



Office for Victims of Crime

First

Response

**to
Victims
of
Crime
2001**



Office for Victims of Crime
OVC
*Advocating for the Fair
Treatment of Crime Victims*

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First Response to Victims of Crime

A Handbook for Law Enforcement Officers
on How To Approach and Help

Elderly Victims
Victims of Sexual Assault
Child Victims
Victims of Domestic Violence
Victims of Alcohol-Related Driving Crashes
Survivors of Homicide Victims



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Advocating for the Fair

Message From the Director

The purpose of this handbook is to help law enforcement officers better understand and meet the needs of victims of crime, particularly during the first response period. Specifically, this handbook addresses issues that arise during the initial contact between officers and victims. How law enforcement first responds to victims is critical in determining how victims cope, first with the immediate crisis and, later, with their recovery from the crime. In addition, the first response can strongly influence victims' subsequent participation in the investigation and prosecution of the crime. Finally, victims who have had a positive experience with law enforcement will be more likely to report future offenses. In this way, a good first response to victims by officers ultimately increases the overall effectiveness of law enforcement.

Circumstances of the crime and the crime scene determine when and how the first responding officers are able to address victims and their needs. Each crime and crime scene are different and require officers to prioritize their performance of tasks. For example, if the crime is ongoing, or if the collection of evidence or investigation of the crime is extremely time-sensitive, first responders may not be able to direct their immediate attention to victims. Once the most urgent or pressing tasks have been addressed, however, officers will then focus their attention on the victims and their needs. How the officers respond to victims, explain their competing law enforcement duties, and work with the victims is very important.

A handbook of this size cannot address every factor that may shape encounters between responding officers and crime victims. Some factors not addressed in this handbook include the different types of criminal victimization and the different characteristics among victims, such as cultural background, intelligence level, financial status, and perceptions of law enforcement. Additional training offered by law enforcement academies and in continuing education classes can teach first responders more about these victims' issues and needs and how they impact the first response experience for both the officer and the victim.

What this handbook offers law enforcement officers are basic guidelines to observe when approaching and interacting with six general categories of crime victims: elderly victims, sexual assault victims, child victims, domestic violence victims, victims of alcohol-related driving crashes, and survivors of homicide victims. Ideal for reminding officers of their earlier victim training and refreshing their perspective, awareness, and sensitivity toward victims, this handbook would be very useful for retraining officers in the inservice setting, at roll calls, and in recertification programs. Also, located in the back of the handbook is a list of national victim resources that includes hotlines and other toll-free numbers to help officers help victims find the resources they need to cope with and recover from their victimization. Placing a copy of this handbook with agency dispatchers would further serve victims of crime as they make telephone contact with law enforcement; the numbers and information would be a valuable resource that law enforcement personnel could share with victims. Finally, if a law enforcement agency is without written directives or orders about the proper handling of victims, the handbook could be used as a working model for developing a victim policy for the department.

This handbook is a reminder that every victim deserves to be treated with courtesy, respect, and fairness. When victims and law enforcement personnel work together and help each other, the effectiveness of the entire criminal justice system increases.

John W. Gillis
Director
Office for Victims of Crime

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Contents

I. Basic Guidelines on Approaching Victims of Crime.....	1
II. Elderly Victims.....	6
III. Victims of Sexual Assault.....	9
IV. Child Victims.....	12
V. Victims of Domestic Violence.....	15
VI. Victims of Alcohol-Related Driving Crashes.....	17
VII. Survivors of Homicide Victims.....	21
VIII. National Victim Resources.....	24
IX. Victim Services Directory.....	26

I. Basic Guidelines on Approaching Victims of Crime

Background

The way people cope as victims of crime depends largely on their experiences immediately following the crime. As a law enforcement officer, you are usually the first official to approach victims. For this reason, you are in a unique position to help victims cope with the immediate trauma of the crime and to help restore their sense of security and control over their lives.

Circumstances of the crime and the crime scene determine when and how the first responding officers are able to address victims and their needs. This publication recognizes that each crime and crime scene is different and requires officers to prioritize their performance of tasks in each situation. Generally, officers must attend to many tasks, including assessing medical needs, determining facts and circumstances, advising other personnel, and gathering and distributing suspect information. It is helpful to keep in mind that apprehension of the suspect is the primary duty of law enforcement and that accomplishing this task helps not only the suspect's current victims but potential victims as well. Sometimes the first responders must delay their attendance to the victims if the situation requires. For example, if the crime is ongoing, or if the collection of evidence or investigation of the crime is extremely time-sensitive, first responders may not be able to direct their immediate attention to the victims. However, as soon as the most urgent and pressing tasks have been addressed, officers will focus their attention on the victims and their needs. At this point, how the officers respond to the victims, explain the competing law enforcement duties, and work with the victims is very important.

