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# HOW TO IDENTIFY VICTIMS' SUPPORT NEEDS?

## Guidelines to develop an individual needs assessment

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# I. Introduction

This document constitutes a preparatory work to assist victim support organisations in ensuring their support workers are well equipped to identify victims' needs. A fundamental aspect to delivering high quality victim-centric support services is the ability to determine the specific needs of each victim and to establish support paths to meet those needs.

These guidelines present a comprehensive process to support that aim by:

- Identifying the main needs of victims – in the immediate and longer term (**comprehensive assessment**)
- Ensuring that victims receive the same level of service no matter who they work with or where they are (**consistent assessment**)
- Ensuring that victims are offered appropriate services according to their needs or are referred to relevant services (**service matching**)

These guidelines aim to provide general recommendations and tips to victim support organisations. It is recognised that different organisations will work with paid staff, volunteers, specialists (e.g. psychologists) and a combination of the above. Organisations will also have various partnerships with public agencies and other support groups. Moreover, they will encounter victims in several ways and will have different objectives for each interaction. Finally, organisations will connect with a wide array of victims.

As such, the following guidelines aim to provide an initial framework for a needs identification/ assessment process. A specific approach may be needed for each organisation and country, e.g. a specialist risk

assessment for victims of sexual violence or domestic violence; more detailed supervision mechanisms for less experienced colleagues.

### **Example of conducting an individual needs assessment<sup>1</sup>:**

*Service provider A supports victims of all types of crime, providing a wide range of services based on individual needs assessments. A lady called the local office seeking help and gave basic information about the crime and what help she needed. Prior to the appointment the support officer prepared an interview plan taking into account his training and the guidance document. On arrival for her appointment, the support officer talks to the victim and takes her through a needs assessment process based on a guidance document that prompts them to explore a range of needs.*

*The guidance document has been developed by the service, is not prescriptive but helps the support worker to direct the conversation and identify the victims' concerns. It also offers prompts in relation to needs that might arise as a result of specific crimes, such as carrying out appropriate risk assessments. On completion of the assessment, the support worker outlines what support is available and creates an agreed action plan with the victim.*

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1 UK Ministry of Justice, Evidence and practice review of support for victims and outcomes measurement, Meg Callanan, Ashley Brown, Caroline Turley, Tom Kenny and Professor Julian Roberts, NatCen Social Research, Ministry of Justice Research Series 19/12, November 2012, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/217385/evidence-practice-review-support-for-victims-outcome-measurement.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/217385/evidence-practice-review-support-for-victims-outcome-measurement.pdf)

## II. Methodology and results

Based on existing expertise combined with scientific and practical knowledge, Victim Support Europe conducted desk research and interviewed victim support organisations and experts on victims' rights and needs to develop these guidelines. This would give an overview of the approaches used by the contributing support service providers, and would allow analysis of these approaches in identifying victims' support needs during the first contact with victims of crime.

Our research has shown that there is no single approach common to all organisations. Importantly, it is insufficient to focus on one tool when attempting to determine the needs of victims: different means are required to best equip support workers and the organisation more generally, to work in partnership with victims to determine and address their specific needs.

The primary means in ensuring needs are comprehensively and consistently identified across an organisation are:

- **Training:** initial and lifelong training, which includes modules such as victims' rights and the justice system, impact of crime and trauma, communicating with victims, etc.
- **The intake process:** guidance documents describing the intake process and individual assessment, information recording tools.
- **Supervision and evaluation:** team meetings, random case checks, general supervision

This document intends to give guidelines to victim support services on how to develop their own individual assessment process to identify victims' support needs and better provide a tailored support to victims of crime.

## III. Definition and objectives of an individual needs assessment

An individual needs assessment is a strategic process to establish the nature and extent of a victim's needs. It should capture the individual victim's experiences and formulate a targeted bespoke response to meet identified needs – both inside and outside the organisation. In this sense, an individual support needs assessment plays a special role for victims of crime, who need specific consideration, such those with disabilities, the elderly and children.

### 1. Definition

A needs assessment is commonly part of an intake process i.e. the process by which information is obtained: a victim's personal data, details of the crime, and information on the victim's needs to facilitate the provision of support. Often the intake process is the first point of contact between victims and providers; it usually includes a clinical interview that aims to: facilitate rapport, identify needs, provide psycho-educational tools, and plan support<sup>2</sup>.

**Definitions** (<https://www.socialsolutions.com/blog/successful-nonprofit-case-management-components/>):

**Intake:** initial meeting between a victim support worker and a victim of crime. The victim support worker uses this time to begin to establish trust and build a relationship with the victim, to gather information about the victim, and identify any immediate needs. This

<sup>2</sup> Patient initiation of information: Exploring its role during the mental health intake visit, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2689076/>

first interaction is helpful for a support worker to determine if a victim would benefit from the services the organisation offers. If they would, they then move on to assessing the victim's individual needs. If their needs fall outside the service, the support worker works to identify and refer the victim to an outside service provider.

**Needs Assessment:** The needs assessment stage builds on the information collected during the intake stage, going into greater depth on the victim's individual challenges and goals. During this stage, a victim support worker's primary objective is to identify the victim's problems, interests, and needs, to build a support plan. While every victim goes through this stage when they first come to a victim support service, it's important to re-assess over time as needs and circumstances often change.

The individual needs assessment is not the same as a risk assessment, which identifies protection needs and measures<sup>3</sup>. The individual needs assessment is used by victim support services to detect the needs of victims relative to the services available. If the victim support service identifies a specific need but is unable to provide appropriate support, protocols and referral mechanisms should be in place to refer the victim to the correct service or organisation.

The assessment of risk should not be totally excluded from the needs assessment. In certain situations a risk assessment will need to be conducted to evaluate the safety of the victim: domestic violence, sexual abuse, victims with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, as well as victims in a possible crisis situation, for example where they are thinking about suicide.

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3 As foreseen in article 22 of the Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=cel-ex%3A32012L.0029>

It is important to highlight that the needs assessment is not static, but rather an ongoing process of engagement. As one set of needs are met, another may be identified, particularly as the victim's case moves through the criminal justice process.

## 2. Different engagements with victims of crime

Victims come to the support services by varying routes and therefore different modes of assessment of their needs can be used. These will depend on the method of interaction with the victim. An individual assessment will differ if carried out during a first contact by telephone or during a face to face meeting. Depending on the mode of assessment, the objectives of the conversation can also change:

- An **online discussion** via a chat or email is usually provides first-hand information to victims about their rights, the next steps they should take, or to set up a physical appointment with a support worker.

- A **first conversation over the phone** might only provide general information or contact details to victims. It may also be the time to initiate the individual needs assessment if there's no opportunity to meet the victim face to face. A phone conversation can also be the start of the support process, which can lead to a first meeting face to face with a victim.

- During a **face to face meeting**, the objective of the conversation will be to determine the victim's situation and specific needs to then develop a support plan.

All these types of engagement with victims require attentive, caring and thoughtful approaches. Support workers should be aware that often this is the first contact a victim has had with any support service,

and they might be hesitant, cautious, distrusting or demanding. The necessity to obtain as much information as possible must not come before kindness and consideration. It is important to highlight that transparency and honesty are crucial during the needs assessment so as to avoid unrealistic victim expectations, which may lead to disappointment and distrust.

### 3. Different approaches to the individual needs assessment

Victim support organisations use different approaches and tools when conducting an individual assessment. Three approaches have been identified through the interviews conducted by VSE:

- **Unstructured approach:** the support worker does not guide the conversation but rather lets victims express themselves freely without asking specific questions. This works well when the victims are confident enough to talk about their situation and needs. Listening to the victim is very important in this approach, which may be most appropriate when victims are looking for information and already know some of their rights and needs.

- **Semi structured approach:** the support worker will guide the conversation to lead the victims to talk about their experiences and situations. More open-ended questions will be asked, allowing for discussion with the victims rather than a straightforward question and answer format. The support worker may have a list of questions prepared but does not necessarily ask them all, or touch on them in any particular order, using them instead to guide the conversation.

- **Structured approach:** some victim support services will prefer a formal system following a script or a form. Support workers follow a form with pre-defined questions and fields to fill out.

Each approach has its own advantages and disadvantages. A structured approach might be preferred to ensure every aspect is covered during the intake and to ensure that all relevant information was given to and collected from the victim. It allows support workers to be prepared and appear competent during the interview. A less formal approach allows victims the freedom to express their story in their own terms.

## **4. Sources of the individual needs assessment**

The victim should be the first source of information when needs are to be identified and this requires the support worker to listen to what the victim has to say. An open discussion with the victim will allow the support worker understand and evaluate the victim's situation and needs. Other sources of information can also be used to complete a needs assessment, including the victim's family, the police and social services. These sources can be particularly valuable when assessing victims who cannot fully communicate their experiences, such as children and people with disability. As part of an organisation's needs assessment system, it should be considered how and in what circumstances additional information may be gathered. For example, it may be appropriate to invite family members to a meeting –either jointly with the victim or separately.

