

disbelief

VICTIMS SPEAK OUT



anger

fear



helplessness



confusion

*Help,  
Hope, and  
Healing*

sensitivity

respect

dignity



VICTIMS SPEAK OUT

# *Help, Hope, and Healing*

## VIDEO DISCUSSION GUIDE

Produced by  
VIDEO/ACTION  
for the  
OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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## *Introduction*

**F**or decades, victims have driven changes in how the justice system perceives crime victims and implements victims' rights. Victims have also influenced how society views people who are hurt by crime, and enhanced understanding of the rights afforded to victims and their need for respect and dignity.

The U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime developed the "Victims Speak Out: Help, Hope, and Healing" video<sup>1</sup> to illustrate victims' perceptions of and opinions about the justice system, their major needs and concerns, and to offer suggestions for how the justice system can reduce victim trauma and respond to victim needs.

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<sup>1</sup>This video is an updated version of one originally produced by Video/Action in 1998 for the Council of State Governments, with funding from the Office for Victims of Crime, to augment findings from the survey "Crime Issues in the Northeast: Statewide Surveys of the Public and Crime Victims in Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island." Survey conducted by Schulman, Ronca & Bucuvalas, Inc.: New York, NY.

**This 25-minute video features vignettes of 14 victims of violent crime, and is divided into 6 segments:**

1. Victims' personal experiences with crime.
2. Obstacles to reporting crime.
3. Victim safety and support.
4. Victim notification and participation in justice processes.
5. Victim satisfaction with outcomes.
6. Help, hope, and healing.

### **Suggestions for using the “Victims Speak Out: Help, Hope, and Healing” video and discussion guide**

This video and discussion guide are valuable training tools for victim service providers, criminal and juvenile justice professionals, mental health providers, allied professionals, and other audiences who seek to better understand the impact of violent crime on victims. The “Victims Speak Out: Help, Hope, and Healing” video can be viewed in its entirety or in segments.

At the end of each segment, the video will fade to black. To facilitate discussion of each segment, simply turn to that section in this discussion guide. Each section offers a framework for a facilitator to use in moderating a discussion

among viewers/participants after each segment of the video. This framework

- Explores victims' comments in each of the six segment topics and reinforces salient points.
- Suggests questions for participants that encourage them to consider victims' perceptions of various issues discussed in the video.
- Provides the moderator with "probes" — possible answers or responses to each question that are based on research on victim trauma and needs — to use during discussion.

The discussion guide questions are designed to spark discussion among participants about issues raised in the video. The moderator may choose any of several ways to use these questions, depending on the size and composition of the group. You may want to create viewer worksheets with questions, on which participants can write their thoughts. You may want to divide participants into smaller groups to discuss the questions, with reports back to the larger group. When deciding how to structure the discussion, consider how to reinforce the issues raised by the victims who speak in the video and give participants opportunities to apply these ideas, and their own experience working with victims, to their work.

This discussion guide and video seek to provide viewers with insights into both victims' feelings about their experiences, as well as ways that victim service providers and criminal/juvenile justice and allied professionals can best meet victims' needs and reduce victim trauma. The recommended responses to victims' needs are by no means all-inclusive but, rather, are intended to promote further discussion among viewers about victims' rights, needs, and concerns — and what viewers can do to promote help, hope, and healing for victims.

This video can serve as a primer about victims' foremost issues and concerns, from the time the crime occurs through the criminal or juvenile justice process. It can be a useful audiovisual aid for

- Introductory training for new staff.
- Continuing education for existing staff.
- Professional training and education programs for victim service providers, criminal and juvenile justice officials, and allied professionals.
- Public awareness efforts that seek to increase understanding of victims' rights and needs.
- Victim awareness programs that seek to help offenders better understand the impact of crime on victims.

### ***Facilitator Tips for Using This Video***

Depending upon the audience and venue, the discussion facilitator can

- Develop viewer worksheets — utilizing the discussion questions — to encourage individual reflection on the issues addressed in the video.
- Provide opportunities for viewers to apply the issues raised by the victims in this video to *their own experiences*, either as crime victims, or as professionals who work with crime victims.
- Divide viewers into small groups to discuss their ideas and opinions, with the opportunity to share insights with the whole group.
- Document key points of group discussions on tear sheets to offer a visual summary of the proceedings.

