



The Important Role of Systems-Based Victim Advocates in Responding to Mass Violence Incidents

Crime victim advocates are professionals trained to provide victims of crime with **compassionate and logistical support**. They are essential in the plan for and response to a mass violence incident (MVI). Systems and community-based advocates perform many of the same services, but there are some important differences in how they support victims, survivors and families. Importantly, these organizations often work together to provide the most comprehensive support from the incident through long-term healing.

Research shows: Survivors who work with advocates demonstrate a **decrease in secondary victimization**, feel less guilt and depression, and are **less reluctant to seek further help**.

Who Are Systems-based Advocates?

Systems-based advocates are found in a variety of agencies such as **law enforcement, prosecutor offices, courts, corrections and probation, and the military**. Generally, they are employees of criminal justice agencies and support victims who are involved in, or interact with, that system.

These positions are considered an arm of the agency they work for and are held to the same ethical standard of disclosure. As such, they **may be obligated to disclose information** that is considered exculpatory evidence. The advocate may be a social worker, mental health professional, paralegal, case manager, community outreach worker or legal advocate, but **they do not necessarily have the same confidentiality protection as community-based advocates**.

Like any advocate, their first concern is to **reduce further victimization and trauma**, provide emotional support, crisis intervention, referrals for services and assistance with practical needs. Their role is not to provide clinical mental health treatment.

GUIDE	INFORM	EMPOWER
Navigate the System	Provide Information	Support & Empower
Trained to guide survivors through the complex criminal justice process	Legal Information, victim rights updates, and case status	Ensure access to services and build victim confidence

This kind of support makes it more likely that victims will **cooperate with investigations**, stay engaged with the criminal justice system, and have a more positive outcome.



What Does This Look Like for Victims?

Emotional Support	Crisis intervention & Psychological First Aid (PFA) • Active listening, normalizing feelings of fear, anger, grief and confusion • Building confidence and reinforcing the crime was not their fault • Ongoing emotional check-ins and grief support, reducing secondary victimization
Information & Education	Explanation of the criminal justice process and the victim’s role in it • Information on victim’s rights • Updates on the status of the criminal case
Referrals & Resources	Connect victims to community resources: counseling, shelter, financial assistance, legal services • Short- and long-term needs • Referrals to community-based advocacy organizations and peer support groups
Accompaniment & Presence	Being with the victim throughout the criminal justice process: medical exams, depositions, court dates, trial and sentencing • Providing a calm and reassuring presence to reduce anxiety, fear and confusion. This support reduces further trauma and may improve victim participation
Safety Planning	Assist victims in developing individualized plans for their personal safety
Liaison Role	Acting as liaison between victims, witnesses, family members, police, and prosecutors • Improving communication and ensuring victims’ needs are appropriately represented to criminal justice professionals
Practical Needs	Help with paperwork such as protective orders or victim compensation claims • Assisting with emergency needs like transportation, housing, or childcare



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