Support workers should be aware that sometimes victims have difficulty identifying and expressing their needs, and may be inhibited due to embarrassment or shame. Whenever support workers suspect the victim is not comfortable during the needs assessment, they should use a more structured interview (searching for information instead of waiting for the victim to provide it), and /or seek additional sources of information.

## 5.

# Objectives of an individual needs assessment

Although research conducted by Victim Support Europe showed that the use of a single individual needs assessment tool is not a common approach, a structured intake process has several benefits:

- It introduces **consistency** in the assessment process by ensuring that core areas of need are explored with each victim, and that these areas are raised consistently across different support workers;
- It allows '**hidden**' needs to be identified by helping victims to consider their needs in areas that might not have occurred to them initially<sup>4</sup>;
- It allows for the prioritisation and identification of **potential risks** where an immediate response is necessary;
- It allows for a **baseline measure** to determine change over time and against which outcomes may be mapped;
- It allows the referral of victims to other more specialised services as required.

A full intake process is not always necessary when it is apparent that another service is better able to support the needs of the victim.

A comprehensive needs assessment might point to requirements that cannot be supported by the initial victim support organisation contacted: support workers should be aware of alternative national or regional services and be able to refer victims to such services as necessary. A mapping of all existing national/regional services is extremely useful, while partnerships and protocols established between the different services will ensure continued collaboration and easy referral of cases between organisations.

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<sup>4</sup> Evidence and practice review of support for victims and outcomes measurement, Meg Callanan, Ashley Brown, Caroline Turley, Tom Kenny and Professor Julian Roberts, 2012

## Useful resources:

The Counselling Intake Process: What Counsellors Need to Consider  
<https://thriveworks.com/blog/counseling-intake-process/>

Community Support services, Intake process: <http://www.cssbh.org/intake-process>

Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime, Training and Technical Assistance Center (OVCTTAC), <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/4-supporting-victims/42-victim-service-provider-intake-and-needs-assessment/>

## IV. Overarching principles when conducting an individual needs assessment

Principles should be applied and respected when developing an individual needs assessment.

### 1. Holistic

Being a victim of a crime effects a range of life dimensions. Scientific and practical evidence shows how the impact on different areas of life is interlinked and influences each other. For example, the physical consequences of victimisation will have psychological consequences and impact the rehabilitation trajectory.

Worries about financial problems, caused by the crime or not, will be a factor in developing emotional issues after the crime and will hamper the emotional support trajectory offered by the victim support organisation. Awareness of the wide range of victims' needs will allow support organisations to address them, whether directly or by referral.

Having this in mind, it is necessary to map **the full range of needs** a victim might have in the aftermath of a crime, even if the assistance identified is not offered by the organisation; though, for many support organisations, making effective referrals is part of their service. Thus, identifying financial issues and knowing which organisation is best suited to help the victim is an essential element of the assessment.

To be consistent in the assessment of which aspects of life are impacted by an individual's victimisation, one must first identify the areas to be evaluated. A good place to start is by understanding:

- The **consequences of crime** with respect to Psychological, Physical, Social, Financial, Spiritual, Rights impacts.
- The **quality of Life Framework** (Shalock & Verdugo, 2005)<sup>5</sup> covering Emotional Well-being, Material Well-being, Physical well-being, Personal Development, Self-determination, Interpersonal relationships, Social Inclusion, Rights.

Within these two broad areas, an overlap will be seen:

| Consequence of Crime | Quality of Life  |
|----------------------|--|
| Psychological        | Emotional Well being<br>Personal development<br>Self-determination |
| Physical             | Physical well-being  |
| Financial            | Material well being<br>Self determination<br>Social inclusion      |
| Social               | Interpersonal relationships<br>Social Inclusion                    |
| Rights               | Rights   |

However, the issues are viewed from two different perspectives. On the one hand, Quality of Life looks at what a person requires for a good quality of life (wellbeing). On the other hand, the ‘consequences of crime’ looks at how those same requirements are negatively impacted by crime – and what must be done to re-establish well-being.

Victim support organisations should develop a framework that allows them to identify the range of needs that might be relevant. For those needs that the organisation does not support, referral mechanisms should be in place to ensure victims can obtain appropriate assistance.

<sup>5</sup> Verdugo, Miguel & Schalock, Robert & Keith, Kenneth & Stancliffe, Roger. (2005). Quality of life and its measurement: Important principles and guidelines. Journal of intellectual disability research

## 2.

# Victim-centered

In a victim-centered approach, the victim's wishes, safety, and well-being take priority in all matters and procedures. The victim-centered approach plays a critical role in supporting victims' rights, dignity, autonomy, and self-determination.

The approach is defined as the systematic focus on the needs and concerns of a victim to ensure the compassionate and sensitive delivery of services in a non-judgmental manner. It involves:

- Showing respect for the victim's life experiences, differences and perspective, considering the individual needs of victims and tailoring responses accordingly.
- Approaching each person as a unique individual – each person has different issues, realities, information and options.
- Understanding that a person's situation and perspective will change. The victim is the expert in their own recovery process.

Everyone reacts differently when faced with a crime or a traumatic incident, and only a personalised evaluation can determine the individual victim's support needs.

The support worker's conversation with victims should consider the individual and not only pre-existing knowledge of specific crimes. The conversation, and the questions, should be tailored to the type or nature of the crime and the victim's circumstances, the specific communications needs of victims, etc.

The prioritisation of needs will be unique to each victim and may be different to those identified by the support worker, therefore, it is important to **allow the victim to determine what is a priority.**

However, victims might not feel ready to deal with all the challenges they face: support workers should talk to the victim about the impact of the crime and the possibility / need for support, but should follow the victim's pace and trajectory during the conversation.

Victim support organisations should allow for this individualised approach in their assessment procedures, which permits flexibility in the way the assessment is carried out. A structured questionnaire with closed questions risks overshadowing specific individual needs that might be less easy for the victim to vocalise.

Support workers should receive training in collaborative approaches to enable them to support the victim in determining their needs and the priorities for support during the assessment process.

### **3. Trauma-informed**

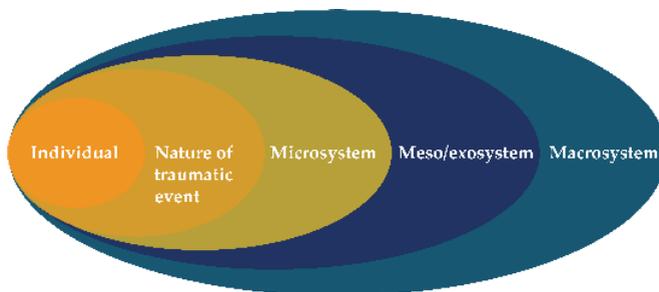
Assessment of victims' needs should be carried out from a trauma-informed perspective.

Being a victim of crime is, for many people, a traumatic experience and certain types of victimisation are known to carry the risk of post-traumatic stress. Trauma, specifically in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), after victimisation has been the subject of a wide range of scientific studies that offer important guidelines and recommendations for its diagnosis and treatment. Post-traumatic stress symptoms have been shown to substantially impact the victim's life and daily activities. Symptoms such as concentration problems, loss of memory, avoidance, and hyperarousal etc. will play a role in how and if a victim is able to respond to needs-based questions during the assessment process.

However, indicators have been developed to determine whether a victim suffers from a post-traumatic stress disorder and whether specialised support is needed.

Trauma-based evidence points to a range of risk, and protective, factors at all socio-ecological levels that exacerbate, or alleviate, post-traumatic symptoms and other mental health symptoms. The **Ecological Framework** developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) has been increasingly used to identify the risk and protective factors impacting mental health after stressful events like victimisation<sup>6</sup>. Campbell et al (2009) developed a clear framework in which risk and protective factors have been identified in the impact of rape on mental health impact<sup>7</sup>.

The ecological model looks at the effect of traumatic life events on an individual. Factors at the individual level (age, race and socio-economic status, education, income), microsystem level (interactions with family friends and peers), meso/exo system (formal institutions and networks), macrosystem level (cultural attitudes) and chronosystem level (changes over time in the individual's interactions with the environment) are all identified as possibly influencing mental health after a victimisation event.



*Figure 1 Ecological model*

6 Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

7 Campbell, R., Dworkin, E., & Cabral, G. (2009). An ecological model of the impact of sexual assault on women's mental health. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 10, 225-246.

Trauma-informed assessment relies on the thorough knowledge of trauma and its effect on victims. Such an assessment will determine how the victim is addressed and communicated with, the best choice of interviewee and the amount of time given to the interview as well as when referrals to specialist organisations are required, etc. The use of validated diagnostic instruments to determine trauma and potential other mental health disorders is highly recommended.

Trauma-informed psychoeducation is helpful during and after the assessment phase. It can help victims recognize symptoms and functional problems as they occur, and understand these are consequences of the traumatic event. It then becomes easier for the victims, and the support workers, to connect these episodes to the victims' needs and the potential sources of appropriate assistance.

