

A GUIDE TO RESPONDING TO VICTIMIZATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY

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This guide is intended for citizens of a community where a violent crime has taken place. It will provide a brief overview of the immediate impacts on community members; how to support children; attending court and seeking restitution; moving forward following the crime; supporting victims of crime; and support from the community following a crime.

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING A CRIME IN YOUR COMMUNITY

FEARS FOR SECURITY

Immediately following a violent crime, it is normal for you to have fears for the security of yourself and your family members. This fear has a real impact on your quality of life – especially in cases where an arrest has not been made. It is common for a community to feel vulnerable after one of its members is victimized and question why the crime took place. This may be especially true for certain groups of citizens (for example seniors) who are more likely to stay inside their homes for feeling unsafe on their streets. Often the general sense of being safe in your community is reduced following a crime.

Local police and municipal officials will often release information via the media on what risks may exist for the general public and what measures are being taken following the crime. Look for updates made available through television, radio and newspapers in your area. Social media is an excellent way for communities to share information but be wary of rumours. Consider the source of information to ensure its accuracy - for example, follow updates given by official accounts of local law enforcement.

The perception of threat is very important as you move forward following a traumatic experience. A traumatic event, such as a violent crime, causes a ripple effect to go through a community beginning with those directly victimized and radiating out to those associated with the victim then to the wider community. One way to ensure your resiliency (and your community's) is to make connections with fellow community members. This might be in an organized way, such as forming a neighbourhood-watch program, or simply just providing a support system of individuals dealing with a common issue.

EMOTIONAL IMPACTS

In the time following the crime, the fears for your personal security may be eased but there are many factors that may still affect your community. If you or your family members are feeling an emotional impact, there are services available in most regions. The first place to seek out

information is your municipal police or nearest RCMP detachment. Victim services can provide appropriate referrals for both crisis intervention and more long-term services.

Coping with a trauma in your community is eased by predictability –having a routine, familiarity and rules; and control - keeping yourself safe, having an influence on the surrounding world, and making decisions or choices. You may wish to participate in a hands-on way such as attending community meetings that may be offered or volunteering (See Support from the Community). If you live in a rural or small community, you may be uniquely impacted by a crime in your community. Often you will be acquainted with the victim or their family members; this is not always the case in larger communities. The impact of a violent crime may be increased in a smaller community due to the familiarity with those directly victimized.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

There are numerous economic impacts that may occur as a result of a violent crime in your community. The impacts seen may vary depending on where a crime takes place. For example, when a crime takes place in a commercial area, local businesses may suffer as traffic slows or routines change. Customers may avoid an area entirely or at certain times (for example after dark) because they fear victimization. In residential areas, property values may decrease as residents feeling at risk may move from the area. You may personally feel an economic impact due to changes in your routine. For example, if you no longer feel safe taking public transit to your job and must pay for a taxi. While it may not be felt on a personal level, all community members will be impacted through the cost of social services: first responders, medical expenses, financial assistance, and ongoing criminal justice costs. (See *Community Impact Statements and Restitution* for further information.)

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AFTER A VIOLENT CRIME

It is important that your child feel supported following a violent crime in your community. In addition to the support you provide at home, there are many resources available to you. Your child's school may be offering specialized programming in response to an incident of violence in your community. Teachers and school staff offer support following any event that affects your child's school experience. While the incident may not take place on school grounds, children often carry their experiences on to school or empathize with their affected classmates.

Although they may not have long-term children's programming, your local police victim services can provide crisis intervention and recommend appropriate services for children. If you

are concerned about your child's physical or mental well-being, you can seek guidance from your child's physician. Do not feel you have to handle the situation without help.

Here are some tips on how to approach children in the aftermath of a traumatic event:

Age Appropriate Discussions

When a violent crime takes place in your community, it is best that your children hear the news from you. Whenever possible you should disclose incidents to your children right away as you will be able to impart factual information and set the tone for future discussions. It is important to include children of all ages in the discussion following a crime. While it is often assumed that younger children are oblivious to the events in their community, they may be deeply affected.

Children often have questions about violence that has taken place in your community. Be as open and honest as possible. If you do not have the answer, reassure your child you will try to find the answer and be available to discuss future concerns. There may be ongoing discussions as children process the information.

Taking Cues from the Child

Each child may react differently to a violent crime in your community. It is important to follow up on their individual cues. It is important to answer questions your child may have while not providing too many details. If your child is having trouble expressing their feelings, suggest alternatives such as drawing pictures or telling stories.