By approaching victims appropriately, officers will gain their trust and cooperation. Victims may then be more willing to provide detailed information about the crime to officers and later to investigators and prosecutors, which, in turn, will lead to the conviction of more criminals. Remember that you are there for the victim, the victim is not there for you.

You can help victims by understanding the three major needs they have after a crime has been committed: the need to

feel safe; the need to express their emotions; and the need to know "what comes next" after their victimization. The information in this handbook is designed to show you how to meet these needs.

Tips for Responding to Victims' Three Major Needs

Victims' Need To Feel Safe

People often feel helpless, vulnerable, and frightened by the trauma of their victimization. As the first response officer, you can respond to victims' need to feel safe by following these guidelines:

- Introduce yourself to victims by name and title. Briefly explain your role and purpose.
- Reassure victims of their safety and your concern by paying close attention to your own words, posture, mannerisms, and tone of voice. Say to victims, "You're safe now" or "I'm here now." Use body language to show concern, such as nodding your head, using natural eye contact, placing yourself at the victims' level rather than standing over seated victims, keeping an open stance rather than crossing your arms, and speaking in a calm, sympathetic voice.
- Ask victims to tell you in just a sentence or two what happened. Ask if they have any physical injuries. Take care of their medical needs first.
- Offer to contact a family member, friend, or crisis counselor for victims.
- Ensure privacy during your interview. Conduct it in a place where victims feel secure.
- Ask simple questions that allow victims to make decisions, assert themselves, and regain control over their lives. Examples: "Would you like anything to drink?"; "May I come inside and talk with you?"; and "How would you like me to address you, Ms. Jones?"
- Assure victims of the confidentiality of their comments whenever possible.
- Ask victims about any special concerns or needs they may have.

I. Basic Guidelines on Approaching Victims of Crime

- Provide a "safety net" for victims before leaving them. Make telephone calls and pull together personal or professional support for the victims. Give victims a pamphlet listing resources available for help or information. This pamphlet should include contact information for local crisis intervention centers and support groups; the prosecutor's office and the victim-witness assistance office; the state victim compensation/assistance office; and other nationwide services, including toll-free hotlines.
- Give victims—in writing—your name and information on how to reach you. Encourage them to contact you if they have any questions or if you can be of further help.

Victims' Need To Express Their Emotions

Victims need to air their emotions and tell their story after the trauma of the crime. They need to have their feelings accepted and have their story heard by a nonjudgmental listener. In addition to fear, they may have feelings of self-blame, anger, shame, sadness, or denial. Their most common response is: "I don't believe this happened to me." Emotional distress may surface in seemingly peculiar ways, such as laughter. Sometimes victims feel rage at the sudden, unpredictable, and uncontrollable threat to their safety or lives. This rage can even be directed at the people who are trying to help them, perhaps even at law enforcement officers for not arriving at the scene of the crime sooner. You can respond to victims' need to express their emotions by following these guidelines:

- Avoid cutting off victims' expression of their emotions.
- Notice victims' body language, such as their posture, facial expression, tone of voice, gestures, eye contact, and general appearance. This can help you understand and respond to what they are feeling as well as what they are saying.
- Assure victims that their emotional reactions to the crime are not uncommon. Sympathize with the victims by saying things such as: "You've been through something very frightening. I'm sorry"; "What you're feeling is completely normal"; and "This was a terrible crime. I'm sorry it happened to you."
- Counter any self-blame by victims by saying things such as, "You didn't do anything wrong. This was not your fault."

- Speak with victims as individuals. Do not just "take a report." Sit down, take off your hat, and place your notepad aside momentarily. Ask victims how they are feeling now and listen.
- Say to victims, "I want to hear the whole story, everything you can remember, even if you don't think it's important."
- Ask open-ended questions. Avoid questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no." Ask questions such as "Can you tell me what happened?" or "Is there anything else you can tell me?"
- Show that you are actively listening to victims through your facial expressions, body language, and comments such as "Take your time; I'm listening" and "We can take a break if you like. I'm in no hurry."
- Avoid interrupting victims while they are telling their story.
- Repeat or rephrase what you think you heard the victims say. For example, "Let's see if I understood you correctly. Did you say . . . ?"; "So, as I understand it, . . ."; or "Are you saying . . . ?"