## 4. Empowering

A needs assessment should form the foundation of an empowering approach to victim support where both challenges and strengths are assessed.

The resources that allow a victim to cope with the impact of crime, lie in the individual and their social network. A rehabilitation and support trajectory can be developed to deal with the negative impact of crime but builds upon the **strengths and resources** of the victim.

As a support worker, it is key that victims are empowered to overcome the consequences of crime with the support of your organisation without making the victim dependent on you or your help. A sustainable support trajectory allows the victim to cope with the crime and its consequences.

Victims should be guided to identify their own needs as this enables empowerment in the decision-making process and ‘humanises’ the assessment process<sup>8</sup>. Victims are given options/ courses of action and then encouraged to decide what next steps should be taken; the support worker must respect these decisions. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) defines victim empowerment as “the process of promoting the resourcefulness of victims of crime and violence by providing opportunities to access services available to them, as well as to use and build their own capacity and support networks and to act on their own choices. Hence, empowerment may be defined as having (or taking) control, having a say, being listened to, being recognized and respected as an individual and having the choices one makes respected by others (moving from victim to survivor).”<sup>9</sup>

The individual assessment should be carried out in close cooperation with the victims, considering their wishes, even if they do not want to benefit from support. At the end of the process support workers should always explain the different opportunities available and how they can be accessed. Victims should decide themselves what kind of support, if any, they would like to receive - nothing should be imposed upon them.

Studies have shown that where professionals work with victims to identify strategies to help them cope, there is a reduction in mental health symptoms like PTSD<sup>10</sup>.

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8 Evidence and practice review of support for victims and outcomes measurement, Meg Callanan, Ashley Brown, Caroline Turley, Tom Kenny and Professor Julian Roberts, 2012

9 National Policy Guidelines for Victim Empowerment, Social Development Department Republic of South Africa, UNODC, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/Shelters/National%20policy%20guidelines%20for%20victim%20empowerment.pdf>

10 Hollifield, M., Gory, A., Siedjak, J., Nguyen, L., Holmgreen, L., & Hobfoll, S. (2016). The Benefit of Conserving and Gaining Resources after Trauma: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 5(11), 1-15.

These interventions build upon a broad framework of knowledge on the importance of fostering and developing initiatives in not only the individual but also the wider social sphere<sup>11</sup>.

An assessment of needs should go hand in hand with an assessment of existing resources. Victims are often overwhelmed by the victimisation which can cloud their perception of their own social, practical, and individual toolkit. Assessing these tools includes the identification of resources that are already used by the victim, those in the victim's environment but that are not yet used, those that exist in the wider environment and society that could offer support. Assistance can be found at all socio-ecological levels from the individual (e.g. hobbies, coping skills), micro (e.g. family), meso (e.g. friends or support organisations), to the macro (e.g. macro level ideas).

## 5. Timely and repeated

Needs assessments should be carried out in a timely manner and repeated throughout the support trajectory.

A well-timed assessment of the victim's needs will ensure a tailored planning and delivery of the appropriate services to the victim. Ideally, the individual needs assessment is conducted during the first contact with the victim, this can happen over the phone when the support service contacts the victim after receiving a third-party, or self-, referral or during a first face to face meeting.

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11 Hobfoll SE. Conservation of resources and disaster in cultural context: The caravans and passageways for resources. *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes*. 2012;75(3):226–231. doi: 10.1521/psyc.2012.75.3.227.

It can be difficult for victims to immediately give all necessary information and for support workers to instantly assess the victims' needs and appropriate assistance, therefore it is recommended that the assessment is carried out over several meetings.

It is also recognised that, in some circumstances, the assessment is not appropriate at the first post-crime contact e.g. if the victim is traumatised, overwhelmed, injured or does not understand the questions for any reason: arrangements should be made to conduct the assessment as soon as practicable. In some circumstances, such as with large-scale attacks, victims might not be able to talk about their experiences or their needs for some time. An option is to talk about the role of the victim support service and then, after a few days, contact the victim with an online self-assessment. This method has been appreciated by victims of large-scale attacks in the USA as they felt that the questions were appropriate to their specific needs and situation.

It is recognised that victims' needs change with time: a repetition of the full assessment procedure is not required, but an adapted interview should be carried out to consider changes to the different spheres in the victim's life.

## 6. Consistent

A consistent and holistic framework will aid the quality of the assessment. A victim support service must be able to offer the same standard of service to all clients. The organisation must demonstrate consistency in its treatment of individuals to ensure an equal degree of respect and to ensure a quality analysis of their situation, independent of the location of the service or the support worker meeting with the victim.

Consistent does not mean rigid or inflexible as this will hamper a victim-centered approach; consistency requires the application of structure and framework to be able to assess a wide range of needs of victims.

Maintaining consistency can be tackled by providing the support worker with appropriate initiation and on-going training as well as by providing regular supervision during all casework. The use of guidelines or a script, to aid support workers review all facets of a victims' life may also be useful. However, it should be highlighted that a script can be off-putting for a victim and if used, the script should not prevent the support worker from asking other questions or from having a more open discussion with the victim.

## V. Identifying victims' needs

Identifying needs is not an easy task. Support works in contact with victims will need a range of resources to identify a victim's needs: training, support tools before, during and after the intake process, and an effective supervision process.

### 1. Developing the ability to identify needs with training and skills development

All professionals in contact with victims and witnesses, should be provided with training to ensure they can deal with victims' reactions to crime in a sensitive, impartial, professional manner. The level, type and frequency of training, including any specialist training, should be determined in accordance with the extent and nature of the professional's contact with victims and witnesses of crime. Victim support organisations should incorporate a training module that helps their staff identify victims' needs.

#### 1. 1. Content of training

Training for those staff in contact with victims, and who will be expected to identify victims' needs, usually covers the following areas:

- Basic victims' rights and an overview of the justice system
- Impact of crime and trauma on the individual
- Listening skills and communicating with victims
- Victim safety and confidentiality

## 1. 1. 1.

# Basic victims' rights and overview of the justice system

Support workers must have an in-depth knowledge of victims' rights and the role of their national justice system. This knowledge will assist the support workers in identifying what needs the victims may have under the rule of law. Support workers will have to discuss these topics with victims to explain how their victimisation is seen by the law and what might be expected of them as participants during the legal process.

## Understanding victims' rights

Defining victims' rights is an essential starting point for a needs assessment and identifying these requirements includes understanding the impact of crime on the individual victim. Whilst ultimately, the best source of information is the victims themselves, existing knowledge and research can be used to inform professionals of many of the common needs, which are likely to be exhibited by individuals. This pre-knowledge will enable the victim support organisation to design training, protocols, guidance, and more to support any interaction with victims.

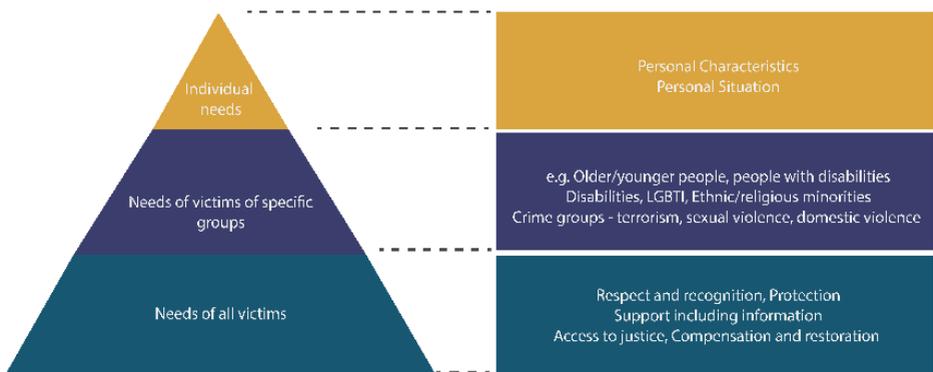
It is widely recognised that all victims tend to have a common set of needs<sup>12</sup>. These may vary in the detail or in the intensity, and they may be summarised in different ways, but broadly speaking these needs relate to:

- **Respectful** treatment and **recognition** as victims;
- **Protection** from intimidation, retaliation and further harm by the accused or the suspect, and from harm during criminal investigations and court proceedings;

<sup>12</sup> Victim Support Europe has described the rights of victims under the European legislation in details: <https://victimsupport.eu/help-for-victims/victims-rights/>

- **Support** including immediate assistance following a crime, longer-term physical and psychological assistance, information, legal assistance, financial and practical assistance;
- **Access** to justice while ensuring that victims are aware of and understand their rights, and can participate in proceedings;
- **Compensation and restoration**, whether through financial damages paid by the state or by the offender or through mediation or other form of restorative justice.

It is recognised that these five groups are common to all victims, however, some needs may change depending on the specific category of victim or a specific crime (persons with disabilities, children victims, victims of terrorism, etc.). Finally, the personal characteristics and situation of the victim will also influence the needs assessment.



