

## What Is a Victim Advocate?

### What Is It?

Victim advocates are professionals trained to support victims of crime. Advocates offer victims information, emotional support, and help finding resources and filling out paperwork. Sometimes, advocates go to court with victims. Advocates may also contact organizations, such as criminal justice or social service agencies, to get help or information for victims. Some advocates staff crisis hotlines, run support groups, or provide in-person counseling. Victim advocates may also be called victim service providers, victim/witness coordinators, or victim/witness specialists.

### Roles and Training

Advocates' responsibilities vary depending on their job description and where they work. Typically, the role of an advocate may include:

- Providing information on victimization;
- Providing information on crime prevention;
- Providing information on victims' legal rights and protections;
- Providing information on the criminal justice process;
- Providing emotional support to victims;
- Helping victims with safety planning;
- Helping victims with victim compensation applications;
- Helping victims submit comments to courts and parole boards;
- Intervening with creditors, landlords, and employers on behalf of victims;
- Helping victims find shelter and transportation;
- Providing referrals for other services for victims;
- Crisis intervention;
- Helping to arrange funerals; and
- Notifying victims of inmates' release or escape.

Advocates work in many different locations. Some serve in the criminal justice system (in police stations, prosecutor's offices, courts, probation or parole departments, or prisons). They may also be part of private nonprofit organizations such as sexual assault crisis centers or domestic violence programs. Some advocates are paid staff, and others are volunteers.

Many advocates have academic degrees that prepare them to work with victims. They may have studied social work, criminal justice, education, or psychology. Advocates often receive significant additional training on the specific knowledge and skills they need on the job.

## How Advocates Work with Victims

Advocates offer victims information about the different options available to them and support victims' decision-making. Advocates do not tell victims what to do.

Advocates are committed to maintaining the highest possible levels of confidentiality in their communications with victims. However, the level of confidentiality they can observe depends on their position, education, licensure, and the laws in each state. An advocate in a police department may have to share any information related to an investigation with officers. Yet an advocate at a domestic violence program may be able to keep most victims' confidences private. However, all advocates must report certain types of information to the authorities. For example, they have to report any type of threat to a person (such as clients threatening to hurt themselves or someone else), and they have to report the abuse or neglect of children. It is important for victims to ask about confidentiality rules before they begin working with an advocate.

## If You Are a Victim

It may be difficult for you to reach out for help. But you may find that victim advocates can offer you information, support, and access to helpful services you might not know about. Victims are often relieved to know that agencies in their community want to make sure they are safe and have the help they need to recover from the impact of the crime.

## Resources

If you would like help finding a victim advocate, call the National Crime Victim Helpline (**1-800-FYI-CALL**). Helpline advocates can help you identify your options and refer you to resources in your area. Helpline services are free and confidential.

### National Crime Victim Helpline

1-800-FYI-CALL (1-800-394-2255)

1-800-211-7996 TTY

8:30 a.m. – 8:30 p.m. ET weekdays

Or visit: **Help for Crime Victims:** [www.ncvc.org/victimassistance](http://www.ncvc.org/victimassistance)

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