Victims' Need To Know "What Comes Next" After Their Victimization

Victims often have concerns about their role in the investigation of the crime and in the legal proceedings. They may also be concerned about issues such as media attention or payment for health care or property damage. You can help relieve some of their anxiety by telling victims what to expect in the aftermath of the crime. This will also help prepare them for upcoming stressful events and changes in their lives. You can respond to victims' need to know about what comes next after their victimization by following these guidelines:

- Briefly explain law enforcement procedures for tasks such as the filing of your report, the investigation of the crime, and the arrest and arraignment of a suspect.
- Tell victims about subsequent law enforcement interviews or other kinds of interviews they can expect.

I. Basic Guidelines on Approaching Victims of Crime

- Discuss the general nature of medical forensic examinations the victim will be asked to undergo and the importance of these examinations for law enforcement.
- Explain what specific information from the crime report will be available to news organizations. Discuss the likelihood of the media releasing any of this information.
- Counsel victims that lapses of concentration, memory losses, depression, and physical ailments are normal reactions for crime victims. Encourage them to reestablish their normal routines as quickly as possible to help speed their recovery.
- Give victims a pamphlet listing resources available for help and information. This pamphlet should include contact information for local crisis intervention centers and support groups; the prosecutor's office and the victim-witness assistance office; the state victim compensation/assistance office; and other nationwide services, including toll-free hotlines.
- Ask victims whether they have any questions. Encourage victims to contact you if you can be of further assistance.

II. Elderly Victims

Background

When elderly people are victimized, they usually suffer greater physical, mental, and financial injuries than other age groups. Elderly victims are twice as likely to suffer serious physical injury and to require hospitalization than any other age group. Furthermore, the physiological process of aging brings with it a decreasing ability to heal after injury—both physically and mentally. Thus, elderly victims may never fully recover from the trauma of their victimization. Also, the trauma that elderly victims suffer is worsened by their financial difficulties. Because many elderly people live on a low or fixed income, they often cannot afford the professional services and products that could help them in the aftermath of a crime.

It is understandable why the elderly are the most fearful of crime. Elderly people, in fact, face a number of additional worries and fears when victimized. First, they may doubt their ability to meet the expectations of law enforcement and worry that officers will think they are incompetent. They may worry that a family member, upon learning of their victimization, will also think they are incompetent. Further, they may fear retaliation by the offender for reporting the crime. Finally, elderly people may experience feelings of guilt for "allowing" themselves to be victimized. Depending on your approach as a first responder, you can do much to restore confidence in and maintain the dignity of the elderly victims you work with.

Tips for Responding to Elderly Victims

- Be attentive to whether victims are tired or not feeling well.
- Allow victims to collect their thoughts before your interview.
- Ask victims if they are having any difficulty understanding you. Be sensitive to the possibility that they may have difficulty hearing or seeing, but do not assume such impairments. Ask victims if they have any special needs, such as eyeglasses or hearing aids.

- Ask victims whether they would like you to contact a family member or friend.
- Be alert for signs of domestic violence or neglect, since studies indicate that 10 percent of the elderly are abused by their relatives.
- Give victims time to hear and understand your words during the interview.
- Ask questions one at a time, waiting for a response before proceeding to the next question. Avoid interrupting victims.
- Repeat key words and phrases. Ask open-ended questions to ensure you are being understood.
- Avoid unnecessary pressure. Be patient. Give victims frequent breaks during your interview.
- Protect the dignity of victims by including them in all decisionmaking conversations taking place in their presence.
- For hearing-impaired victims, choose a location free of distractions, interference, and background noise, and:
 - Face the victim so your eyes and mouth are clearly visible.
 - Stand or sit at a distance of no more than 6 feet and no fewer than 3 feet from the victim.
 - Begin speaking only after you have the victim's attention and have established eye contact.
 - Never speak directly into the victim's ear.
 - Speak clearly, distinctly, and slightly slower than usual. Keep your questions and instructions short and simple. Do not overarticulate your words.
 - If necessary, talk slightly louder than usual but do not shout. Extremely loud tones are not transmitted as well as normal tones by hearing aids.
 - Be prepared to repeat your questions and instructions frequently. Use different words to restate your questions and instructions.