*Figure 2 Pyramid of victims' needs*

An effective intake depends on sufficient expertise and practitioner knowledge on the needs of victims, this is particularly important to identify complex needs such as psychological needs.

## Understanding the justice system

Most people have never been involved with the justice system and do not know how it works, therefore, they are unable to identify what they might require (e.g. a victim cannot ask for legal assistance to claim compensation if they don't know they have the right to compensation). Victim support organisations can help with practicalities beyond victim rights: e.g. support workers can not only provide information on the right to compensation and its procedures, but also on the reality (difficulties, timing, success rates, etc.) of submitting a claim.

Once a crime has been reported to the police, support is crucial for those navigating the criminal justice system. Victims require help in dealing with the criminal justice system: when attending court, giving evidence and /or writing a victim statement. They also require general information on the workings of the criminal justice, as well as specific information on the progress of their case; victims may not understand the prosecutors' decisions to amend or drop charges, or the rationale behind a sentencing decision<sup>13</sup>.

The justice system can be complex confusing for victims of crime. The role of support workers includes providing victims with the assistance identified above: attending court, preparing victim impact statements, organising travel and accommodation if required, understanding restorative justice, etc. Support workers can help victims take back control of their lives and ensure victims' rights are upheld and that they access appropriate services.

Training and knowledge in these topics might be location specific to the victim support office, or the cases they generally receive. For example, in regions where migration is a known issue, support workers should receive training on the rights of migrants, a group vulnerable to victimisation and secondary victimisation.

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<sup>13</sup> Evidence and practice review of support for victims and outcomes measurement, Meg Callanan, Ashley Brown, Caroline Turley, Tom Kenny and Professor Julian Roberts, 2012

## Useful resources:

Victim Support England and Wales also give public access to their course for victim support workers : <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/more-us/why-choose-us/training/our-courses>

Victim Assistance Training Online, Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center: [https://www.ovcttac.gov/views/TrainingMaterials/dspOnline\\_VATOnline.cfm?tab=1#basics](https://www.ovcttac.gov/views/TrainingMaterials/dspOnline_VATOnline.cfm?tab=1#basics)

The National Center for Victims of Crime, Victim's Rights: <https://victimsofcrime.org/help-for-crime-victims/get-help-bulletins-for-crime-victims/victims'-rights>

### 1. 1. 2.

## Impact of crime and trauma on the individual

Every victim of any crime experiences psychological trauma as a result. The extent and consequences of the trauma will differ between individual victims. Therefore, each victim support service must train its personnel to recognise psychological trauma and its effects on human beings.

To accurately identify victims' needs, it is crucial to acknowledge the adverse psychological impact of crime. Understanding the impact this trauma has on victims of crime, allows support workers to identify its effects when talking with a victim: such trauma may negatively impact a victim's mental health and may lead to conditions such as PTSD.

The effects of trauma can occur immediately after a crime, or at a later stage and may last for a short period of time, or have may affect the victim over the longer term<sup>14</sup>.

This training module has two objectives:

- Help support workers to understand the concept of victimisation and its consequences on victims, to better be able to search for and identify predictable needs;
- Help support workers to communicate more clearly with victims, to support them better.

The training should cover areas such as: concepts of violence, crime and the victim, vulnerable victims, the impact of victimisation, psychological reactions in the aftermath of a crime, consequences of victimisation.

Victimisation and trauma have many and various effects on the victim that influence different aspects of life (e.g. physical, psychological, social, financial, etc.) Victim Support England and Wales carried out research on the diverse impacts of crime and this could be included in the training module<sup>15</sup>:

- **Physical:** death, injuries, permanent or short-term disabilities, drug or alcohol abuse, exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, short or long-term health conditions, etc.

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14 UNODC, The Doha Declaration: Promoting of Culture of Lawfulness, Training, Module: The impact of crime, including trauma, <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/crime-prevention-criminal-justice/module-11/key-issues/2--the-impact-of-crime-including-trauma.html>

15 Understanding victims of crime, The Impact of the crime and support needs, Tamar Dinisman and Ania Moroz, April 2017, Victim Support England and Wales, [https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/sites/default/files/VS\\_Understanding%20victims%20of%20crime\\_web.pdf](https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/sites/default/files/VS_Understanding%20victims%20of%20crime_web.pdf)

- **Emotional and psychological:** fear, anxiety, shock, anger, PTSD, confusion, feeling unsafe or helpless, feeling out of control, depression, intense grief, isolation, panic symptoms, distrust, etc.

- **Social:** disruption to relationships, to family life, changes in lifestyle, isolation, negative effect on overall productivity, negative effect on overall quality of life, etc.

- **Financial:** medical bills, health services, replacement of lost property, loss of wages, physical therapy, relocation expenses, child-care expenses, transportation costs, etc.

The effects of trauma can influence the victim's behaviour during an interview: memory loss, lack of focus, emotional reactions, and multiple versions of the same story can all be signs of trauma exhibited by a victim. Interviewers should be familiar with these signs and not assume the victim is merely avoiding the truth. For example, a lack of linear memory is often a sign of trauma, so it may be helpful during initial interviews to ask "What else happened?" instead of "What happened next?" This will allow victim workers to focus on the elements of the crime, while the victim is able to recover from the trauma of the crime.

### Useful resources:

Evidence and Practice Review of support for victims and outcome measurement, UK Ministry of Justice : [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/217385/evidence-practice-review-support-for-victims-outcome-measurement.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/217385/evidence-practice-review-support-for-victims-outcome-measurement.pdf)

Victim Needs Assessment, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire : <https://www.northyorkshire-pfcc.gov.uk/content/uploads/2016/09/Victim-Needs-Assessment-2014-Full-Final-Report.pdf>

Victim Support England and Wales also give public access to their course for victim support workers: <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/more-us/why-choose-us/training/our-courses>

## **1. 1. 3.      Listening skills and communicating with victims**

Communication and listening skills are key to ensuring an effective intake and the identification of victims' needs. Support workers must be able to communicate effectively with victims and survivors, who may be in crisis and in a hypersensitive state, to assess and respond effectively to their needs.

Support workers who practice good communication skills are better able to help victims move forward and reclaim the control they lost as a result of their victimisation. Poor communications can further traumatize and re-victimize the victim and will result in an ineffectual intake.

The goals of successful communication with victims are to:

- Identify victims' needs and attempt to meet them.
- Explain the justice process and the role of the victim service provider and its allied professionals.
- Help victims to understand and exercise their statutory and constitutional rights in accordance with the law.
- Protect the safety of victims.
- Provide information.
- Obtain information.
- Be sensitive to special needs or concerns.

Good communication requires that the message be sent and received as it was intended. Thus, support workers must use clear, concise language and provide timely, accurate information to avoid misunderstanding and confusion. Good listening skills must be employed to make sure the needs of the victim are identified and clearly understood.

A distinction should be made between a first individual needs assessment completed on a helpline and a more in-depth assessment carried out during a face to face meeting with a victim. The victim's body language, which provides subtle hints as to the person's feelings, cannot be seen by the support worker during a phone call; however, the victim's tone of voice or speech patterns can convey the speaker's emotions and push the conversation in a certain direction.

Specific training should be provided on communicating with vulnerable victim groups: victims of sexual violence, victims of domestic violence, children, victims of terrorism, etc. When working with these groups, support workers should consider the language used, the means and methods of communication as well as the content and context of information to be shared.

## Key elements of communicating with victims of crime

**Communicate with the victim in a sensitive manner:** Each person reacts differently when faced with a crime or a traumatic incident, and only a personalised evaluation can highlight a victim's support needs. A case-by-case approach should therefore be prioritised. Conversations with victims should not rely only on pre-existing knowledge of specific crimes, but should consider the individual's circumstances. The conversation, and the questions asked, should be designed to respond to personal characteristics, the type or nature of the crime and its circumstances, specific communications needs of the victims, etc.

Victims often have difficulty in communicating effectively because they are emotionally vulnerable. Support workers must understand this and allow victims time and space to regain a level of confidence. While calming, comforting and reassuring victims, support workers should tell them that their feelings are normal and thank them for their trust. It is important to ensure that the victim understands the information given, so technical jargon should always be avoided. Support workers must work to overcome any communication barriers: cultural barriers, linguistic barriers, programmatic barriers, etc.

**Use a language that the victim understands** (use interpreters if necessary): As noted above, the support worker must be aware of words used as well as method and means of information delivery when working with vulnerable groups. However, not all victims – whether vulnerable or not – will be able to communicate fluently in the spoken language of the country, so care must be taken by the support workers to ensure that victims are able to understand the concepts discussed during the telephone and face to face meetings. If the victim’s level of comprehension or spoken language is severely limited, whether because of disability or second language issues, then an interpreter should be called to translate during the face to face sessions. In all cases, and to ensure that the victim understands the information given, support workers should use clear, concise language. The information should be given to the victims in a timely and accurate manner.