Suggested resources to augment effective facilitation:

- VCR and monitor.
- Viewer worksheets.
- Tear sheet pads and easel.
- Markers.
- Masking tape.

## SEGMENT ONE

## *Victims' Personal Experiences with Crime*

When victims share their personal experiences, they offer significant insights into the psychological, financial, physical, and spiritual losses endured as a result of criminal victimization. This segment will help viewers

- Understand the wide range of victims' reactions to violent crime.
- Reflect on their experiences assisting victims.
- Develop approaches that can help identify and reduce victim trauma.

**1. Describe some of the reactions these victims experienced, either at the time of the crime or as they entered the justice system.**

### ***Facilitator Probes***

- Confusion.
- Anger.
- Fear.
- Thoughts of dying.
- Horror.
- No recollection of what happened.
- Disbelief.
- Helplessness.

**2. Are these victim reactions similar to the reactions of any of the victims whom you have worked with in the past?**

***Facilitator Probes***

- Encourage participants to share their personal experiences of working with crime victims.
- Encourage participant discussion of emotional reactions victims commonly experience, focusing both on the short- and long-term trauma that many victims endure.

**3. What could criminal/juvenile justice professionals and others have done to lessen the trauma these victims experienced?**

***Facilitator Probes***

- Say simply, “I’m sorry for what happened to you.”
- Ask victims what their important needs are, and try to meet them.
- Assure them that feelings of anger and fear are okay because they have been badly hurt.
- Provide information immediately about the rights they have as victims of crime.
- Learn whom they have already spoken to, in order to make appropriate referrals.

- Provide referrals to supportive services or, better yet, make the referral call for the victims.
- Provide victims with information and resources so that they can make informed choices about their futures.
- Provide justice and allied professionals (e.g., medical, mental health providers) with opportunities to receive training about how crime affects victims, how victims experience the justice system, and how professionals can respond sensitively to victims. Incorporate victims' real-life experiences into such training programs.

SEGMENT TWO

## *Obstacles to Reporting Crimes*

The more criminal and juvenile justice professionals and others understand why some victims choose not to report crime, the better the chance that the justice system can be improved to increase reporting. Further, as justice professionals understand the frustrations of victims who do report, they can develop responses to address these frustrations, thus increasing victim participation in the justice system. This segment will help viewers

- Identify reasons why some victims don't report crimes to authorities.
- Discuss measures to increase reporting.
- Discuss the importance of cultural competency in addressing victims' needs and concerns.
- Discuss the importance of victim confidentiality and privacy.

### **1. What are some of the reasons these victims gave as to why some victims fail to report crimes?**

#### ***Facilitator Probes***

- Total disdain for law enforcement.
- Belief that the system is complacent about following up on reports.
- Belief that the system is filled with uncaring professionals.

- Feelings of shame about the crime.
- Feelings of guilt about the crime.
- Encounters with insensitive police.
- Fear of the criminal justice system.
- Endless delays by the system.
- Inconvenience caused by participating in the system.
- Unfamiliarity with the system.
- Perception that the system is focused on representing the interests of the state, which aren't necessarily the same as the victim's interests.
- Belief that the system takes charge and victims feel helpless.
- Lack of trust in the system.
- Perception that the system requires too many obligations of victims.

## **2. What can be done to increase reporting of crime?**

### ***Facilitator Probes***

- Disseminate public information about the connection between crime reporting and crime reduction — those offenders who are apprehended and convicted have fewer opportunities to commit additional crimes.
- Promote and enforce victims' rights.
- Consider victims' rights and needs when deciding to delay processing cases.

- Provide victims with simplified information that helps them understand the criminal and juvenile justice processes.
- Develop partnerships between law enforcement and the community that promote mutual respect and collaboration.
- Protect the confidentiality and privacy of victims (especially with sensitive victims, such as sexual assault and child victims). Victims will be more likely to report crimes if they feel their privacy is respected.
- Provide options for victims to increase their feelings of control as they proceed through justice processes (e.g., offer them choices, validate their decisions).
- Recognize and respect cultural diversity, particularly as it relates to victims' perceptions of justice processes. This means acknowledging that victims from some cultural and ethnic groups might have difficulty trusting the justice system for a variety of reasons, including their belonging to an ethnic group that has historically been mistreated by the system, or coming from another country where law enforcement officials were corrupt.
- Provide justice officials and the community with frequent opportunities to receive victim sensitivity training.