- Provide enhanced lighting if victims are required to read. Ensure that all print in written materials is both large enough and dark enough for victims to read.
- Provide victims written information that summarizes the important points you communicated verbally so they can refer to this information later.
- Remember that elderly victims' recollections may surface slowly. Do not pressure them to recollect events or details; rather, ask them to contact you if they remember anything later.
- In all your comments and interactions with elderly victims, their families, and other professionals involved in the case, focus on the goals of restoring confidence to and maintaining the dignity of the elderly victims you work with.

III. Victims of Sexual Assault

Background

Sexual assault is one of the most traumatic types of criminal victimization. Whereas most crime victims find it difficult to discuss their victimization, sexual assault victims find it especially painful. One obvious reason for this is the difficulty that many people have in talking about sex. A more important reason, however, is that many victims of sexual assault are intensely traumatized not only by the humiliation of their physical violation but by the fear of being severely injured or killed.

The three primary responsibilities of law enforcement in sexual assault cases are to (1) protect, interview, and support the victim; (2) investigate the crime and apprehend the perpetrator; and (3) collect and preserve evidence of the assault that will assist in the prosecution of the assailant.

In the investigation and prosecution of most sexual assault cases, the role of the victim is much more important than in other crimes since the victim is usually the sole witness to the crime. Unfortunately, sexual assault victims are sometimes reluctant to cooperate with law enforcement because they fear the perpetrator will return to retaliate.

Only men and women who have suffered the trauma of sexual assault themselves can begin to understand the depth and complexity of the feelings experienced by sexual assault victims. Even so, your approach as a first responder to sexual assault victims can significantly affect whether the victims begin the road to recovery or suffer years of trauma and anguish.

Tips for Responding to Victims of Sexual Assault

- Be prepared for virtually any type of emotional reaction by victims. Be unconditionally supportive and permit victims to express their emotions, which may include crying, angry outbursts, and screaming.
- Avoid interpreting the victim's calmness or composure as evidence that a sexual assault did not occur. The victim

could be in shock. (Note: False accusations of sexual assault are estimated to occur at the low rate of 2 percent—similar to the rate of false accusations for other violent crimes.)

- Approach victims calmly. Showing your outrage at the crime may cause victims even more trauma.
- Ask victims whether they would like you to contact a family member or friend.
- Offer to contact a sexual assault crisis counselor. Ask victims whether they would prefer a male or female counselor. In addition, ask the victims whether they would prefer talking with you or a law enforcement officer of the opposite sex.
- Be careful not to appear overprotective or patronizing.
- Remember that it is normal for victims to want to forget, or to actually forget, details of the crime that are difficult for them to accept.
- Encourage victims to get medical attention, especially to check for possible internal injuries. In addition, a medical examination can provide evidence for the apprehension and prosecution of the victim's assailant. Keep in mind, however, that victims may feel humiliated and embarrassed that their bodies were exposed during the sexual assault and must be exposed again during a medical examination. Explain what will take place forensically during the examination and why these procedures are important.
- Notify the hospital of the incoming victim/patient and request a private waiting room. Escort victims to the hospital. If no crisis intervention counselor is available, wait at the hospital until victims are released and escort them to their destination.
- Be mindful of the personal, interpersonal, and privacy concerns of victims. They may have a number of concerns, including the possibility of having been impregnated or contracting sexually transmitted diseases such as the AIDS virus; the reactions of their spouse, mate, or parents; media publicity that may reveal their victimization to the public; and the reactions or criticism of neighbors and coworkers if they learn about the sexual assault.

- Interview victims with extreme sensitivity. Minimize the number of times victims must recount details of the crime to strangers. If possible, only one law enforcement officer should be assigned to the initial interview and subsequent investigation.
- Offer to answer any further questions victims may have and provide any further assistance they may need.
- Encourage victims to get counseling. Explain that your recommendation for counseling is based on having seen other victims benefit from it in the past. Explain that they may experience posttraumatic stress symptoms in the next few months. Identify and refer them to support services for assistance.