**Building trust:** just as they were not in control over the victimisation, victims find it difficult to control circumstances around them after the event. To help enable victims to regain control, support workers must work to encourage victims to trust in them and the judicial system. To do this, support workers should introduce themselves to the victims during the first contact, demonstrating empathy for the situation and awareness of the tone, as well as body language and facial expressions, used in conversation.

**Keep the victim informed:** Victims must receive all relevant information relevant to ensure they can make well-informed decisions, with options and alternatives also being made readily available. Victims should be aware of their rights, their potential role in the criminal process and all other appropriate information related. Support workers should create an enabling environment and provide opportunities for victims to make informed decisions for themselves.

The Human Rights Monitoring Institute presents the main elements of communication with victims of crime<sup>16</sup>:



*Figure 3 Main elements of communication<sup>17</sup>*

**Show respect:**

- Treat all victims with equal respect regardless of their race, nationality, religion, gender and sexual orientation, social status or cultural and other differences;
- Speak in a language that the victim understands or find an interpreter;
- Listen carefully and show that you hear: when listening, from time to time nod your head or say “yes, I see” and so on;

<sup>16</sup> Communicating with Victims of Crime, Handbook for officers, Human Rights Monitoring Institute: [https://victimsupport.eu/activeapp/wp-content/files\\_mf/1554799348HandbookforOfficersHRMI2.pdf](https://victimsupport.eu/activeapp/wp-content/files_mf/1554799348HandbookforOfficersHRMI2.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Mukasey, M. B., Sedgwick, J. L. and Gillis, J. W., First response to victims of crime: a guidebook for law enforcement officers, U.S. Department of Justice, 2008, <https://ojp.gov/ovc/publications/infores/pdfxt/FirstResponseGuidebook.pdf>

- As far as possible, take into account the wishes and needs of the victim (e.g. it is sometimes difficult for the victim to speak freely while in the same premises where the crime was committed; the victim needs to contact somebody urgently or to inform an employer of the absence from work);

- Collect feedback (e.g. find out whether you are speaking intelligibly, whether the wording of questions and information provided is clear) and adjust your communication as necessary.

- Show respect by your behaviour and attitude: find the balance between advising and empowering (instead of saying “you should”, say “you may want to...”), be aware of behaviour or tone of voice, which may be perceived as paternalistic.

### **Ensure safety:**

- Start your interaction before speaking: interaction should start with a mutual agreement to begin communication;

- Introduce yourself at the beginning of any conversation: name, surname and position;

- Briefly explain your role and responsibilities;

- Maintain discreet eye contact and sitting down with people during the conversation;

- Before starting the conversation, find out whether the victim would like to ask or say anything or whether there are any other matters of concern to them;

- Show concern for the victim: ask how the victim feels, whether they are comfortable or in pain/distress, whether they are injured, whether they feel safe to speak now, etc.;

- Ask simple questions (especially at the beginning of the conversation) that allow the victims to feel that their opinions matter and that they can make decisions and take back control;

- Involve victims in all decisions related to them;

- Offer the opportunity to use available resources (transport, hygiene articles, water, etc.);

- Leave contact details for further communication and encourage victims to use them;
- End the conversation by summarising the interaction to lay grounds for enhancing trust;
- Ensure confidentiality.

**Allow victims to speak out and to express emotions related to the traumatic event:**

- Allow and encourage the victim to speak out, actively listen without interrupting: attentive facial expressions, discreet eye contact, nodding, etc.;
- When the victim speaks, show empathy and understanding;
- Victims should hear your assurance that the trauma (no matter how severe it is) is already in the past;
- If the victim is crying or asking to leave / end the conversation, keep close but non-intrusive contact, let them calm down and make sure they feel safe;
- The victim's anger should be seen as a reaction of fear and helplessness caused by the traumatic event;
- When the victim expresses self-blame and shame, help them re-establish self-esteem and confidence.

**Provide information:**

- Clearly and intelligibly inform the victim what will happen next and the role the victim will be expected to play;
- Provide information on victims' rights, available support, and, if possible, give the victim a written version of the information, or directions to web links, to get the information at a later date.;
- Ensure that all interventions (such as referral to other services) are conducted with the consent of the victims;
- Encourage victims to ask questions that are important to them and then answer them.

## Key elements of listening skills

Active listening is a crucial tool in identifying victims' needs. The support workers' task is to listen closely and repeat back the victim's words in a continuous process of clarification and repetition. Support workers gather information and use their feelings, senses and experience to understand and process the information received.

Active listening is a learned skill requiring energy, concentration, and the practice of specific techniques, it is not the same as simply hearing and replying. Support workers must make the effort to comprehend, reflect, and respond to the victims' words and feelings rather than passively hearing the victims' words<sup>18</sup>.

The Protasis project has developed a training manual with relevant key elements on active listening<sup>19</sup>:

### Non-verbal behaviours:

- **Eye contact:** maintaining eye contact and looking at the individual throughout the conversation is a sign of interest and respect.
- **Facial expression:** an expressive face, reacting appropriately to what the victim says, shows interest and helps sustain rapport.
- **Body language:** a natural, relaxed but attentive posture with feet and legs placed in an unobtrusive position should be adopted. Use of smooth and unobtrusive hand gestures is recommended. Leaning slightly closer toward the victim can be used to show interest or encourage elaboration.

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18 National Sexual Violence Resource Center, Active Listening, [https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/file/just-rural-2013\\_active\\_listening.pdf](https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/file/just-rural-2013_active_listening.pdf)

19 Towards a victim-centered police response, Training Manual, Protasis project, Vasiliki Artinopoulou, Alexandra Koufouli, Iro Michael, [http://www.eurocrime.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/PROTASIS\\_Training-Manual.pdf](http://www.eurocrime.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/PROTASIS_Training-Manual.pdf)

## **Vocal qualities, language and silences:**

- **Vocal qualities:** a neutral, warm and non-judgmental tone should be used. It is important to adjust the vocal qualities according to the specific needs of the victims (e.g. speaking slowly when they have difficulties in understanding).

- **Talking their language:** terms and concepts that the victim can understand should be used, especially in the case of child victims. Using plain and simple language is recommended to ensure full understanding. The tempo of the discussion should be led by the victims' pace and needs (e.g. slowly to allow the victim to think and process the meaning of a question before answering).

- **Silences:** silences are important and useful to allow the victim think or recompose and recover. A few seconds or instances should pass before intervening as it is recommended to allow the victim some space during silences.

## **Encouragement:**

- **Probing, yes, smiles, nods:** open-ended, specific/closed questions, yes, smiles, nods, repeating the victims' phrases, etc. should be used, as appropriate, to encourage the victim to open up, to indicate understanding, and to elicit information and specific details.

- **Paraphrase:** simple paraphrasing, repeating the essence of the victim's conversation, can be used to demonstrate understanding, to show the victim they have been heard and to encourage further speech. It can also be used in question format to allow the victim to correct any misinformation.

- **Summarise:** small summaries of the various topics covered can be used to assimilate what has already been said, transit to the next topic, ensure proper understanding, and facilitate more focused discussion. Following an accurate and appropriate summary, the victim will be more likely to respond positively and continue speaking. The victim should be an active participant, whose confirmation of the discussion is obtained through verbal and nonverbal skills.

- **Empathetic comments, reassurance:** empathetic comments and non-verbal smiles and nods should be used to show understanding and validation of the victim's experience. These can help encourage a victim when a sensitive topic is discussed.

### **Clarification, redirecting and supportive confrontation:**

- **Clarification:** stating ones' own confusion and repeating what has just been said, with a small closed question at the end, could be used to ensure clarification (e.g. So you first ... 'did I understand that correctly?'). Simply asking what has been said is appropriate in cases of mishearing or misunderstanding.

- **Redirecting:** redirecting always starts with a supportive comment and can be used to avoid abrupt interruptions when clarity or a change of subject is needed, or when the victim is avoiding a question, redirecting the conversation back to the issue of concern.

- **Supportive confrontation:** respectful supportive confrontation can be used to clarify discrepancies or vagueness. Using evidence and facts to highlight conflict, while adopting a non-judgemental tone, the support worker can appear confused and ask for the victim's help to clarify the situation.

## **May 2008 National Victim Assistance Academy, Track 1, Foundation-Level Training**

Some active listener techniques include:

- Be attentive. Don't fidget, daydream, or let your eyes wander when a victim is speaking to you. Maintain eye contact, if culturally appropriate, to show that you're interested in what is being said.

- Take time to listen to the full story. When there is a pause in the conversation, ask questions or offer gentle probes to clarify what is being said or to elicit more information.

