

VICTIM SERVICES TOOLKIT

ESTABLISHING A COMPREHENSIVE
VICTIM SERVICES PROGRAM ON
CAMPUS

ENHANCING VICTIM
SERVICES PROJECT



*Note: Both the terms "victim" and "survivor" are used in this document, as each individual who experiences sexual violence may identify differently throughout the recovery process.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, and stalking are not new issues within the campus environment, however the national attention paid to these forms of violence in recent years has allowed for greater exploration of institutional response.

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide a summary of evidence-based literature related to developing a victim services office. Topics examined include crisis intervention, advocacy, counseling, prevention & education, as well as partnerships & collaboration.

ROLE OF A VICTIM SERVICES PROGRAM

Victim service programs aim to provide comprehensive services that align with University policies and procedures and follow up-to-date research and recommendations from experts in the field. A victim service program should emphasize efforts that are tailored to prioritize the needs of each victim/survivor, reflect an understanding of trauma, and be flexible and accessible for all students. The following are promising and best practices intended to help establish a program as a comprehensive resource for victims/survivors.



CRISIS INTERVENTION

Crisis intervention provided by the victim services programs ensures immediate assistance to victims/survivors in a confidential setting. It is important for staff members to communicate their confidential role to provide a safe space for victims/survivors to share. Below are some characteristics of best practices for crisis intervention:

24 hour availability: The most important element of crisis intervention is the ability to provide immediate response to student needs (WHTF, 2014). Therefore, 24-hour services are crucial to providing adequate support to victims/survivors. It is important to customize the approach based on the capacity and configuration of the services. Programs may implement a rotating on-call system, and/or initiate a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) bolstered by volunteerism. In addition, programs may collaborate with the local sexual and domestic violence programs to assist with consistent service as the program is in development. In order to ensure a positive and consistent experience for victims/survivors the program should prioritize establishing procedures for who and how victims/survivors can contact the program during a 24 hour period.

24 hr Response line: Each program should promote a 24-hour phone number that students can call to access services and emotional support. Anonymous hotlines are seen as a vital way for students to feel safe accessing information on these topics (WHTF, 2014). If a hotline is not currently established on campus, programs should develop a relationship with local domestic and sexual violence agencies to serve as a resource. The White House Task Force developed a template Memorandum of Understanding, intended to outline the roles and responsibilities a campus and local agency can fulfill when partnering.

Safety planning: During a crisis, students may be feeling emotionally and physically unsafe. Program staff can assist by assessing their safety and developing safety plans with the victim/survivor.

Victim Assistance Emergency Fund: Each campus has access to funds that can provide emergency assistance to a student in crisis. These funds exist to assist in restoring a sense of dignity and safety during a crisis situation and can be applied to emergency food, clothing, toiletries, shelter, transportation, and other immediate needs to enhance safety. The victim services programs are designated to be the distributor of these funds, making sure to adequately inform other campus representatives of its existence.

Trauma-informed spaces: Being trauma-informed means that each victim services program is considering the physical, psychological, and emotional impact of interpersonal violence and therefore responds with an awareness of the effects of trauma (CTARP, 2015). Students often choose to report to peers rather than formal resources. The confidentiality associated with the victim services program may increase student access due to the perception of safety during disclosure (WHTF, 2014). It is crucial for these physical spaces to be confidential and private to give victims/survivors an opportunity to share their experience.

ADVOCACY

Advocates serve as a link to resources and a support person during the navigation of on-campus and off-campus systems. Effective advocacy includes creating a safe environment, believing and validating the victim/survivor, acknowledging their feelings and perceptions, educating the victim/survivor about their options, and supporting their decisions (NSVRC, 2013).

Information and referral: Those representing the victim services program serve an important role in providing information about reporting options, victim rights, crime compensation, and appropriate resources. Advocates are tasked not only with equipping students with their options but also supporting the decisions that students make with this information (CTARP, 2015; WHTF, 2014).

Referrals are often suitable depending on the capacity of the program and the unique needs of the victim/survivor. Referrals to other resources can include local domestic and sexual violence agencies, legal agencies, medical and health services, the Title IX office, faith-based organizations, and culturally relevant organizations. Minoritized students experience violence in particular ways, and face distinct barriers to accessing services. Incorporating cultural humility into service provision is imperative, as it makes room for self-reflection, challenging power imbalances, and developing respectful partnerships with underserved students (Murray-Garcia & Tervalon, 1998). This may require being willing and able to refer students to culturally relevant services when your office does not have the expertise necessary to meet their needs. It is important for the victim services program to build connections with these resources to ensure a smooth and clear link for students.