IV. Child Victims

Background

The victimization rate for children 12 through 19 is higher than that for any other age group. (Note: Criminal victimization data are not collected for children under 12 years of age.) In addition, according to the American Medical Association, approximately 1,100 children die each year from abuse and neglect while 140,000 are injured. Uniform Crime Report data indicate that almost 2,000 children under the age of 18 were murdered in 1996. Finally, murder and nonnegligent manslaughter are the causes of death for approximately 17 percent of children under the age of 19.

When children are victimized, their normal physiological and psychological adjustment to life is disrupted. Furthermore, they must cope with the trauma of their victimization again and again in each succeeding developmental stage of life after the crime.

Child victims suffer not only physical and emotional traumas from their victimization. When their victimization is reported, children are forced to enter the stressful "adult" world of the criminal justice system. Adults—perhaps the same adults who were unable to provide protection in the first place—are responsible for restoring the children's sense that there are safe places where they can go and safe people to whom they can turn. As a law enforcement officer, you can play a key role in this process and lessen the likelihood of long-term trauma for child victims.

Tips for Responding to Child Victims

- Choose a secure, comfortable setting for interviewing child victims, such as a child advocacy center. If such an interview setting is not available, choose a location that is as comfortable as possible. Take the time to establish trust and rapport.
 - Preschool children (ages 2 through 6) are most comfortable at home—assuming no child abuse took place

there—or in a very familiar environment. A parent or some other adult the child trusts should be nearby.

- For elementary school-age children (ages 6 through 10), the presence of a parent is not usually recommended since children at this age are sometimes reluctant to reveal information if they believe they or their parents could "get into trouble." However, a parent or some other adult the child trusts should be close by, such as in the next room.
 - Preadolescents (ages 10 through 12 for girls and 12 through 14 for boys) are peer-oriented and often avoid parental scrutiny. For this reason, they may be more comfortable if a friend or perhaps the friend's parent(s) is nearby.
 - Since adolescents (generally, ages 13 through 17) may be fearful of betraying their peers, it may be necessary to interview them in a secure setting with no peers nearby.
- Realize that children tend to regress emotionally during times of stress, acting younger than their age. For example, 8-year-olds may suck their thumb.
- Use language appropriate to the victim's age. Remember your own childhood and try to think like the victim. Avoid "baby talk."
- Since young children often feel they may be blamed for problems, assure preschool and elementary school-age children that they have not done anything wrong and they are not "in trouble."
- Be consistent with the terms you use and repeat important information often.
- Ask open-ended questions to make sure victims understand you.
- Use care in discussing sexual matters with preadolescent and adolescent children, as their embarrassment and limited vocabulary can make conversation difficult for them. At the same time, do not assume that victims, including elementary school-age children, are as knowledgeable about sexual matters as their language or apparent sophistication might indicate.

- Maintain a nonjudgmental attitude and empathize with victims. Because elementary school-age children are especially affected by praise, compliment them frequently on their behavior and thank them for their help.
- Remember the limited attention span of children. Be alert to signs that victims are feeling tired, restless, or cranky. When interviewing preschool children, consider conducting a series of short interviews rather than a single, lengthy one. Also, consider postponing the interview until the victim has had a night's sleep. However, in this case, be sure not to wait too long before interviewing preschool children because victims at this age may have difficulty separating the events of the victimization from later experiences.
- Encourage preschool children to play, as it is a common mode of communication for them. You may find that as children play, they become more relaxed and thus more talkative.
- Limit the number of times victims must be interviewed. Bring together for interviews as many persons from appropriate public agencies as possible, including representatives from the prosecutor's office, child protective services, and the medical/health care community.
- Include victims, whenever possible, in decisionmaking and problem-solving discussions. Identify and patiently answer all of their questions. You can reduce victims' insecurity and anxiety by explaining the purpose of your interview and by preparing them, especially elementary school-age children, for what will happen next.
- Show compassion to victims. Children's natural abilities to cope are aided immensely by caring adults.
- Although the immediate victim is the child, do not forget to comfort the nonoffending parents. Referrals regarding how they can cope, what they can expect, as well as how to talk to and with their child should be provided.

V. Victims of Domestic Violence

Background

Domestic violence is a crime, not a family matter, and should be approached as such by law enforcement. U.S. Department of Justice statistics indicate that approximately 20 percent of homicides are committed within families or within intimate relationships, and one out of three female homicide victims is killed by an intimate. Furthermore, approximately 28 percent of violent crimes against females are committed by husbands or boyfriends. Finally, approximately 50 percent of domestic violence occurs between married partners and 25 percent between nonmarried partners living together, both involving mainly male assailants and female victims.