- If you have trouble concentrating on what a victim is saying, try repeating his or her words mentally after you hear them. This will reinforce the speaker's message and help you control mind-drift.
- Ask for clarification or repetition of statements to understand what the victim is saying.
- Be willing to repeat information you are offering to the victim several times. Victims in trauma may have trouble concentrating or understanding and remembering information.
- Use silence to gather information. Silence gives victims time to think, and they
  - may be better able to provide additional information if they are allowed quiet time.
- Listen without judgment. Many victims have already been stigmatized and marginalized. Show understanding, concern, and caring.
- Take brief notes. This demonstrates professionalism and concern and records important information. Do tell the victim why you are taking notes and whether the notes are confidential.
- Don't talk. You can't listen while you're talking.
- Don't interrupt.
- Don't become flustered by victims' anxieties or repetitions.
- Don't jump to conclusions, assume you know what the speaker is going to say before it's said, or put words in the other person's mouth. You may be wrong.
- Don't react to anger or argue with victims.

## Barriers to communication

Good communication between support providers and victims is the basis for an effective individual assessment. However, communication barriers can be encountered, and victim support workers should try to overcome them as soon as possible. Barriers to communication include, but are not limited to<sup>20</sup>:

**Cultural differences** between providers and victims: Support workers need to be aware that victims are a diverse group, with different cultures, backgrounds and lifestyles, and therefore, cultural barriers may be encountered. Depending on the victim's culture, there may be a different grieving process, a different understanding of privacy or sharing, there may be fears of immigration or deportation, etc.

In certain cultures the gender of the victim may impact the interaction with the support worker: some crimes will be more difficult for the victim to discuss or disclose; similarly, it may be considered inappropriate to express certain needs e.g. male victims may find it difficult to express needs as it makes them appear vulnerable. When the victims are migrants, special attention must be given to cultural differences, and the support worker will have to exhibit cultural sensitivity.

**Programmatic barriers**, such as lack of adequate training.

**Physical barriers**, such as the geographical distances some victims must travel to access services.

**Language barriers:** In some cases, provision of information and support are only provided in the local language (and sometimes English), but not in other languages. Support workers should try to provide a professional translation service.

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<sup>20</sup> May 2008 National Victim Assistance Academy, Track 1, Foundation-Level Training, chapter 5, Communication with victims and survivors, Nancy Lewis and Ann Jaramillo <https://ce4less.com/Tests/Materials/E055Materials.pdf>

**Barriers due to disabilities:** Victim support organisations can look to cooperate with associations for blind and deaf people to offer interpretation in Braille and/or sign language. Victim support services might be in a location, which is difficult for a person with physical disabilities to access; options should be available for people with different needs.

To overcome these barriers, support workers should be trained to be aware of their cultural biases, and they should always show respect to the victim without making any assumptions. Victim support services may consider employing a diverse mix of staff members, to learn from each other and to provide better victim assessments.

Victims may suffer from post-traumatic stress, making communication with the support worker more difficult. Support workers should be trained to respect the victims, to give them time to calm and comfort them.

### Useful resources:

Basic Guidelines on Approaching Victims of Crime, Office for Victims of Crime: [https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc\\_archives/reports/firstrep/bgavoc.html](https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc_archives/reports/firstrep/bgavoc.html)

Communicating with Victims of Crime, Handbook for officers, Human Rights Monitoring Institute: [https://victimsupport.eu/activeapp/wp-content/files\\_mf/1554799348HandbookforOfficersHRMI2.pdf](https://victimsupport.eu/activeapp/wp-content/files_mf/1554799348HandbookforOfficersHRMI2.pdf)

First Response to Victims of Crime, US Department of Justice: <https://ojp.gov/ovc/publications/infores/pdftxt/FirstResponseGuidebook.pdf>

Phone interview with victims training (Accueil téléphonique des victimes), France Victimes (in french) : <https://www.france-victimes.fr/index.php/formation/catalogue?view=formation&id=94>

National Policy Guidelines for Victim Empowerment, Social Development Department Republic of South Africa, UNODC, EU : <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/Shelters/National%20policy%20guidelines%20for%20victim%20empowerment.pdf>

May 2008 National Victim Assistance Academy, Track 1, Foundation-Level Training, chapter 5, Communication with victims and survivors, Nancy Lewis and Ann Jaramillo <https://ce4less.com/Tests/Materials/E055Materials.pdf>

National Sexual Violence Resource Center, Active Listening, [https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/file/just-rural-2013\\_active\\_listening.pdf](https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/file/just-rural-2013_active_listening.pdf)

Towards a victim-centered police response, Training Manual, Protasis project, Vasiliki Artinopoulou, Alexandra Koufouli, Iro Michael, [http://www.eurocrime.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/PROTASIS\\_Training-Manual.pdf](http://www.eurocrime.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/PROTASIS_Training-Manual.pdf)

## 1. 1. 4.

# Victim safety and confidentiality

The safety and privacy of victims should be the number one priority for victim support services. Each time victims are in contact with a support worker or a volunteer, they should feel safe and reassured that their right to privacy is respected.

## Safety

When meeting face to face, victims should feel secure enough to talk freely with support workers. Support workers should always confirm whether victims are safe or whether protection measures should be initiated. Key threats for victims of crime or violence include: immediate or imminent harm, short to long-term risk of murder; self-harm (including thoughts of or attempts at suicide); sexual and reproductive health risks (such as unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections); danger to children who may be involved.

A safety and risk assessment can be developed to identify victims' specific protection needs and to determine appropriate protection measures. Particular consideration should be given to the vulnerable: children, victims of domestic violence, victims of human trafficking, and people with disabilities, who are more likely to need specific protection measures.

## Confidentiality

Ensuring confidentiality requires that the support organisation's premises allow for victims' privacy, whether they are contacting the service in person, by phone or through a chatroom. Any contact with victims must allow for privacy and enable the support provider to pay full attention to the victims and their needs. In practice, this means that there should be a distinct interview room for in-person or telephone

meetings. These rooms should feel comfortable and inviting, rather than being simply an office. Additionally a play area, with toys and books, should be available for children.

Confidentiality helps victims feel safe when reporting a crime, receiving medical attention, or talking with a support worker. It encourages victims to disclose information that may make them uncomfortable, embarrassed, or fearful.

National data protection legislation must be respected and the consent of the victim must always be obtained when personal information is to be recorded, stored or transferred. Victims should also have the option of anonymity if desired.

Confidentiality must be safeguarded when information is sought from other sources, the victim's consent is a pre-requisite. Procedures, such as an appropriate form, should be put in place to collect victims' consent. According to research conducted by the FRA, reporting obligations exist for all professionals, who are in contact with children, to report cases of child abuse, neglect and violence in 15 EU Member States<sup>21</sup>.

### **Recommendations:**

- Clearly inform victims of data privacy, confidentiality policies and mandated reporting requirements as early as possible in the intake process.
- Clearly define and follow confidentiality policies throughout the support process.

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21 The 15 Member States are: Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Fundamental Rights Agency, Provisions on professionals' legal obligation to report cases of child abuse, neglect and violence, available on: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2015/mapping-child-protection-systems-eu/reporting-1>

- Ensure all staff and volunteers understand their professional responsibilities, ethical obligations and legal requirements regarding the confidentiality of victims' information and receipt of services. A non-disclosure document can be signed by all staff.
- Have in place a policy and protocol in compliance with legal requirements for data and record retention.

### **Useful resources:**

EVVI risk assessment : [http://www.justice.gouv.fr/publication/evvi\\_guide\\_en.pdf](http://www.justice.gouv.fr/publication/evvi_guide_en.pdf)

Maintaining confidentiality, OVCTTAC: <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/3-operating-a-task-force/32-information-sharing/maintaining-confidentiality/>

Strengthening Sexual Assault Victim's Right to Privacy, Online Guides from OVC: <https://www.ovc.gov/publications/infores/VictimsRightToPrivacy/pfv.html>

US Department of Justice, Guidelines for Confidentiality Policies: [https://www.doj.state.or.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019\\_Guidelines\\_For\\_Confidentiality\\_Policies.pdf](https://www.doj.state.or.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019_Guidelines_For_Confidentiality_Policies.pdf)

## 1. 2.

# Different forms of training

While content is a major element of any training programme, it is only part of the learning equation. Training is most effective when strong content is shared via successful delivery methods, enabling the message to be absorbed, retained, and implemented by the students. The use of several approaches in each training session may help support workers absorb and retain information; keeping in mind the 3 key learning styles: visual (learning by seeing), auditory (learning by hearing) and kinaesthetic (learning by doing). Below are training options that victim support organisations could arrange for their staff:

## 1. 2. 1.

# Instructor-led classes

Instructor-led classes are the classic way of teaching and remain one of the most popular techniques with trainers using simple equipment such as blackboards, projectors, video presentations or power points. This is a way to present the same information to a number of participants in a cost-effective way, especially if the trainers are in-house. For face-to-face training, instructor-led classes provide the opportunity of more discussions with the trainer; however, they tend to be less interactive, and can be hard to follow. Case studies can be used to maintain students' attention and to highlight good and bad practices in victim support.