- Promote the availability of community-based victim services for victims who choose not to report crimes.

### **3. Are there other “obstacles” victims face as they go through the justice process, and as they attempt to recover in the aftermath of crime?**

#### ***Facilitator Probes***

- Little or no acknowledgment that they have been hurt by crime.
- Disrespectful treatment by justice officials, family members, and friends.
- Inadequate or confusing information about the status of the case and status of the offender.
- Disregard for victims’ constitutional and statutory rights, and limited or nonexistent legal remedies when their rights are not enforced.
- Societal attitudes that sometimes judge and/or blame the victim for what happened to him or her.
- Lack of referrals to supportive services that can help victims regain control over their lives, make informed choices, and access assistance to help them recover.

SEGMENT THREE

## *Victim Safety and Support*

States, territories, and the Federal Government have passed laws and created programs to address the difficulties faced by victims of crime. Policymakers recognize that victims need assistance recovering from the crime and navigating the justice system. They also understand that participating in the justice system poses risks for some victims, which laws protecting victims' confidentiality and privacy attempt to minimize.

Many violent crime victims worry about their safety and the safety of their loved ones, particularly when the alleged or convicted offender is not incarcerated. Experiencing violent crime can be life-altering, causing victims to need significant support and services. Justice professionals and others have an obligation to do as much as possible to increase victims' feelings of safety and support.

This segment will help viewers

- Identify and address victims' concerns about safety and security.
- Identify and address victims' needs for supportive services — such as counseling, assistance in completing victim compensation claims, planning for victim safety, referrals to victim support groups, and the implementation of

victims' rights to notification, participation, and restitution.

- Work with crime victims to promote positive changes in justice processes that can make the criminal and juvenile justice systems more “victim friendly.”

## **1. How did these victims' lives change as a result of the crimes committed against them?**

### ***Facilitator Probes***

- Their feelings of fear have increased.
- They are unable to enjoy things they previously enjoyed.
- They tend to generalize about people who remind them of the offender(s), fearing and mistrusting them.
- They feel paranoid.
- They want revenge.

## **2. From your experiences, what are some other “life changes” that victims might experience following a crime?**

### ***Facilitator Probes***

- A lack of trust — in themselves, in others, and in justice processes.
- Concerns about who to tell about the crime.
- Fear of being blamed or judged by others for being victimized.

- Acute or chronic anxiety (which can be exacerbated by lack of information about what is happening, or about what might happen in the future).
- Difficulty with important relationships.
- Changes in spiritual belief systems.
- Changes in how one views the world — as no longer fair or safe.
- Use or abuse of alcohol or other drugs as coping mechanisms.

### **3. How can victim service providers, justice, and allied professionals help victims cope with changes in their lives that result from the crime?**

#### ***Facilitator Probes***

- Provide victims with information about what is happening, and what might happen in the future.
- Provide victims with information about compensation and assistance that is available and help them complete the forms to apply.
- Offer the victim a referral to mental health counseling.
- Supply information about victim support groups and other supportive services.
- Reassure victims that many people hurt by crime experience feelings of revenge, which are “normal” as long as they do not act upon these feelings.

- Reassure victims that not all people who remind them of their offender(s) act like their offenders.
- Provide victims with supportive services and referrals for victim assistance and mental health services—this helps victims recover and lead hopeful and productive lives.

#### **4. What are some of these victims' safety issues?**

##### ***Facilitator Probes***

- Fear of retaliation (actual and perceived).
- Lacking important information, such as when an offender is being released.
- A perception that the system isn't always concerned with victims' needs and concerns but, rather, with things that will strengthen the case for successful prosecution and/or adjudication.

#### **5. How can victim service and allied justice professionals increase victims' sense of security?**

##### ***Facilitator Probes***

- Ask victims if they have any safety concerns.
- Work closely with victims to develop a safety plan to increase their feelings of security.
- Determine if victims' safety concerns are based upon real (actual) threats from the offenders or his/her cohorts, and coordinate protective remedies (e.g., restraining/stay-away orders) with the proper authorities.

- Provide them with information about the status of their case and the status of their alleged or convicted offender.
- Ensure that victims' rights to participate in the justice process are enforced (e.g., right to be present at hearings, right to be notified of offender's release, etc.).

