

Opportunities for Churches and Houses of Worship to Assist Victims of Crime

Develop Resources

1. Develop a library of sacred text and faith-based resources and publications relating to trauma, victimization, healing, forgiveness and reconciliation. (Books and publications that are *visible* to crime and trauma victims reduce victims' fear of stigmatization and invite conversations and disclosures about traumatic events in the lives of hurting people.)
2. Provide space! Identify locations in your church or house of worship that can be a comfortable meeting place or "compassion center" that can offer safety to individuals and families affected by community violence. This can be a safe place for families and friends of victims to meet privately, especially if the church or house of worship is located near a courthouse. In Jonesboro, during the trial of the youths charged in the schoolyard shooting, the local Baptist church provided space, volunteer support and food for family and friends awaiting the outcome of the highly publicized trial.
3. Develop liaisons with other helping agencies, services and programs. Have a list of resources that can support or provide for basic needs (food, utilities, clothing, shelter, emergency assistance, etc.)
4. Coordinate with other resources. Offer special educational programs and workshops on topics such as *Grief and Loss, Healing, Getting through the Holidays, Impact of Crime, Forgiveness, Domestic Violence, Child Abuse, Human Trafficking*, and others. Invite community experts and local victim assistance staff to present workshops on these topics and to address specific concerns and questions of church or house of worship members.

Provide Education and Training

1. Educate congregants about possible feelings, reactions and needs of crime victims and their families. **DON'T FORGET THE VICTIM** especially if the church also has a prison ministry. Oftentimes, victims feel injured the second time by the church because they are neglected or ignored. Remember that your presence is the most powerful gift that you can give to a person in pain.
2. Provide training to volunteers and lay leaders who have an interest in helping people in crisis. Identify and develop a trained support network within the house of worship to assist victims and survivors.
3. Identify members of the faith community with special skills and gifts, individuals who are skilled with children, elders, individuals with disabilities, culturally diverse populations and other more vulnerable populations.

4. Help meet the spiritual needs of victims. Identify “victims in the pews” and provide prayer and spiritual support. Provide for spiritual safety and allow anger at God.
5. Plan a “*How Your Church (or the Faith Community) Can Help Crime Victims*” community seminar (these can be co-hosted by local victim assistance partner in law enforcement, non-profit organization, state agency or other group representing victim services.)
6. Learn more about traumatic or complicated grief. Be there for the long-term. There is no closure to complicated grief.
7. Learn about compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma. Learn how to respond to caregiver needs following a tragic event or prolonged exposure to crisis.

Plan and Host Commemorative Activities

8. Organize candlelight services or memorial services during Christmas and other religious and holy days for homicide victims families.
9. Have a special commemorative service with prayers and sacred text related to transformation, healing, forgiveness during National Victims Rights Week (about the 3rd week in April) for all crime victims.
10. Join National Night Out prevention effort in the community. Plan a prayer walk.
11. Host victim support group meetings monthly in partnership with victim assistance organizations or programs.

Develop Policies and Partnerships

12. Report any suspected cases of child abuse and develop policies within the house of worship to ensure the protection of children.
13. Develop church/house of worship policies and guidelines for selection of any individual that works with children, nursery school staff, faith leadership, youth pastors and youth ministers to protect children and the church from potential harm and criminal liabilities.
14. Develop crisis management protocol and crisis intervention strategy for your house of worship and keep it somewhere other than the house of worship or church building in case you are unable to access the material.

Offer Direct Victim Services and Assistance

15. Develop partnerships with local victim assistance programs (domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, prosecutor and law enforcement based programs and others that serve crime victims).

I. Personal Victim Assistance

- A. Determine victim or victim assistance program needs and provide *practical* support.
- B. Victims may need:
 - transportation to court, hearings or other locations
 - child care while parents are testifying in court
 - accompaniment to court or to parole hearings
 - crime scene clean up after a robbery or vandalism
 - home visits (especially if the individual is elderly or disabled)
 - locks and safety devices installed especially after a burglary
 - help with translation
 - help with filling out insurance forms, victims compensation claim forms, etc.

II. Program Support

Identify your local resources and ask what you can do to help in their efforts to assist crime victims!

- Many programs are in need of resources and volunteers. Example: Domestic violence shelters may need toys and playground equipment for children who are staying in the shelter. The children in the shelter need backpacks and school supplies so they can attend school while they are in the shelter. Some shelter rooms need refurbishing and painting and the staff may need furniture and office equipment.
- Your local victim assistance programs located in prosecutors and law enforcement offices may need volunteer support, equipment, educational materials, resources for children and families, emergency funds for travel, transportation and lodging, transportation and other help.
- Funding for special projects and needs.
- Space for training events and other needs that may arise.
- Volunteers to assist with childcare, clerical support, grant writing, creative and innovative initiatives to help victims.