## 1. 2. 2.

# Online training/eLearning

As access to computers and the internet is now widespread, online training is becoming more popular though it has not fully replaced face-to-face training.

eLearning offers alternative training methods: virtual classrooms, mobile-learning apps, embedded performance-support systems, polling software, learning-video platforms, learning-assessment, measurement platforms and massive open online courses (MOOCs), to name just a few. The Office for Victims of Crime Training & Technical Centre offers several online trainings to support workers and providers<sup>22</sup>. In Canada, the British Columbia authorities also provide tools for online training<sup>23</sup>.

If on-line training is chosen, then programmes can be tailored to groups of participants with similar backgrounds and interests. Different teaching techniques will ensure that participants remain focused – visual tools are particularly useful in the retention of information as is the use of case studies. Follow up questionnaires can be used to ensure that staff have fully grasped the concepts of the training programme.

## 1. 2. 3.

# Interactive training

Active learning by participants is the most effective way to accumulate knowledge. When participants explore a subject on their own, they rely on their personal experiences; so rather than giving the participant

<sup>22</sup> Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center, Victim Assistance Training Online, [https://www.ovcttac.gov/views/TrainingMaterials/dspOnline\\_VATOnline.cfm](https://www.ovcttac.gov/views/TrainingMaterials/dspOnline_VATOnline.cfm)

<sup>23</sup> British Columbia, Victim Services Service Providers Training, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/victims-of-crime/service-providers/training>

solutions, they must find the solution themselves, which may be particularly rewarding when carried out as a collaborative exercise. Nevertheless, this type of training requires immediate feedback to allow participants learn from their mistakes. Interactive training includes several techniques:

**Case study:** Participants analyse real situations and learn how to handle similar circumstances. Support staff work in groups and share their experiences, explaining how they behaved in a specific scenario. This technique may be time consuming and requires a high number of participants to be effective; however, participants will absorb the content more quickly.

**Role play/simulations:** support workers assume different roles and act out a situation according to those roles. As with the case study approach, participants will learn how to handle real life situations, which can be played out as an interactive scenario: participants are given choices and receive feedback reflecting how these choices develop in the 'real world'. Role plays are especially valuable for new support workers, who are yet to be in contact with victims as it allows for the simulation of actual cases. Using pre-recorded phone calls can help new staff understand what they will encounter in their new role: when recording calls, the consent of the victims must always be obtained. Role-plays and simulations can be carried out in a "fish bowl" manner, those participating in the role-play/simulation are watched by non-participants (usually sitting in a circle around them) – this form of training maximises the learning by allowing both the participants and the viewers to learn simultaneously. The viewers should engage in active listening and learning to enhance the effect of the simulation.

Interactive training enhances interest and activates participants' critical thinking skills and creativeness. Having control of a situation increases a participant's motivation to be involved and pay attention<sup>24</sup>.

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24 Self determination theory, (Deci et. al, 2009).

After each type of training, participants should be encouraged to actively recall what they have learned using retrieval practice. Strategies include the use of flashcards, short quizzes, self-tests and verbal questioning. Self-tests can be as simple as answering questions at the end of each lesson or performing a “brain dump”, where participants write down everything they remember about the topic on a piece of paper, review and verify it, and re-examine the concept to commit it to memory.

Initial training for all staff (which may take several days or weeks) as well as periodic refresher-training should be provided by trainers with in-depth knowledge of the specific forms of violence and victim communication to be addressed. Training should also include a ‘shadowing period’ when support workers listen to senior volunteers make calls, which is useful in perfecting listening skills and learning how to communicate with victims in different situations.

Life-long training is as important as induction training and refresher courses are used to review soft skills, update on national legislation, learn about specific cases or vulnerable victims, etc. Support workers continue updating their skills through regular mandatory courses and voluntary attendance of workshops and seminars as available.

## 2.

## Identifying needs during the intake process

As discussed above, identifying victims’ needs is an ongoing process that requires the support worker to be well prepared to conduct an effective intake and assessment of victims’ needs, which may take place over several meetings. Support workers must bear in mind that the victims may find these meetings traumatic, having to relive the crime and open up about emotions or events that have been suppressed.

As the individual needs assessment should allow victims to access help to recover, the form and method of information recovery are an intrinsic part of a victim-centered approach.

## **2. 1. Organising the intake process**

As appropriate, support workers should prepare for their meetings with victims by ensuring that the time and location suits the victim, update themselves on relevant current practices and legislation, and study relevant organisational documents.

### **2. 1. 1. Timing, location and comfort of victim**

The timing and location of the meeting must ensure the safety and wellbeing of the victim, this includes having a location that is both easy to access and secure from external interruption. Even during a first phone call, support workers should ascertain if the victim is currently in a safe place with the freedom to speak, whether the victim would prefer contact to be made later, etc. Identifying a location that provides the victims with a feeling of security will be more likely to result in a productive discussion.

As the intake starts, the support worker should ask the victim about any personal, or family, safety concerns. After a crime, safety issues can evolve and may increase significantly as the case approaches trial, support workers should clearly explain all steps of the criminal justice process to demonstrate that the victim's concerns are being heard. Initially, a victim may not be ready to discuss certain topics and the support worker should encourage the victim to determine when

information can be shared. Patience and understanding on behalf of the support worker builds trust, avoids misleading answers, and results in consistent statements.

Victims should be informed that if something changes, if they no longer feel safe or if they have more information to share, this is a normal part of the process and that support workers can be contacted at those times.

## 2. 1. 2. Stay up to date

Support staff should continuously refresh their knowledge, expertise and victim communication skills through current articles, documents, and manuals as well as through appropriate regular training. Additionally, they should be aware of new legislation or administrative requirements related to victims of crime, compensation, the judicial process, etc.

## 2. 1. 3. Tools to support the identification of needs and discussions with victims

Support tools should be available to staff, as needed, during conversations with victims, as they can help identify any hidden needs and ensure consistency in the provision of support throughout the organisation. Support tools can include:

**Manuals:** there is a wide range of printed material available to the victim support professional and these can be used as a training follow up tool or for obtaining specific reference data. Topics covered will include the impact of crime, rights and needs of victims, definitions of

crime, victim types and the associated impact of victimisation. Manuals may provide pre-defined questions and answers for specific situations and can be used by support workers whenever they need to find a quick answer to a question or confirm half remembered information. Reference manuals will cover legal and legislative topics as well as national judiciary procedures, articles on compensation schemes and administrative regulations. Manuals may be available from libraries, on-line or may be held by the support organisation or other entities.

**Guidelines or script:** some victim support organisations use a script or guidelines during the intake process to collect information and to guide the conversation. These have the benefit of covering all topics that may arise during a conversation with a victim and ensures that the victim support worker has asked all the important questions. However, if they are too restrictive, support workers may need to adapt their content to have a normal conversation with the victim, while victims may feel that the conversation is a check box exercise. The length and depth of the script or guidelines will depend on the individual organisation.

**Checklist:** a checklist of different topics to be addressed by support staff can act as a reminder of the information to be given to, or elicited from, the victims during the conversation.

**Opportunity to request help from/ ask questions of professional colleagues:** support workers should be able to request help from their professional colleagues: psychologists, lawyers or social workers.

## 2. 2.

# During the individual assessment

All victims should complete an individual needs assessment during the primary contacts with a support worker. The depth and length of the assessment will vary depending on the means of communication, but staff should always cover the standard needs of victims of crime. The methods of recording information, and the tools used during and after the individual assessment, will depend on the victim support service.

## 2. 2. 1.

# Content of the assessment

Whilst acknowledging the importance of a structured intake process, service providers expressed concerns about a too restrictive approach and said that using more open discussions with victims enabled them express their feelings and needs. Formality and bureaucracy should be avoided when assisting victims, who may be very sensitive to behaviour and actions that can be interpreted as disrespectful of their feelings and situation. Victims should be treated with dignity, respect and sensitivity and victim support services should adapt their protocols and procedures to these basic victim needs.

As each victim reacts differently to crime, each will react differently during conversations with support staff. Some will talk easily about their experiences and will answer questions quite comfortably, while others might be quiet, reserved or inhibited, and it may be difficult to obtain information from them. Open ended questions can then be used to guide the victims to talk about their specific needs.

Although each conversation is different, support workers should always try to cover basic topics to identify victims' specific needs.

These include:

- financial impact,
- legal impact,
- emotional impact,
- social impact,
- physical impact,
- psychological impact.

Certain of these areas will be investigated more thoroughly, depending on the nature of the crime or the personal circumstances of the victim.

## 2. 2. 2.

### How to ask questions in a trauma-informed approach

The conversation with victims and the questions asked of them should follow a trauma-informed approach. At the beginning of the conversation, make the victim feel welcome by asking simple personal questions, listen actively to the responses and then explain the reason behind the further more detailed questions. For example, support workers can say:

*Is this place convenient for you to talk?*

*Would you like anything to drink (do you have any other needs/ do you need to use the toilet)?*

*How can I address you?*

*Would you like to talk to me or to my colleague? (this question may be important based on the nature of the crime and if there are two workers of different genders).*

Support workers should clearly tell victims how the meeting will unfold and that questions may be repeated to get a better understanding of the victims' circumstances and the events that took place to enable the correct help to be provided. When asking questions,

support staff should be aware that victims might not remember all details; however, they should also be aware that repeating a question can make victims think that they are not believed.

