



Training Bulletin—Critical Needs of Victims

Crime victims require a continuum of support and services to heal. The seven critical needs of victims outlined below are a foundation for victim-centered, trauma-informed practices. While every victim will have specific needs, these seven categories highlight areas of focus for law enforcement.

Law enforcement plays a principal role in ensuring victims' needs are understood and addressed as victims move through the criminal justice system. In every interaction with a victim, ask yourself

- Will my words and actions support this victim in exercising their rights and having their needs met?
- Or will this create a barrier?

Eliminate or minimize barriers and include victims in decision-making as much as possible.

1. Safety

People who have experienced victimization, especially those impacted by violent crime, are generally at a higher risk of revictimization in the future.¹

- Provide information about risk reduction and the likelihood of revictimization
- Recommend actions to take when experiencing intimidation and fears about future harm.

Physical, emotional, and psychological safety are all important for victims in the aftermath of crime.

- Recognize that victims' safety concerns may also extend to children, family members, friends, and others.
- Create an environment where victims feel safe reporting crimes and expressing their thoughts, fears, and needs.

2. Support

Opportunities for connecting victims with the help they need are often missed by law enforcement.²

- Allow support persons chosen by victims to be present when possible. When this is not possible, explain why.
- Facilitate connections with victim services personnel (agency employed and community based) whose role is to provide ongoing support and assistance.

3. Information

Victims benefit from having information about their rights, available resources, and future points of contact in the criminal justice system.

- Provide victims' rights information and guidance around exercising those rights. Provide information in multiple ways (e.g., in conversation, through written material/brochures, on agencies' websites).
- Provide updates on the investigation. Notify victims when a case does not result in an arrest and prosecution. Explain why and how decisions are made.

¹ Barbara A. Oudekerk and Jennifer L. Truman, [Repeat Violent Victimization, 2005-14](#) (Bureau of Justice Statistics, August 2017); Katie Ports, Derek Ford, and Melissa Merrick, "Adverse Childhood Experiences and Sexual Victimization in Adulthood," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 51 (January 2016): 313-322.

² Rachel E. Morgan and Barbara A. Oudekerk, [Criminal Victimization, 2018](#) (Bureau of Justice Statistics, September 2019).

4. Access

Victims need opportunities to participate in criminal justice system processes.

- Review how to physically access buildings (e.g., ramps, doorways, parking).
- Use technology if available and appropriate.
- Ensure information is available in languages used by community members (e.g., spoken languages, sign language, braille).

5. Continuity

Victims encounter multiple professionals and processes in the criminal justice system.

- Collaborate with other criminal justice professionals, community agencies, and victim services providers.
- Understand the roles and responsibilities of other professionals.
- Use consistent language and victim-centered approaches across agencies.
- Facilitate supportive handoffs to other professionals as cases progress (e.g., from law enforcement investigation to prosecution)
- Facilitate and participate in ride-alongs and sit-alongs with community partners and system professionals in various roles.
- Share and analyze data to promote research-informed practices.

6. Voice

Crime victimization involves direct or threatened physical, emotional, or financial harm as a result of actions taken by others. The response to crime also involves decisions and actions by others. It is important for victims to have a voice in the criminal justice system.

- Encourage victims to ask questions and listen to their concerns.
- Invite victims and victim services personnel (agency-employed and community-based) to participate in case-related and agency practice discussions.

7. Justice

Many cases do not result in arrest, prosecution, and maximum sentencing of offenders. Procedural justice, which refers to the concept of fairness in the processes that resolve disputes and allocate resources,³ may be the only form of justice that some victims receive.

- Recognize that not all victims define justice the same way.
- Explain criminal justice system processes and how decisions are made.
- Complete thorough, trauma-informed and offender-focused investigations.
- Do your part to hold offenders accountable.
- Ask victims for their input and views on case resolution.

³ Laura Kunard and Charlene Moe, [Procedural Justice for Law Enforcement: An Overview](#) (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015).