The three primary responsibilities of law enforcement in domestic violence cases are to (1) provide physical safety and security for victims, (2) assist victims by coordinating their referral to support services, and (3) make arrests of domestic violence perpetrators as required by law.

Unlike most other victims of crime, victims of domestic violence do not usually suffer a "sudden and unpredictable" threat to their safety or lives. More often, domestic violence involves years of personal stress and trauma, as well as physical injury. Thus, in domestic violence cases—unlike in other crimes—your ability to help victims cope with and recover from their victimization may be limited.

Tips for Responding to Victims of Domestic Violence

- Because domestic violence cases present potential dangers, responding officers should arrive in pairs at the scene if possible. Introduce yourself and explain that you were called because of a possible injury. Ask permission to enter the residence to make sure everything is okay.
- Separate the parties involved in domestic violence before interviewing them, even if they are not violent or arguing when you arrive.

- Ask victims whether they would like you to contact a family member or friend.
- Avoid judging victims or personally commenting on the situation. Abusive relationships continue for many reasons. Offering advice to the victim at the scene will not solve this complex problem.
- Even if no children are present at the scene, ask whether there are children in the family, and, if so, find out their whereabouts. Keep in mind that children sometimes hide or are hidden in these circumstances.
- Approach children with care and kindness. Look for signs of emotional trauma or distress. Be attentive to physical indications of child abuse since domestic violence is sometimes linked with child abuse.
- Even when no domestic violence charges can be filed, encourage the parties to separate for a short period—at least overnight. If victims' safety at home can be assured, consider asking assailants to leave. Although law enforcement officers have traditionally asked victims to leave the home, this serves to disrupt their lives even further, especially when children are involved.
- Assure victims that the purpose of your intervention is to help address the problem, not to make the situation worse.
- Provide victims with referral information on domestic violence shelters and battered women's programs. This should be done away from the offender.
- Remember that domestic violence can occur in same-sex relationships.
- Be sure to complete a thorough report.

VI. Victims of Alcohol-Related Driving Crashes

Background

According to 1998 statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), odds are about 3 in 10 that at some point in life a person will be involved in an alcohol-related driving crash. More than 305,000 people were injured during 1998 in crashes in which law enforcement officers reported that alcohol was present. NHTSA estimates that in 1999 approximately 15,786 people died in alcohol-related driving crashes.

Drunk-driving victimization is generally severe and long lasting. Research funded by the National Institute of Mental Health concluded that 5 years after victimization most victims remain psychologically, physically, and financially impaired. Twenty percent of victims feel they will never again experience a normal life.

The law enforcement officer with knowledge about the unique nature of injury and death in alcohol-related driving crashes will be forever remembered by victims—or survivors of victims—as a first responder who knew how to help. And don't forget, it could just as easily have been you who was injured or killed by the drunk driver. Awareness of this fact will give you patience, humility, and courage.

Tips for Responding to Victims of Alcohol-Related Driving Crashes

- Avoid words and phrases that discount the victim's emotional and physical trauma. For example, do not use the words "At least" and "You're lucky," as in, "At least the drunk driver wasn't speeding," or "You're lucky to be alive." Such words will not comfort victims and may even hurt or anger them. Victims may be in shock or feeling fear, pain, panic, and confusion. Suggesting to victims that they are lucky or fortunate is not appropriate at this time.

- Help the victim driver cope with feelings of guilt and failure. When a passenger has been injured or killed, the victim driver often feels guilty for not having avoided the crash with a last-second decision or maneuver. Gently encourage victim drivers to approach such feelings with rational thinking and to try to appreciate that the crash probably could not have been avoided. Explain to victim drivers that their last-second actions were only a small part of a complex sequence of events leading up to the crash.
- Urge all victims to get immediate medical attention even when no signs of injury are present. Explain to victims that alcohol-related crashes are a leading cause of traumatic brain injury (also called closed head injury) in which the brain is injured without a skull fracture. Victims with such an injury may show no immediate symptoms and interact normally with first responders. Later, however, consequences of the brain injury may disrupt the victim's life. As health problems develop, victims and medical professionals often do not connect them back to the alcohol-related crash. Without medical examinations at the time of the crash, these victims may never realize that their problems stem from the crash.
- Expect ambivalent and conflicting feelings and statements from victim passengers in the drunk driver's vehicle. It can be difficult for them to blame the drunk driver if he or she is a friend or family member. In addition, victim passengers may be reluctant to share information because they worry about possible criminal justice consequences for the offending driver.
- Make sure your attitude and choice of words reflect the reality that drunk driving is a crime, usually a violent one, and that it has victimized many, many people. Your actions and words should reflect your knowledge that the consequences of drunk-driving victimization are as devastating as those of other violent crimes. Drunk driving is a crime, not an "accident." Just as there is no such thing as a robbery accident or a rape or murder accident, there are no drunk-driving accidents.