### **Recommended questions:**

- **Open-ended questions:** it is recommended that 75% of all questions are open-ended as this allows victims to express themselves freely, rather than answering “yes” or “no”. This is especially valuable at the start of the conversation, and allows the victim support worker understand what has taken place. Staff should remember not to interrupt victims and to only ask new questions when the person has finished speaking<sup>25</sup>.

- **Inviting questions:** one of the most effective question-forms to elicit further information from victims is to simply ask: “can you tell me more about it?” / “could you share more information?”. These questions will encourage victims to speak without feeling coerced and without feeling that their privacy is invaded. These questions also usually attract new information, since they do not guide victims in any specific direction, and therefore allow victims to freely give what they consider to be important information.

- **Clarifying questions:** Clarifying questions are useful in narrowing down information and examining it in more detail. For example:

*What specifically did you say/do?*

*Do you have any children that might be in danger?*

- **Neutral:** to uncover information without revealing the victim support worker’s intentions. For example:

*How are you doing?*

*Do you have any concerns about your safety?*

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25 [https://victimsupport.eu/activeapp/wp-content/files\\_mf/1554799348HandbookforOfficersHRMI2.pdf](https://victimsupport.eu/activeapp/wp-content/files_mf/1554799348HandbookforOfficersHRMI2.pdf)

Some questions should be used with caution, and only in certain circumstances, as they might limit the information that the victim gives.

### **Questions to be used with caution:**

- **Closed-ended questions** should be avoided at the beginning of the conversation, because they limit the capacity of the victim to give information. By replying only “yes” or “no”, the information received can be biased and incomplete.

- **“Why” questions** should be avoided because they are perceived as accusations and the victims feel that they must justify their actions.

- **Double questions:** two questions asked simultaneously should be avoided because these can be difficult for victims to address if their concentration process is compromised.

Some questions should never be asked of the victim, as they might trigger a harmful reaction.

### **Unsuitable questions:**

- **Referential questions**, which directly or indirectly prompt the answer that the interviewer wants to hear, they suggest the response. For example:

*Don't you think that your fear is unreasonable?*

- **Evaluative questions**, which evaluate the victim, their morality, way of life, etc.

Different approaches exist relating to the assessment format and the means used to record information from the victim. These tools, case management systems, forms, etc., will depend on the internal policies of the victim support services.

Having a formal checklist of questions may appear overwhelming to victims, so support workers should avoid making continuous notes during face to face meetings. Therefore, it is recommended to jot down salient points while talking with the victims, then fill out the required forms or the online case management documents after the meeting. Some victim support services prefer that their staff refrain from taking notes during conversations with victims. This allows a closer relationship, based on trust, to be built with the victim as taking notes, while the victim is talking, may be seen as lacking respect and not all information may be divulged. On the other hand, being unable to take notes means that support workers must remember all the details to write the relevant information afterwards in the case management system.

A case management system, with pre-defined fields to complete, allows staff to determine which questions to ask to obtain the appropriate information.

Some victim support services prefer using a simple form, where the staff enter general information about the victim and the crime (victim anonymity can be maintained if requested). The form may contain a text box in which the victim support worker can put data collected from the victim, such as emotions and identified needs. This form can then be transferred to colleagues within the organisation, at local branches for example, if the victim has agreed to the transfer of their information for support purposes.

Some examples of individual assessment tools:

- Victim Advocate Script Template: <https://cdpsdocs.state.co.us/dvomb/VictimAdvocatePage%5CSampleForms/VictimAdvocateScriptTemplate2013.pdf>
- Office of Justice Programme, Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center, Human Trafficking Task Force eGuide, Victim Service Provider Intake & Needs Assessment, <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/4-supporting-victims/42-victim-service-provider-intake-and-needs-assessment/>
- Victoria State Government, Intake process and tools, <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/alcohol-and-drugs/aod-treatment-services/pathways-into-aod-treatment/intake-assessment-for-aod-treatment>
- Screening and intake forms For Non-Emergency Domestic Violence Programs, Deadria Boyland December 2016, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, <https://wscadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Non-Emergency-Services-Screening-Intake-Forms-and-Guidelines-for-Advocates-1.pdf>

### Useful resources:

Supporting Justice, Conducting a basic victims needs assessment : [http://www.justicesolutions.org/art\\_pub\\_assessing\\_basic\\_needs.pdf](http://www.justicesolutions.org/art_pub_assessing_basic_needs.pdf)

Victims of Crime—Victim Service Worker Handbook, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division, 2009: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/criminal-justice/victims-of-crime/vs-info-for-professionals/info-resources/victim-service-worker-victims-of-crime.pdf>

National Guidelines for Provision of Services for Physical and Sexual Violence, Republic of Malawi, UNICEF, UNFPA, EU, UKAID: <http://www.branchpartners.org/National%20Guidelines.pdf> (p.46)

Good practices and tools for use in case management, including by front-line law enforcement authorities responding to trafficking in persons, Working Group on Trafficking in Persons: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/organized\\_crime/2010\\_CTOC\\_COP\\_WG4/WG4\\_2010\\_5\\_E.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/organized_crime/2010_CTOC_COP_WG4/WG4_2010_5_E.pdf)

### 3. Supervision and evaluation of the individual needs assessment

Supervision and evaluation of the work carried out by support staff is necessary to guarantee the quality of services provided, as this should be consistent across the organisation. This will ensure that all individuals, and their needs, are treated with the same degree of respect and care no matter which staff member is involved or where the service is located. Quality standards can be safeguarded by implementing training programmes at all stages of staff and victim engagement as well as providing support workers with appropriate and regular supervision.

#### 3. 1. Supervision of the individual needs assessment

**Professional supervision has the following aims:**

- To provide support workers with the opportunity to review their interaction with victims to ensure **quality and consistency of service;**

- To provide support workers with an opportunity to share their experiences, **reflect on their work, and solicit support;**

- To ensure that support workers **maintain professional distance** and do not become emotionally overwhelmed.

Various methods of supervision can be used, here are some examples:

**Individual supervision:** This is a process by which supervising professionals review cases with support workers, through verbal discussion and review of interview notes. One to one meetings between the supervisor (or manager) and support workers should be organised regularly: to debrief after contact with victims; and to identify, and manage, the stress and indirect trauma associated with supporting victims.

There are a number of strategies to minimize the effects of stress and these include: provision of individual/ group support, during and after the intake process, by on-site professionals (social workers, psychologists, lawyers); shorter shifts; and improved staff support during working hours.

During calls and/or meetings with victims, a team of professionals (social workers, psychologists, lawyers) should be present in the premises. Questions can be asked during the intake process if support workers are not sure about what to do in a particular situation or what to answer to a specific question from the victim. If on the helpline, there should be a possibility to put the caller on hold to seek appropriate information from professional colleagues.

**Peer supervision:** This provides support workers with the opportunity to share experiences and challenges encountered during meetings with victims, and encourages the exchange of strategies to overcome common challenges. Additionally, peer supervision promotes cohesion among service providers.

**Team meetings** with professional colleagues (lawyer, social worker, psychologist, etc.) should be organised regularly to allow support workers to discuss complicated cases, ask questions on specific issues, share expertise and support each other.

## 3. 2. Evaluation of the individual needs assessment

**Evaluation of the needs assessment is crucial to:**

- Ensuring that the objectives of the individual needs assessment are met;
- Identifying successes;
- Identifying problems and weakness so they can be rectified;
- Providing information to aid further development.

**Different methods of evaluation can be used:**

**Random monitoring of calls/meetings:** During calls and/or meetings with victims, managers or senior staff can selectively listen to a call or attend a meeting with a victim to assess the quality of the intake process, the identification of victims' needs and the provision of relevant information.

**Random case review:** A manager or senior staff can choose several cases to review to ensure the quality of the intake process and identification of needs.

**Victims' satisfaction questionnaire:** A short survey can be distributed to victims to learn about their recent experience with the victim support organisation and the services provided. An online form can also be created if communication was by phone or using online methods. The survey should always be anonymous and should respect the privacy of the victim.

## VI. Conclusion

This document provides a starting point for victim support organisations in developing their own individual needs assessment process. It offers key principles and resources to create guidelines for an individual assessment tool that identifies victims' specific needs in the aftermath of a crime or traumatic event.

Victim support organisations must always have:

- **Structured but flexible individual needs assessment:** there must be a balance between structured and flexible approaches to ensure that the assessment process is consistent across the organisation and clearly identifies the needs of the individual victim.
- **Training and supervision** are key elements of an effective individual needs assessment. Support workers benefit from (induction and life-long) training and regular constructive supervision in order to provide a consistent quality service to all victims of crime.