas, what time of day are incidents happening, do the attackers tend to be armed and violent?
- Consider, in light of the above information, what steps can be taken to reduce your risk. This might include avoiding travel at certain times of day, avoiding certain areas, using a different type of vehicle, avoiding routines, trying not to stop the vehicle at traffic lights, arranging a system of alerting guards in advance so they can open gates for you to drive straight in to your office compound or residence, travelling in convoy and keeping doors and windows locked.
- Try to keep a full vehicle's distance between the front of your car and the back of the car ahead of you so that you do not get boxed in by attackers and have the space to manoeuvre
- Avoid parking next to obstacles where potential carjackers could hide e.g. walls, bushes etc. This allows you to have a clear view of the vehicle and its surroundings when getting into and out of it.
- Have your keys ready so that you can swiftly enter your vehicle, lock your doors, start your engine, and drive away as quickly and safely as possible.
- Be aware of individuals handing out flyers, selling merchandise or assisting you when parking.

If you are carjacked

Remember that this is potentially a very dangerous situation and the aim is to escape alive and unharmed. A carjacker will want to take the vehicle as quickly and with as little fuss as possible.

- Try to stay calm and never argue with the assailant.
- Listen to their demands and instructions and comply.
- Exit the car if instructed to do so, however take extreme care when removing your seatbelt as this can look as if you are reaching for a weapon. Move slowly and carefully, telling the carjacker what you are doing.
- Keep your hands visible at all times.
- When exiting the vehicle leave the door open, the keys in the ignition and the engine running. Try to stay facing the assailant so that you can see what they are doing.

- If you remove the keys from the ignition for any reason hand them over to the assailant, do not throw them.
- Try to avoid making eye contact with the attackers; studies have shown violence is more likely to be used if the attacker feels they might be recognised.
- If there is a child in the car, explain that you are you going to remove them. Lean into the vehicle and place a foot inside the car whilst you unclip the child so that if the carjackers don't wait for you to exit and attempt to drive off you will be more likely to remain in the car with the child.
- Allow the carjackers to drive away unhindered.
- If you are the passenger in a vehicle that is being carjacked keep calm, keep communication with your colleagues to a minimum to avoid aggravating the assailant, keep your hands on view and comply with demands.
- Once the carjackers have left the scene report the incident to the local authorities.

Carjackings are dangerous and volatile situations. Remember that it is not worth being injured or killed for your vehicle.

Recovering from a carjacking

Even if no-one is hurt during a carjacking, it is a traumatic event. Some common symptoms to experience after such an incident might include:

- Intrusive thoughts, images, sounds, smells & sensations in the body
- Flashbacks
- Feeling cut off
- Tiredness
- Poor functioning
- Taking unaccustomed risks
- Avoidance
- Guilt /feeling bad

These are all very normal things to feel in the days and weeks after being threatened.

Remember

1. Traumatic stress responses are normal.
2. Give yourself time. When we experience something traumatic, we can feel out of control and struggle to make sense of the chaos. It takes time - weeks or months - to accept what has happened and to learn to live with it.
3. Distressing events that shatter the way we see ourselves can evoke a loss of meaning, purpose and hope. You may need to grieve for what you have lost.
4. It can help to spend time with others who have been through a similar experience as you.
5. Ask for support - Most people who experience a traumatic event need support and understanding from those around them to help them recover. Sometimes you will want to be with other people, but not to talk about what has happened.
6. Take some time for yourself.
7. Don't avoid talking about it. It can be a relief to talk about what happened. Take things at a pace that you feel comfortable with. You don't need to wallow in it but it is unhelpful to avoid it.
8. Get into a routine. Exercise, have regular meals and eat a balanced diet. Don't force yourself but aim to re-establish a routine.

When to seek further help

There are times when self-care and talking with friends and/or colleagues is not enough to aid recovery from a traumatic incident. Observe yourself - your thoughts and feelings - and if you don't seem to be moving towards feeling better after a couple of weeks, it may be worth seeking some professional support. The following list provides some cues for when to ask for more help:

- You have no one to share your feelings with
- You feel overwhelmed by sadness, anxiety, or nervousness
- You feel that you are not returning to normal after six weeks
- Your nightmares are preventing you from getting sleep

- You are struggling to get on with those close to you
- You want to withdraw from other people more and more
- You feel numb and notice that you increasingly don't care
- Your work is suffering and its difficult to concentrate
- Those around you suggest you seek help
- You only feel alive in high risk or very stressful situations
- You are drinking or smoking too much, or using drugs or other high risk strategies to cope with your feelings.
- You bury yourself in work in order to avoid your feelings.
- Even in a safe relationship, you are not able to talk about the traumatic event.
- You feel you are the only one suffering like this.

Speak to someone such as your Field Manager who can help you access further professional help. This may with a doctor or a psychologist or counsellor. It might be with an elder or religious leader you trust. Whoever it is, make sure it is someone you trust and who you feel safe with.

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