



RESPONSE TO VICTIMS OF CRIME

Model Policy

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I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to emphasize that an effective response to the needs of crime victims is an integral part of the law enforcement mission. This essential function, performed by both sworn and civilian personnel, should address victims' needs by establishing a continuum of support as victims progress through the various phases of the criminal justice process.

II. POLICY

As first responders, law enforcement personnel are uniquely positioned to provide care and support to victims of crime as required by state and federal laws.¹ These efforts can have both an immediate and a long-term impact on the victim's emotional recovery by developing a sense of security and stability and potentially mitigating the traumatic effects of the crime. Therefore, it is the policy of this department to (1) recognize and address the needs of crime victims by all employees during each contact; (2) support and assist the victims as they continue to interact with the criminal justice system; and (3) act as a liaison to appropriate victim assistance and service agencies.

III. DEFINITION

Crime Victim: Generally, a person who has been physically and/or emotionally injured due to the occurrence of a crime. Victims include individuals who have been direct targets of violence or property loss or damage, their family members, and people who

experience emotional trauma as a result of witnessing such an incident.

IV. VICTIM NEEDS

A. Seven Critical Needs of Crime Victims

Victims of crime experience a variety of physical, psychological and social needs, which can be classified under seven categories:

1. Safety: Protection from perpetrators and assistance in avoiding re-victimization
2. Support: Assistance to enable participation in the criminal justice system processes and repair of harm
3. Information: Concise and useful information about victims' rights, criminal justice system processes, and available victim services
4. Access: Ability to participate in the justice system process and have ready availability to support services
5. Continuity: Consistency in approaches and methods across agencies through all stages of the criminal justice process
6. Voice: Opportunities to speak out and be heard on specific case processing issues and larger policy questions
7. Justice: Receiving the support necessary to heal and seeing that perpetrators are held accountable.

V. PROCEDURES

A. Initial Response

1. Communications personnel shall treat individuals reporting a crime with compassion, patience, and respect as they collect the

¹ Federal and state victim rights laws can be found at www.victimlaw.info.

information necessary to determine the nature and location of the incident; the identity of the caller, victim, and perpetrator, if known; and the conditions that indicate that responding officers might be at risk of injury. Officers shall be dispatched to meet with the victim as soon as practical.

2. Responding officers shall
 - a. immediately ascertain that the victim or victims are at a safe location;
 - b. render emergency first aid, if necessary;
 - c. determine the need for and request additional medical and/or departmental resources; and
 - d. once the incident is stable, develop a supportive presence by reassuring the victim that she or he is no longer in immediate danger.
3. Victims who are emotionally distraught should not be left alone. If appropriate, relatives, friends, or a community resource such as a victim's assistance professional or member of the clergy should be contacted to provide comfort and support.
4. While collecting information and physical evidence necessary for the investigation and subsequent prosecution, officers should be perceptive to and sensitive about the victim's psychological state.
5. Employees shall consider the method, manner, location, and timing of the victim interview, so as not to subject the victim to additional stress and trauma.

B. Information and Referrals

1. At the earliest appropriate time, officers shall explain and provide the victim with written information regarding the following:
 - a. The state's victims' rights laws
 - b. Specific rights and protections available under domestic/family violence laws
 - c. Relevant victim assistance/advocacy resources that are available to them.
2. At the conclusion of the initial investigation, the officer shall
 - a. inform the victim of the general direction that the investigation will take, how the department will proceed, who will be responsible for further follow-up, and whether the victim should expect to be contacted;
 - b. provide the victim with the telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of the appropriate points of contact within the department; and
 - c. strongly encourage the victim to contact

the department immediately if they are threatened or intimidated by anyone as a result of reporting the crime, or if they learn of any new information regarding the case.

3. The reporting officer shall document in his/her report that the victim was properly informed of the rights and available protections and was provided with information relating to referrals.

C. Investigation and Follow-up

1. Officers assigned to conduct follow-up criminal investigations shall contact the victim as soon as practical to determine whether the victim has new details concerning the case and relay information, when available and appropriate, relating to such matters as
 - a. arrest and detention of suspects and their pretrial release status;
 - b. court restraining orders;
 - c. court proceedings and schedules;
 - d. status of stolen, recovered, or removed property; and
 - e. possible eligibility for victim compensation.
2. If the victim is in need of further assistance from outside sources or the department or requests additional services, the investigating officer shall make reasonable efforts to connect the victim with appropriate service provider agencies.
3. In the event that an arrest is made, the investigating officer shall contact the victim as soon as practical to provide the following:
 - a. Information concerning the arrest
 - b. The bail status of the suspect, or any change in this status
 - c. An overview of the court process
 - d. A specific point of contact in the prosecutor's office
4. The victim should be advised that if he or she is contacted by the suspect in any way or is threatened or intimidated by anyone, he or she should contact the department through dispatch immediately.

D. Resources

1. Department employees that have contact with the public in general and victims in particular shall be familiar with governmental and community-based victim support and advocacy organizations. It is the policy of the department to collaborate and provide reasonable assistance to such entities to the extent that it does not place the victim or others at risk, substantially interfere with an ongoing investigation

or prosecution, or violate state privacy laws or departmental procedures.

2. A victim services reference directory with up-to-date contact information shall be developed and made available to communications, administrative, patrol, investigative, and victim services personnel, if any.
3. Pamphlets regarding the rights of crime victims and area resources shall be made available to all crime victims.
4. Department employees shall be attentive to crime victims with special needs. Victims with physical, mental, or emotional impairments, as well as child and elderly victims should be attended to in a manner that best supports their life conditions and specific situations. Employees should select a combination of service provider referrals that can work collaboratively to meet the unique needs of these victims.
5. Employees shall also be sensitive to the cultural needs of crime victims by providing materials in a language that the victim can comprehend and ensuring access to translator services when appropriate. Cultural background can affect the manner in which crime victims respond and react to being victimized and how they are treated by family and community members. Employees should be aware of these special circumstances and work with the appropriate service providers and community partners to support victims in these situations.

E. Training

Department employees must complete training on providing assistance and services to victims of crime as part of their initial orientation program and during regularly scheduled roll-call and in-service training. This shall include state and federal laws regarding victims and victims' rights, internal policies relative to working with victims, effects of trauma on crime victims, communication skills, integrating the needs of victims into the investigation process, cultural awareness, familiarization with victim and social service providers, and how to contact and access these services.²

Acknowledgment

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² Content for such training is available through the *Training Supplemental*, vol. 4, of the IACP/OVC strategy for enhanced victim response that can be viewed and downloaded at www.responsetovictims.org.