### **6. Why do some victims feel the justice system needs to be changed?**

#### ***Facilitator Probes***

- They are forced into a system that they did not choose to enter.
- The system is perceived as not friendly to victims.
- A concern with technical procedures obscures the fact that someone was victimized and/or murdered.
- They feel re-victimized by the system.

## **7. How can victim advocates and other helping professionals (including those in the justice system) validate victims' feelings about the need for system change?**

### ***Facilitator Probes***

- Let them know you are sorry about what happened to them and are here to help.
- Identify any problems the victim may be having with a specific individual or agency within the system, and intervene to the degree possible.
- Provide victims with avenues for activism — such as working to improve the justice system — which may diminish their feelings of powerlessness.
- Avoid “bad-mouthing” allied professionals — simply listen, and assure the victim you will try to provide him or her with the best advocacy and assistance possible.
- Assure the victim that, regardless of any prior bad experiences he or she has had with the justice system, you will help him or her through “your components” of the justice system or community-based service, by providing the victim with appropriate information, guidance and services, and referrals for further advocacy when necessary.

SEGMENT FOUR

## *Victim Notification and Participation in Justice Processes*

In every state and at the federal level, victims have the statutory right to various types of notification about the status of their case and the offender. Notification and the opportunity to participate in key justice proceedings are important rights. They offer validation for victims by acknowledging the life-altering and irrevocable impact of crime. They supply victims with information to help them make decisions that affect both their case, their safety, and their future. This segment will help viewers

- Identify victims' major concerns about notification and participation.
- Address measures that enhance notification procedures and encourage full participation of victims throughout justice processes.

### **1. What were these victims' major concerns about notification and participation?**

#### ***Facilitator Probes***

- Perception that limited rights exist for victims.

- Uncertainty about what to expect — everything seems to be “last minute.”
- Confusion due to inadequate explanation of the justice process, terms, etc.
- Belief that they cannot ask questions or can question the information they receive.
- The treatment of offenders seems to be better than treatment of victims.
- Belief that there are too many “loopholes” for defendants.
- The victim has no lawyer and no representation.
- They have no input into decisions in the case.
- They are not given details of the case or crime.
- They need information to regain a sense of control.
- They function well when given opportunities to gain control and to be empowered.
- They want an opportunity to tell how the crime has affected them.

## **2. How can victims’ concerns about notification and participation be addressed?**

### ***Facilitator Probes***

- Enforce victims’ rights that are afforded by statute and/or constitutional amendments.
- Ensure that victims are aware of defendants’/ convicted offenders’ rights, in addition to victims’ rights, in order to reduce the opportunity for unpleasant surprises.

- Provide advocates for victims at each stage of the justice process.
- Provide timely information about the status of the case and the status of the alleged or convicted offender.
- Offer services and procedures that promote victim safety.
- Offer referrals to clearinghouses, Web sites, and toll-free telephone numbers so victims can obtain information about rights, services, and some of the reactions they may experience as a result of their victimization.
- Use victim impact statements and restitution orders documenting losses to allow victims to *define the harm* caused by the crime.
- Emphasize that victim input is important both to the case and to *justice professionals* and *agencies* involved in the case.
- Provide victims with referrals to supportive services in the community.

## SEGMENT FIVE

## *Victim Satisfaction with Outcomes*

When victims are treated with respect and compassion throughout the criminal and juvenile justice systems, and allowed to have input into key decisions affecting their cases, their sense of satisfaction will likely increase. This segment will help viewers

- Identify the types of issues that can affect a victim's perception of both case outcomes *and* the justice process.
- Discuss measures to increase the implementation of victims' core rights, which are statutorily defined in most states, territories, and at the federal level.

### **1. What types of issues influence how a victim feels about the outcome of his or her case?**

#### ***Facilitator Probes***

- System support — which leads to greater feelings of safety and security.
- The mental health impact of crime — including anxiety, depression, difficulty with concentration, sleep disturbances, problems with relationships, and alcohol or other drug use and abuse — which, if not addressed by

mental health professionals, can result in long-term trauma.

- The financial cost of victimization — which can be astronomical.
- Frustration over the amount of taxpayer dollars spent on offenders compared with dollars spent on victims, especially since “lack of money” is perceived as being an excuse for an inadequate response to victims.
- Ensuring that victims have input into release decisions and are notified of the offender’s status and location is crucial. The release of the offender can create additional fear.