- Be prepared for victims to be emotional or even hostile. Sometimes, victims strongly believe that law enforcement does not treat the crime of drunk driving seriously enough, and they may express their views to you. Remain nonjudgmental and polite as you accept victims' reactions and listen to them state their views. Do not argue or contradict what victims say. Listening attentively makes victims feel they have been heard. Show empathy for their pain and suffering, but do not say "I understand" when clearly no one can.
- Support family members who want to view and spend time with the body of their loved one. Survivors often have a strong psychological need to get to the body of their loved one as soon as possible and spend time with it. Be sensitive to the family's suffering. Knowing that death from an alcohol-related crash almost always causes violent injury to the body, and knowing the pain such devastating images may cause surviving family members, your initial reaction may be to refuse the family access to the body out of a sense of compassion. However, refusal only increases the survivors' pain. First, offer to view the body on behalf of the family and provide a detailed description to them. If family members still wish to see and be with the body, support their right to do so. Holding and touching a loved one's body gives the survivors the chance to say goodbye while the victim's body is still in its natural state, before funeral home preparation. Viewing the body can help survivors begin the process of accepting the death.
- Choose your words with care and sensitivity. For many survivors, the distinction between "died" and "killed" takes on important significance after a drunk-driving crash fatality. The word "died" ignores the victimization. The word "killed" signifies the deliberate or reckless taking of life.
- Look for and place in safekeeping any personal articles of the victims, such as clothing and jewelry, found at the crash scene. In a survey on satisfaction with the criminal justice system's response to drunk-driving crashes, nearly two-thirds of the respondents were satisfied with law enforcement's investigation of cases, but many felt that officers had

failed to protect the victims' personal property. This perception was a source of hurt and bitterness.

- Review the Survivors of Homicide Victims section for additional tips on responding to the needs of survivors of victims killed in alcohol-related driving crashes.

VII. Survivors of Homicide Victims

Background

Homicide is a crime with more than one victim. Nothing can ever prepare survivors for the day they are suddenly told their loved one has been murdered. Survivors suffer the shock of the sudden loss of their loved one and anger that the loved one did not have to die. Murder crushes survivors' trust in the world and their belief in social order and justice.

Many survivors of homicide victims say that the most traumatic event of their lives was when they were notified of the death. One of the most difficult duties a law enforcement officer must perform is providing notification to the family of murdered victims. An inappropriate notification can prolong survivors' grieving process and delay their recovery from the crime for years. Proper notification by you can restore some of the survivors' trust and beliefs and help them to begin a new life.

Tips for Responding to Survivors of Homicide Victims

- Know the details surrounding the homicide victim's death before notification. Survivors often want to know the exact circumstances of their loved one's death.
- Have confirming evidence of the homicide victim's identity in the event of denial by the survivors. Be sensitive to the possibility that the victim may have been leading a life unknown to the survivors, such as involvement in drugs, extramarital affairs, or homosexuality.
- Know as much as possible about the homicide victim's survivors before notification. Notify the appropriate closest survivor first.
- Make notifications in person.
- Conduct notifications in pairs. You can contact local volunteers who are specially trained in death notification through your local clergy or crisis intervention agency. Also, the National Organization for Victim Assistance (800-879-6682) may be able to refer you to volunteers in your area.

