



CAP TIPS #1

To Improve Public Awareness

Tips to Promote the 2010 National Crime Victims' Rights Week Theme "Crime Victims' Rights: Fairness. Dignity. Respect."

Introduction

The very foundation of our Nation's victim assistance movement is based upon the fact that historically, victims were virtually ignored in our systems of justice. When they were engaged in justice processes, it was merely as witnesses to crimes and, too often, they were viewed and treated like pieces of evidence; once their usefulness to a case was over, they were discarded from any further involvement.

Since the inception of the victim assistance field, much has changed to ensure that crime victims and survivors are recognized as integral components of our justice systems and its processes that seek to promote offender accountability and public safety; and as fellow Americans deserving of support and assistance, regardless if they report crimes to law enforcement.

Among the most significant outcomes have been efforts to ensure the fair treatment of victims with dignity and respect.

Defining "Fairness, Dignity and Respect"

The best place to begin "defining" fairness, dignity and respect is in your state's laws. Most victims' bills of rights include a victim's right "to be treated with fairness, dignity and/or respect" or a variation of these treatment aspects. Some states further clarify the meaning of these three key words; for example, the state of Utah offers the following statutory definitions:

- "Dignity" means treating the crime victim with worthiness, honor, and esteem.
- "Fairness" means treating the crime victims reasonably, even-handedly, and impartially.
- "Respect" means treating the crime victim with regard and value.

You can review your state's laws to determine if any definitions of these three terms currently exist (and if they don't, you may want to follow Utah's example and define *fairness*, *dignity* and *respect* in your state's laws!).

You can visit VictimLaw, sponsored by the National Center for Victims of Crime with support from OVC – which features a compilation of states’ victims’ rights laws – at <http://www.victimlaw.info/victimlaw/>. By using the “term search” feature and identifying “fairness,” “dignity” or “respect” in the search space, you can identify specific statutory language at the Federal, state and tribal levels that incorporate these words.

However, for many people (including crime victims and survivors), the terms *fairness*, *dignity* and *respect* are rather intrinsic – they may mean different things to different people, depending upon their life experiences. This requires important outreach to more clearly define what these terms mean to victims, survivors and those who serve them in your community and state.

Who Can Help You Define “Fairness,” “Dignity” and “Respect”?

The most important outreach to define the 2010 NCVRW theme is to ***crime victims and survivors***. You can contact victims directly in person, over the telephone, by using simple surveys via e-mail or free technology (such as “Survey Monkey”) to seek their input and guidance. The following language can be adapted for this effort:

“2010 National Crime Victims’ Rights Week will be commemorated this year from April 18 to 24. The theme for this week is “Crime Victims’ Rights: Fairness. Dignity. Respect.” In order to effectively promote the theme, it’s important that we are able to define what it means to victims and survivors in our community.

“We hope you can take a moment to answer five simple questions that will help us better define and promote the 2010 NCVRW theme:

1. What does it mean to you as a crime victim/survivor to be treated with *fairness*?
2. What does it mean to you as a crime victim/survivor to be treated with *dignity*?
3. What does it mean to you as a crime victim/survivor to be treated with *respect*?
4. What happens when our society and/or justice systems *fail* to treat crime victims with fairness, dignity and respect?
5. Is there anything you’d like to add from your personal experiences that can contribute to our NCVRW theme development?”

This initial outreach will not only help define the 2010 theme for your community; it’s also an important first step to inform victims about, and engage victims in, your 2010 NCVRW activities.

For the purposes of further defining and promoting the 2010 NCVRW Theme, consider for a moment those beyond crime victims and survivors who can help you define what these terms mean to victims, to justice, and to public safety in *your* community:

- Community- and system-based victim service providers.
- Law enforcement.
- Prosecutors.
- Judges.
- Court officials.
- Probation and parole.
- Institutional corrections.
- Local elected officials (mayors, city council members, county supervisors, etc.).
- State elected officials (Attorneys General, Governor, legislators, etc.).
- Community and civic leaders.

Similarly, these and other key stakeholders can be asked to help define the 2010 NCVRW theme through personal contacts and surveys. For example:

“2010 National Crime Victims’ Rights Week will be commemorated this year from April 18 to 24. The theme for this week is “Crime Victims’ Rights: Fairness. Dignity. Respect.” In order to effectively promote the theme, it’s important that we are able to define what it means to victims/survivors, those who support and serve them, and our community and state.

“We hope you can take a moment to answer three simple questions that will help us better define and promote the 2010 NCVRW theme:

1. What does treating crime victims/survivors with “fairness, dignity and respect” mean to (*type of stakeholder*)?
2. How does fair, dignified and respectful treatment of crime victims/survivors equate to victims’ rights and direct services specific to (*type of stakeholder*)?
3. What are the outcomes when our society and justice systems fail to treat victims/survivors with fairness, dignity and respect?