**2. Often, the implementation of victims’ core rights — which are codified in many state and federal statutes — contributes directly to their satisfaction with outcomes. What are these six core rights, and why are they important?**

***Facilitator Probes***

- **Notification** of the status of the case, and status and location of the offender.
- **Information** about rights, resources, and remedies available to victims of crime.
- **Restitution and other legal/financial obligations** (such as child support) that help victims recover financial losses resulting from crime.
- **Protection** from intimidation, harassment, or harm.

- **Participation** in justice processes, including the use of victim impact statements before sentencing and at parole release hearings to describe the emotional, physical, financial, and spiritual losses resulting from victimization.
- **Information and referrals** to supportive services, including victim compensation, support groups, housing, safety planning, and counseling, among others.

### 3. How can victim satisfaction be increased?

#### *Facilitator Probes*

- Specifically ask victims: “What can I do to increase your satisfaction with the justice system?” and respond to their needs as much as possible.
- Treat victims with dignity, respect, and concern for their needs.
- Provide opportunities for victims to identify their needs, the harm caused by the crime, and potential options that will make them feel better.
- Never accept an offender’s inability to fulfill restitution obligations as an excuse; always remind the court that financial losses then become the innocent victim’s obligation when the offender is not ordered to pay.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for the victim’s voice to be heard throughout justice processes

through the use of victim impact statements, presentence investigations that include victim interviews, and victim assessment surveys that provide them with the opportunity to evaluate their treatment by the justice system.

- Provide opportunities for victim advocacy/activism — invite them to get involved to improve victims' rights and services.
- Provide opportunities for offenders and justice professionals to listen to “the voice of the victim” through victim impact panels and victim awareness programs.

## SEGMENT SIX

*Help, Hope, and Healing*

It is important to recognize that every *victim* is unique, and every *case* is unique. Professionals who assist victims should seek every opportunity to have victims identify their most important needs, including the need for help, hope, and healing. This segment will help viewers

- Describe measures offered by the victims on the video that helped them on their journey to healing.
- Identify ways that victim assistance, juvenile and criminal justice, and allied professionals can help victims through the healing process.

**1. What are some of the key elements identified in this segment that help victims recover in the aftermath of a crime?**

***Facilitator Probes***

- The opportunity to meet with the offender in a constructive environment — to learn about why the crime occurred, what happened (in homicides), and to offer victim impact information.
- Expression of remorse from the offender.
- Acknowledgment of victim pain.

- Recognition that some victims believe offenders “get off too easy,” and that the punishment — in their opinion — does not “fit the crime.”
- Offenders complete court-ordered treatment programs.
- Sentences that truly fit the crime.
- Belief that justice was served.
- Opportunities to use victims’ painful experiences for positive change.
- Respecting victims as “experts” and learning from their experiences.

## **2. How can victim service and justice professionals augment a victim’s journey to healing?**

### **Facilitator Probes**

- Allow victims to identify their most salient needs, and then try to meet them.
- Supply literature and other resources that help victims understand some of the feelings they may experience.
- Provide opportunities for victims to meet with offenders to describe how the crime affected their lives (*only on request from the victim*).
- Validate the trauma and losses that victims endure (justice system, victim service providers, and the community).

- Work in collaboration with key stakeholders to remove the societal stigma of victimization.
- Listen to victims — throughout the justice process, through victim impact panels, and through opportunities for victims to serve in advisory capacities to justice agencies and other entities concerned about victims' rights and services.
- Simply listen to victims, and validate that they have been hurt by crime.

## *Additional Resources*

1. *New Directions From the Field: Victims' Rights and Services for the Twentieth Century*. Office for Victims of Crime, 1998. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs: Washington, DC. (NCJ 170600).

Available through the OVC Web site at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications) or by contacting the OVC Resource Center at 1-800-627-6872.

2. Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center

P.O. Box 6000

Rockville, MD 20849

1-800-627-6872

301-519-5500

TTY 1-877-712-9279

Web site: [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ovcres](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ovcres)

To e-mail questions: [askovc@ojp.usdoj.gov](mailto:askovc@ojp.usdoj.gov)

3. National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)

P.O. Box 6000

Rockville, MD 20849

1-800-851-3420

301-519-5500

TTY (toll free) 1-877-712-9279 (local) 301-947-8374

Web site: [www.ncjrs.org](http://www.ncjrs.org)

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For grant and funding information contact:

**Department of Justice Response Center**

1-800-421-6770

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