Accompaniments: Advocates can provide support at proceedings such as reporting to law enforcement, legal proceedings, campus adjudication meetings, or forensic exams. The victim services program should ensure that options on-campus and off-campus are offered. If local domestic and sexual violence agencies are providing advocacy services for your campus, VPVAs can provide training to these agencies regarding campus culture and policies. For more on training between programs and the campus, see the partnerships and collaboration section below.

Accommodations: Victim services programs may also play a role in supporting victim/survivor requests to make changes that enhance their wellbeing and safety, especially for students that have not reported to Title IX. Accommodations can include parking and transportation assistance, escort services, interpreter services, housing or employment modifications, and academic or financial support (CTARP, 2015; WHTF, 2014). The program should build relationships with other offices and resources on campus to ensure greater access to and understanding of accommodations.

Survivor-centered role: Advocacy within a victim services program is based on being victim/survivor-centered. Advocates are distinct from Title IX Coordinators and university administration as they are first and foremost responsible to the victim/survivor (CTARP, 2015). Services for an accused student should never come from the same program staff that is working with a victim/survivor, as this can create conflict and potentially rupture the trust between the victim/survivor and the victim services office. Other campus officials are tasked with moving the reporting process along within the campus system, so advocates can focus exclusively on the status of the victim/survivor (VSDVAA, 2016).

COUNSELING

Another function of the victim services program is to ensure that counseling is available to victims/survivors. While crisis intervention is important to recovery, the impact of sexual and domestic violence is often severe and long-lasting. Counseling helps students identify difficulties, address symptoms, develop skills, and process the experience in a supportive space (ODHE, 2015).

Individual counseling: A principal role for a victim services program is to make individual counseling available to all who request mental health services. It is recommended that counseling is offered both short-term and long-term (WHTF, 2014). Clinicians providing this counseling must have trauma-informed training as well as training specific to sexual violence, domestic violence, and stalking (ACHA, 2016; ODHE, 2015).

Group counseling: The White House Task Force recommends the use of support groups to aid in recovery, as they build the victim/survivor support network and decrease isolation (ODHE, 2015).



EDUCATION & AWARENESS

Victim services programs need to be involved in providing ongoing education and awareness-raising opportunities regarding sexual violence, domestic violence, and stalking, as well as information on policies and resources that address these topics. Efforts are best when they are comprehensive and complementary, addressing the four tiers of the social ecological model, i.e. the individual level, the relationship level, the community level, and the societal level that investigate the risk and protective factors associated with perpetrating or experiencing violence (CDC, 2018).

Education and awareness activities usually intend to build pro-social bystander action, teach healthy relationship skills, promote positive social norms (e.g., through social marketing campaigns), and increase safety and respect within campus culture, in addition to a myriad of other possible strategies (CTARP, 2015). Research has shown that multi-session interventions are more effective than one-time, standalone activities.

Strategic messaging: It is important that messaging for the campus reflects all members of the community, especially those that are often marginalized or disengaged from efforts to address violence (CTARP, 2015). Therefore, the program will be most effective when aiming for services that are marketed to be inclusive and effective for all students (VSDVAA, 2015). Your campus website and social media engagement can promote and supplement your efforts, ensuring that messaging creates an environment that allows students to feel safe when coming forward to access services. Using varied promotional approaches can increase the visibility of your office.

Community involvement: Programs will enhance effectiveness when there is a focus on building relationships with the campus community to promote a healthy climate and reflect the culture within the services VPVA provides (ACHA, 2016). Programming will facilitate opportunities for students to shape prevention and response efforts through input and feedback (CTARP, 2015). Collaborating with already existing student organizations expands reach by using peer voices, and highlights the intersection between violence and other important topics on campus.

Prevention & bystander intervention: A comprehensive prevention plan includes building capacity for primary prevention, coordinating and implementing prevention efforts, evaluating activities and expanding prevention messaging (CTARP, 2015). Prevention efforts on campus are most effective when they join a public health approach with student activism (VSDVAA, 2016).

Valuable strategies include promoting social norms that protect against violence, employing bystander intervention approaches, and mobilizing men as allies. Bystander approaches engage individuals in promoting social norms that protect against violence, while teaching skills necessary to intervene in situations that signal a chance for harm.

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION

Response Team: A consistent, unified response helps reduce the risk of re-victimization and helps to provide timely, efficient services to the victim/survivor in need (ACHA, 2016). Victim services programs can serve as a leading member of a coordinated response team. The office can work toward ensuring a structure exists that strives for a comprehensive response to sexual violence, domestic violence, and stalking. (CTARP, 2015) Numerous members can be included in a response team including campus police, student leaders, Title IX and student affairs, faculty, organizations and representatives from historically underrepresented groups, local victim service agencies, and local law enforcement.