- Do not bring personal articles of the homicide victim with you to the notification.
- Conduct the notification in a private place after you and the survivors are seated.
- Avoid engaging in small talk upon your arrival. Do not build up slowly to the reason for your visit or to the actual announcement of the death of the survivor's loved one. Finally, do not use any euphemisms for the death of the loved one, such as "She passed away," "We lost her," "She expired," or "She left us." Be compassionately direct and unambiguous in giving notification to survivors. For example: "We've come to tell you something very terrible. Your daughter has been killed in a carjacking. I'm so sorry."
- Ask survivors whether they would like you to contact a family member or friend.
- Have one person take the lead in conducting the notification. The other person should monitor survivors for reactions dangerous to themselves or others.
- Accept survivors' reactions—no matter how intense or stoic—in a nonjudgmental, empathetic manner. Survivors may cry hysterically, scream, collapse, sit quietly, or go into shock.
- Be prepared for survivors' possible hostility toward you as a representative of law enforcement and avoid responding impolitely or defensively.
- Show empathy for survivors' pain and suffering, but do not say "I understand" when clearly no one can.
- Refer to the homicide victim by name out of respect to the victim and survivors. Do not use terms like "the deceased" or "the victim."
- Listen to survivors and answer all of their questions.
- Make telephone calls to other survivors of the homicide victim at the request of the immediate survivors. If possible, make arrangements for someone to be with these survivors before they receive your telephone notification. If this is not possible, ask the survivors to sit down once you've contacted them before you make the notification. Ask for permission to

call a neighbor, a friend, or a crisis intervention counselor to be with the survivors after the notification. Tell each person you contact the names of others who have been notified.

- Show respect for survivors' personal and religious or nonreligious understandings of death. Do not impose your personal beliefs about death on survivors by saying of the victim, for example, "She's in a better place now."
- Explain to survivors that everyone grieves differently. Encourage them to be understanding and supportive of one another.
- Before leaving survivors, make sure that someone can stay with them and that they have contacts for support services.

VIII. National Victim Resources

Provide the following national resources and hotlines to victims as appropriate:

Battered Women's Justice Project
(800) 903-0111

Bureau of Indian Affairs
Indian Country Child Abuse Hotline
(800) 633-5155

Childhelp USA/Forrester National Child Abuse Hotline
(800) 422-4453; (800) 222-4453, TDD

Family Violence Prevention Fund/Health Resource Center
(800) 313-1310

Justice Statistics Clearinghouse
(800) 732-3277

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse
(800) 638-8736

Mothers Against Drunk Driving
(800) 438-6233

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
(800) 843-5678; (800) 826-7653, TDD

National Center for Victims of Crime
(800)394-2255

National Children's Alliance
(800)239-9950

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information
(800) 729-6686; (800) 487-4889, TDD; (800) 735-2258,
Hearing Impaired

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect
(800) 394-3366

National Criminal Justice Reference Service
(800) 851-3420; (800) 787-3224, TDD

National Fraud Information Hotline
(800) 876-7060

National Organization for Victim Assistance
(800) 879-6682

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
(800) 537-2238; (800) 553-2508, TDD

Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center
(800) 627-6872; (877) 712-9279, TTY

Parents of Murdered Children
(888)818-7662

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network
(800) 656-4673

Resource Center on Domestic Violence, Child Protection,
and Custody
(800) 527-3223

IX. Victim Services Directory

The local public and private agencies and organizations listed below are prepared to assist victims at no cost:

Agency/Organization	Telephone
Law Enforcement	
Office of the Sheriff	
Police Department	
Other	
Legal	
Office of the Prosecutor	
Victim/Witness Assistance Office	
Office of the Court Clerk	
State Compensation/Assistance Office	
Other	
Social Services/Support Groups	
Mental Health Services	
Drug/Alcohol Treatment Center	
Child/Adult Protective Services	
Support Groups	
Other	
Emergency Services	
Crisis Intervention Center	
Rape Crisis Center	
Shelter(s)	
NOTES:	

Services Provided

Law Enforcement

Legal

Social Services/Support Groups

Emergency Services

NOTES:

This Directory was prepared by the National Sheriffs' Association.



First Response to Victims of Crime

A Handbook for Law Enforcement Officers
on How To Approach and Help

Elderly Victims
Victims of Sexual Assault
Child Victims
Victims of Domestic Violence
Victims of Alcohol-Related Driving Crashes
Survivors of Homicide Victims

For copies of this guide and/or additional information,
please contact:

Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center (OVCRC)
P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
Telephone: 1-800-627-6872 or 301-519-5500
(TTY 1-877-712-9279)

Or order OVC publications online at www.puborder.ncjrs.org.
E-mail questions to askovc@ojp.usdoj.gov.
Send your feedback on this service to tellncjrs@ncjrs.org.

Refer to publication number NCJ 189631.