Your Demeanour

Your child will take cues from you on how to respond to a traumatic event. It is important for you to remain calm when having discussions with your child. While you may express your concerns or sadness over the event that has taken place, your child will respond better to a rational conversation where you explain the facts.

When you are having a discussion about a traumatic event, children will often worry about the potential for it to happen to them. This is the time to discuss safety measures at home and in the community to prevent these incidents from happening to your child. For example, you can discuss the police thoroughly investigating crimes and working to prevent future crimes.

Returning to a normal routine is very important for both you and your children following a traumatic event. Whenever possible, it is best to continue life as usual. As discussed above, your child's school is an important part of their routine and an important part of their return to normalcy.

Marking the Event

There are many ways to mark a tragic event for children so they are able to process it. For example, if there is a death it is important to memorialize the person. Children may wish to draw pictures, tell stories, or create a physical memorial to the person such as plant a tree.

ATTENDING COURT AND SEEKING RESTITUTION

COMMUNITY IMPACT STATEMENTS

When the case goes before the court, you as a community member (or another chosen representative) may have your say. The Canadian Victims Bill of Rights (VBR) came into effect July 23, 2015 - in it is the right for victims to participate in the criminal justice process. This includes the ability of communities to appoint a representative to give a Community Impact Statement (CIS). Much like a Victim Impact Statement, the CIS allows the judge to hear and take into account the wide-reaching effects a crime has had on your community prior to delivering a sentence.

In a CIS, the representative will describe the emotional, physical, and economic impacts that may have occurred following the offence as well as fears for security. The VBR provides a standard form for submitting a CIS to ensure consistency across the country. You may also obtain this form by contacting your local police, victim services or the prosecutor. Included in the form are examples of what your community may include in the representative's submission.

EMOTIONAL IMPACT

Describe how the offence has affected community members emotionally.

For example, think of:

- Community members' lifestyles and activities;
- Community members' relationships with others in the community and outside it;
- Community members' ability to work, attend school or study;
- Community members' feelings, emotions and reactions as they relate to the offence; and
- The community's sense of belonging to the region.

PHYSICAL IMPACT

Describe how the offence has affected community members physically.

For example, think of:

- The ability of community members to access services; and
- Changes in transportation and routes taken to and from school, work, shopping, etc.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Describe how the offence has affected the community financially.

For example, think of:

- Any reduction in the number of visitors or tourists to the region;
- The value of any property that was lost or damaged and the cost of repairs or replacement; and
- Any costs or losses that are not covered by insurance

FEARS FOR SECURITY

Describe any fears that community members have for their security or that of their family and friends.

For example, think of:

- concerns with respect to contact with the offender.

The ability to submit a Community Impact Statement (CIS) is new and widely unused across the country as we prepared this guide. Some examples of communities taking advantage of the CIS are available.

Following a gang shooting in her Hamilton neighbourhood, Melissa Mercuri gave a CIS describing how the violence had changed the way community members went about their daily lives. The CIS described how community members did not feel safe on their streets. The presence of gangs such as the Loyalty Ova Money in Mercuri's community had become an increasing worry for parents as the violence impacted their children. A CIS has been used in other gang cases in Canada including one in Surrey in which the mayor jointly submitted a CIS with the RCMP's chief superintendent. The CIS described the ongoing increase of gang violence and the implications on the community.

The Hamilton Woman Abuse Working Group, represented by Natasha Dobler gave a CIS at sentencing following the manslaughter conviction of Haiden Suarez Noa. Dobler spoke of the impacts on the Stoney Creek community as a result of intimate partner violence. The CIS also raised questions about the implications of a manslaughter verdict in the case – Dobler spoke of

the terrifying possibility that women will be discouraged from reporting violence and that offender can ‘get away with murder’.

COMPLETING THE COMMUNITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The following is a listing of the resources available from each province and territory with respect to Community Impact Statements at the time of publication:

British Columbia

A Community Impact Statement must be prepared using the Community Impact Statement Form. Individuals can call 1-844-660-5343 if they have questions about how to complete a Community Impact Statement or they can ask a victim service worker for assistance. To find a victim service worker in your community, contact VictimLinkBC at 1-800-563-0808 (toll-free in BC).

Alberta

Assistance in completing the CIS can be sought from any of Alberta victim service units. Alberta Department of Justice has downloads of both a guide to submitting a CIS as well as a form available on their website.

Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, assistance with completing or submitting a CIS may be obtained from any local police service or RCMP detachment. The Government of Saskatchewan provides a download of the CIS form on their website. The form gives a brief explanation of what may be included as well as examples from the VBR.

Manitoba

Manitoba Justice Victim Services may be contacted for CIS information. The Manitoba Justice provides a brief overview of the CIS on their website as well as a form download. The instructions for completing a CIS and examples are included in the download.

Ontario

In Ontario, assistance on completing a CIS is available from Victim Services in your community. To find services use the Victim Services Directory or call the Victim Support Line toll-free at 1-888-579-2888. There is no information available online from the province of Ontario on submitting a CIS.

Quebec

For those requiring assistance with a CIS, questions can be directed to Justice Quebec at 1-866-536-5140 or via email: informations@justice.gouv.qc.ca. Their website offers information on completing a CIS and a form download which includes instructions.

New Brunswick

New Brunswick's Victim Services Program can provide more information to those wishing to submit a CIS. A Victim Services Coordinator can be reached at any of their regional offices. There is no information available online for submitting a CIS.

Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island Department of Justice and Public Safety have assistance available via their Charlottetown and Summerside Victim Services offices for community members wishing to submit a CIS.

Nova Scotia

Information and assistance in completing a CIS can be obtained from a Victim Service Officer at any regional Victim Services office in Nova Scotia.

Newfoundland

For information or assistance with completing a CIS, contact a Victim Services Coordinator at any regional office. The Newfoundland Department of Justice and Public Safety offers downloads on their website of both instructions and a form to complete a CIS.

Yukon

Information on completing and submitting a CIS in the Yukon can be obtained from any regional victim services office.

Northwest Territories

The Northwest Territories' website provides a download of the CIS form. It has instructions on completing and submitting a CIS contained in the form. For assistance or further information, contact 867-873-7002 for referral (collect calls are accepted).

Nunavut

Information is not yet available about Community Impact Statements in this jurisdiction.

RESTITUTION

In addition to completing a CIS, if you are feeling an economic impact from the offence you may seek restitution for expenses such as replacing damaged property. Community members may submit a form asking The Court to order the offender to pay for monetary loss as a result of the crime. The Court will decide how much money the offender must pay you based on the amount of financial loss you show was caused by the crime. In order to provide the Court with accurate information, you should start documenting financial losses as soon as possible after the crime. The request for restitution is submitted at sentencing similarly to a CIS.

MOVING ON FOLLOWING A VIOLENT CRIME

Although you may not have been directly victimized, you are nonetheless impacted by a violent crime in your community. It is important that you address the after-effects in an appropriate manner. As discussed earlier, returning to your normal routine is an important step following a traumatic event. Look after your health by making sure you get enough sleep, eat regular meals and exercise moderately. Make sure you have a support system in place such as a friend to talk with about your feelings. Remember that it is normal to have feelings of unease after a traumatic event.

As mentioned in the section on Fears for Security, you and your community are more resilient when you are connected. This may come in a formal or informal setting. Some residents of communities impacted by a violent crime find group discussions and public meeting very helpful whereas others find these may trigger negative emotions. Many community members respond best to socializing and sharing experiences with their neighbours in an informal setting such as over coffee or a meal. Your past experiences may impact how you deal with trauma. If you have experienced personal victimization, you may react to a violent crime in your community differently than someone who has not. Ask for support if you need it.

SUPPORTING VICTIMS OF VIOLENT CRIME

Remember that every victim and survivor is worthy of support and sympathy. Do not judge based on lifestyle or circumstances of the crime - NO ONE deserves to be victimized. Victims will often blame themselves for the crime - it is important not to reinforce this. Supporting victims over the long-term is something friends and acquaintances often forget. In the initial days and weeks following a crime, there is immense support but this often ends quickly. Victims need ongoing support as they move forward.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Providing emotional support to those who have been directly impacted is an important contribution of the broader community. There are some cases where strangers or acquaintances are better able to offer emotional support to victims than those closest to them. A victim's family and friends are also deeply affected by a tragedy so they may not be able to put aside their own grief or anger. As it is important for you to return to a more normal routine, it is also important for victims. The return to a routine and proper assistance following a crime is essential to reduce long-term distress in victims.