On-campus support: The victim services office will need to support and inform other efforts on campus that are addressing sexual violence, domestic violence, stalking, and other intersectional topics. One method is implementing a “whole school approach” that acknowledges the priority of coordinating with different departments, offices, and student organizations across the campus to ensure stakeholders are represented and the entire university is working to prevent gaps in services. Campus collaboration and support can include attending trainings, collaborating with existing programs, offering expertise, promoting relevant activities, and partnering with other campus professional and student-led efforts. Programs can work with these organizations to strengthen their services so they are responsive to the needs of diverse populations.

Off-campus support: It is critical for victim services programs to develop strong relationships with external resources to expand options for victims/survivors and enhance response from all possible agencies. A great way to offer continuity of care for victims/survivors is to schedule cross training and/or co-training with advocates from local sexual and domestic violence programs (VSDVAA, 2016). In New Jersey, Confidential Sexual Violence Advocates (CSVAs) located at county-based programs provide crisis intervention and referral on a 24 hour hotline, as well as accompaniment to forensic and legal proceedings. Protected by a victim-counselor privilege law, communication between a victim/survivor and a CSVA is protected from disclosure in any legal process.

Cross-training allows campuses to strengthen advocate response and knowledge of external resources. It provides external advocates with knowledge about campus procedures so they can disseminate accurate information to students. This exchange further empowers victims/survivors to choose whether to seek support on campus or off campus (CTARP, 2015). Co-training can build relationships and help develop new initiatives that work to assist both agencies. Your program can develop MOUs with these agencies to determine the roles and commitment of each agency.

CONCLUSION

Victims/survivors of sexual, dating, and stalking violence experience difficulties in many ways. They can face physical trauma, emotional distress, and academic or work disruptions. These students are often unaware of their options and may need help and support. The victim service offices established on every campus can now ensure that victims/survivors have access to information, referrals to resources, mental health assistance, and support navigating reporting systems.

An effective program requires staff to develop strong relationships within and outside of their campus to provide a cohesive and consistent response to students in need. It is also crucial for these offices to engage students early and often in their development of programming to ensure the campus community is connected to the resources and messaging to end sexual and dating violence in their community.



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Notes

1. Sample MOU to facilitate campus and community organization partnerships:

<https://www.justice.gov/ovw/page/file/910381/download>

2. Guidance on safety planning for a campus environment:

<https://www.victimrights.org/sites/default/files/VRLC%20MSCASA%20Safety%20Planning%20with%20Campus%20Sexual%20Assault%20Victims.pdf>

3. Clinician assessment of trauma-informed competencies:

<http://mha.ohio.gov/Portals/0/assets/Initiatives/HumanTrafficking/2013-self-assessment-for-helping-professionals.pdf>

4. Development of support groups:

http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_guides_building-cultures-of-care.pdf

5. Violence prevention strategies:

http://www.communitysolutionsva.org/files/Prevention_Guidelines_20092.pdf

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/campussv-prevention.pdf>

6. Bystander intervention strategies:

<https://www.justice.gov/ovw/page/file/905957/download>

7. Guidance on creating a coordinated Response Team:

<https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/ovw/legacy/2008/01/11/standards-for-ccr.pdf>

Resources

American College Health Association (ACHA). (2016). Addressing sexual and relationship violence on college and university campuses.

Retrieved from http://www.acha.org/documents/resources/guidelines/Addressing_Sexual_Violence.pdf

Campus Technical Assistance and Resource Project (CTARP). (2015). Addressing gender-based violence on college campuses: Guide to a comprehensive model.

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National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC). (2013). Building cultures of care: A guide for sexual assault services programs.

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Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE). (2015). A safer campus: A guidebook on prevention and response to sexual and intimate partner violence and stalking for Ohio campuses.

Retrieved from https://www.ohiohighered.org/sites/ohiohighered.org/files/uploads/CampusSafety/A-Safer-Campus_Final-Draft_071515.pdf

U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women (OVW). (2008). Minimum standards for creating a coordinated community response to violence against women on campus.

Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/ovw/legacy/2008/01/11/standards-for-ccr.pdf>

Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance (VSDVAA). (2016). Safety & justice for all: Best practices for Virginia campuses addressing gender-based violence.

Retrieved from <https://alliancetrainingsite.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/safety-and-justice-for-all-campus-best-practices-interactive-version.pdf>

White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault (WHTF). (2014). Not alone toolkit and resources.

Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/protecting-students-sexual-assault>