When conducting your “theme surveys,” it’s important to determine if you want to attribute quotations to their source. If you do, please be sure to document *in writing* that you have permission to directly quote those who help you define the 2010 NCVRW theme, and that your attribution is correct, i.e., the correct spelling of the person’s name, his/her title and affiliation, etc.

The OVC Oral History Project

Another excellent resource is the OVC Online Oral History Project, which interviewed over 60 pioneers of the victim assistance field (including many victims and survivors) to document the history and growth of our field. Comprehensive interviews are available in both video and print formats. The Oral History Project’s “search” function identified three citations for “fairness,” eight citations for “dignity,” and 30 citations for “respect.” You can visit the OVC Oral History Project and review these helpful historical citations at <http://vroh.uakron.edu/index.php> .

“Notable Quotables”

There are many powerful quotations from throughout history that relate to the concepts of fairness, dignity and respect. These can be used in both victim awareness and community outreach during 2010 NCVRW and throughout the year.

The next CAP Tip #2, “*Notable Quotables*,” will feature quotations that address the three terms included in the 2010 NCVRW theme.

What Has Made a Difference in the Treatment of Crime Victims and Survivors?

This is another excellent question that can be posed to theme survey respondents (see above), or considered and discussed by your NCVRW Planning Committee. In determining *what* has made a difference, consider these questions:

1. How has your community/state changed in how it treats and views victims of crime?
2. What key factors have made a difference in the treatment of crime victims and survivors?
3. What more can we do to ensure that *all* victims of crime are treated with fairness, dignity and respect?

At the national level, many powerful forces and initiatives have combined to promote the concept of treating victims and survivors with fairness, dignity and respect. For example:

- The “power of the personal story” – emanating from crime victims and survivors speaking out about their experiences, their perceptions of how they were viewed and treated, and their recommendations to improve the treatment of other victims – has been a driving force in public awareness and education, and the passage or strengthening of countless victims’ rights laws
- Ongoing national leadership from the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice has, since 1983, provided a vision and strategy to promote improved treatment of crime victims nationwide.
- Today, there are over 10,000 community- and system-based victim assistance programs that identify and meet victims’ needs; help them understand and implement their rights; and assist them in the aftermath of criminal victimization.
- Victims’ rights are now clearly defined in over 32,000 statutes (including 33 states’ constitutional amendments) at the local, state, Federal and tribal levels.
- Significant case law resulting from violations of victims’ statutory or constitutional rights – from state to Federal to U.S. Supreme Court decisions

- Important collaborative efforts among crime victims/survivors, victim service providers, and criminal/juvenile/Federal/tribal justice officials have resulted in agency and inter-agency policy development, training and cross-training, and public education that has improved how victims are viewed and treated in America.
- Countless crimes have detrimentally affected individuals, communities and our nation as a whole – from the scourge of interpersonal violence among America’s families, to acts of mass violence committed in our communities, schools and military bases, to the terrorist attacks on our Homeland of 1994 in Oklahoma City and 2001 in New York City and Washington, DC. A strong case can be made that:

“Everyone in America *is* or *knows* a victim of crime.”

This highly personal nature of crime and its aftermath makes the rights, needs and concerns of crime victims an important priority for public policy, crime prevention and victim assistance.

**“Fairness, Dignity and Respect”
for Non-reporting Victims of Crime**

Today, the majority of crimes remain unreported to law enforcement agencies. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, victims reported 47 percent of violent crimes and 40 percent of property crimes to the police in 2008 (Rand, Michael. [September 2009]. *Criminal Victimization, 2008*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice). A rich body of victimology research has found that victims often don’t report crimes because they are fearful; they think that nobody will believe them; and they think they will be blamed.

ALL victims and survivors of crime deserve to be treated with fairness, dignity and respect. For victims who do *not* report crimes to law enforcement, and who do *not* participate in justice processes, you can:

- Always respect the personal decisions of victims/survivors related to their victimization, and the victim’s individual autonomy.
- Promote efforts to ensure that non-reporting victims are aware of the variety of services that can help them in the aftermath of criminal victimization, including crisis response; counseling and mental health services; support groups; and personal safety measures, among others.
- Identify unserved and underserved victim populations in your community, and:

- Partner with “gatekeepers” who represent specific populations to promote awareness of victims’ rights and services, and development of and access to services that best meet these victims’ needs.
 - Promote cultural competency in victim outreach and services that identifies and addresses barriers to access, such as fear of law enforcement; language; lack of telephones and/or computers; location of services; and disability access, among others.
 - Work with the news media to promote the availability of victim assistance services from community-based organizations, regardless if a victim/survivor reports the crime.
- Learn from the research, and seek ways to increase crime reporting that recognize victim trauma and fears, as well as their concerns about how they will be viewed and treated if they choose to report.

For More Information

Please contact National Crime Victims’ Rights Week Community Awareness Project Consultant Anne Seymour via email at annese@atlantech.net; or by telephone at 202.547.1732.