

How to Juggle Priorities and Shifting Responsibilities During the COVID-19 Pandemic:

A Tip Sheet for Victim Service Providers (VSPs)

Managing priorities and responsibilities as a Victim Service Provider (VSP) during a public crisis can be extremely difficult. Your role in serving victims in your community is more important than ever. This tip sheet provides VSPs with the information needed to effectively serve victims of mass violence incidents (MVIs) and other crimes during times of public crisis.

- VSPs may need to shift priorities and take on additional duties during a public health crisis, such as COVID-19.
- There may be an increase in calls to crisis lines with concerns about the current situation, as well as an individual's victimization experience(s). Be prepared to respond to callers that do not meet your typical client demographic or those that do not qualify for your services. (Refer to your supervisor on how to handle out of scope callers).
- Address the impact that current safety precautions, such as the quarantine and social distancing, have on victims.
- Provide information about the crisis and normalize that this will impact their feelings and concerns related to their victimization experience(s). Some questions to consider asking victims to assess how they are managing the co-occurring distress between the current crisis and their prior victimization experience(s):
 - What can you do to decrease distressing symptoms and negative feelings?
 - What are you doing to stay connected?
 - What is available to you to meet your needs if other supports are less available?

Additional Unique Issues Presented by COVID-19

This pandemic impacts the entire community. However, victims of mass violence and other crimes may be especially “triggered” or “emotionally cued” or “prompted” by constant media bombardment. It is important to ask questions to determine if victims are feeling emotionally overwhelmed, excessively stressed, isolated, and/or experiencing financial hardship.

- Help victims identify ways to stay connected.
- Share tips and provide information about the use of technology to aid in virtual connections.
- Provide information and connections about available resources
- Provide current, accurate information about the pandemic, but do not overwhelm your clients.
- Proactively help clients to manage the lack of an “end date” to COVID. The inability to plan for the future can trigger stress, anxiety, loneliness, and depression.

Develop a COVID-19 protocol

- Define essential staff and services
- Outline procedures for shifting priorities & assigning additional duties
- Do scenario planning for what happens if certain providers get sick, or have to take family leave under the Family First Coronavirus Response Act
- Outline protocols for delivering services remotely (for example via telehealth, email, or phone)
- Notify the community, partnering agencies, and your service population about your protocol and how it affects your services
- Have updated information about COVID-19
 - Include medical, mental health, behavioral health and financial information

Tips for Self-Care/Personal Resilience

- Don't forget to take care of yourself. It is important to maintain boundaries, which means delegating to others, saying 'no,' and trying to avoid taking on too much by yourself.
- Find that balance between your personal and professional life.
- Maintain connections – both personal and professional
- Use coping strategies, such as controlled breathing and muscle relaxation, and practice them every day.
- Practice what you preach by working in exercise, healthy eating and sleep routines, and daily engagement in positive activities.
- Recognize when you need support from others.