Victims of violent crime may go through a wide range of emotions, often changing from day-to-day. The most common emotions are: emptiness, numbness, grief, shock/disbelief, shame, guilt or self blame. Victims may also experience feelings of helplessness, panic, detachment and/or separation from others, fatigue, and depression. Victims commonly experience anger which they direct toward family and friends. It is important to remain patient and understand that the anger is not really directed at you.

While not all victims develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), they may be at risk. PTSD may be marked by:

1. Recurrent and intrusive re-experiencing of the traumatic event, such as dreams or “flashbacks”
2. Avoidance of places or events which serve as reminders of the trauma, and
3. Ongoing feelings of increased arousal such as constant vigilance or an exaggerated startled reaction for a period of one month or more.

If you notice these disturbances affecting individuals following a trauma, they may be suffering from PTSD. If so, it would be beneficial for them to seek help from a mental health professional to cope with this disorder.

HOMICIDE

Survivors of homicide are dealing with a unique form of loss that is not comparable to accidental or natural death. This is due to the unexpected and violent death of their loved one as well as the criminal justice process that follows. When offering support to homicide survivors, it is important to be sensitive to the circumstances by refraining from sayings such as “he/she is in a better place”, “I know just how you feel” etc. While well-meaning, these statements often upset loved ones and make them feel worse. Instead, choose support language like “I am here if you need me”.

SEXUAL ASSAULT/ABUSE

Responding appropriately to those who have been sexual assaulted or abused may be especially challenging but there are many ways to support these victims. It is important to reassure individuals that you are sorry for what happened, willing to help and do not blame them for their attack.

It is never appropriate to blame individuals for their victimization or downplay their experience. It is important to offer support without pitying or controlling the individual. Do not

ask for details but rather offer an open ear. Do not make assumptions about an individual's needs e.g. some people will not wish to be touched where others will long for a comforting hug.

SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY AFTER A VIOLENT CRIME

To be effective, your community's actions must be planned and organized. If you are involved in activism following a violent crime in your community, remember to outline the goals of the activity; define and utilize your resources efficiently; and monitor the success and progress of your activity over time.

FUNDRAISING

When a tragic event happens to a community member, a common response by the community is to raise funds or donate goods as a gesture of assistance. It is important to be sensitive to the needs and wants of victims and their families. Not all individuals will be open to receiving donations following a violent crime. In order to avoid upsetting victims, it is suggested that a family contact, such as an extended family member or friend, be consulted before proceeding. In the event of a death, the funeral home handling the services may have information about a preferred charity for memorial donations.

Crowd-funding has become a popular tool for community members to provide support to victims of crime. This type of fundraising has its limitations as it is not accessible to all donors and has the potential for fraudulent activity. An alternative is to start a trust fund through a local financial institution to receive funds in the victim's name.

If you are part of a group organizing a formal fundraiser such as benefit concert or a raffle, businesses in the area may donate goods or services to assist with the cause. Many service clubs or community organizations may offer you space for free or a small fee.

ADVOCACY

Community members may find themselves in the role of advocate in response to a violent crime in their community. This may come in a number of forms including lobbying for legislative changes, circulating petitions, or speaking out at community meetings. Networking with other individuals and communities who have been involved in similar activities is an excellent way to determine what works best.

CONCLUSION

The recovery of you, your family and your community following a violent crime may be a very stressful and lengthy process. There are many resources available to aid you along the way – ask for help! Victim services providers in your community are there to provide assistance and direct your inquiries. It is important to look after yourself first so you are better able to participate in your community's recovery. We hope this resource is useful in supporting your emotional recovery, encouraging your participation in the criminal justice process and fostering your participation in the broader community's recovery.

OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

The Child Mind Institute offers a wide variety of material on Trauma and Grief in children: <http://childmind.org/topics/concerns/trauma-and-grief/>

For more information about the unique circumstances of homicide survivors see our publication, A Survivor's Guide to Homicide and Grieving: <http://www.victimsofviolence.on.ca/victim-information-library/a-survivors-guide-to-homicide-and-grieving/>

Family and friends of victims of sexual assault/abuse victims can visit Pandora's Project for Support Tips: <http://www.pandys.org/articles/tipsforfriends.html>

For more information on supporting victims of violent crime see our publication, A Guide to Providing Support and Assistance to Victims: <http://www.victimsofviolence.on.ca/victim-information-library/a-guide-to-providing-support-and-assistance-to-victims/>

The National Center for Victims of Crime's Community Action page offers advice on community activism: <https://www.victimsofcrime.org/help-for-crime-victims/get-help-bulletins-for-crime-victims/community-and-victimization>

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