

Tips for Community Leaders: Supporting Victims and Families

In the immediate aftermath

- Ensure a swift and coordinated response from law enforcement, local fire and EMS agencies, and other organizations to restore order and a sense of safety.
- Establish an emergency victim assistance professional (VAP) as part of the command center to coordinate communication and services.
- Establish a family assistance center (FAC) staffed with VAPs
- Identify the person(s) responsible for developing the FAC, including finding a location, calling local resources, supervising personnel and assigning duties
- Include trained VAPs at every level of planning and response. ([Sample Victim Liaison Job Description](#))
- Coordinate with the FBI's Victim Services Division which provides specially trained Victim Specialists to give immediate on-scene support to victims.
- Notify local mental health agencies about need for trained and screened counselors
- Send Victim Specialists to accompany FBI Special Agents to interviews to provide support to victims and/or to deliver death notification. Law enforcement officers may not have the time or skills to do Psychological First Aid.
- Assign a VAP to support the victim throughout the course of the criminal justice system.
- If possible, assign a permanent VAP to each victim. This keeps victims from having to tell their story over and over.
- Coordinate forensic interviews with counseling services
- Coordinate efforts with other professionals including the US Attorney's Office Victim Witnesses Coordinators and local VAPs
- Let people know where to go to seek help
- Quickly organize the collection of information so incorrect reports can be sorted out.
- Keep victims and the public informed with regular updates. Correct information interrupts rumors and reassures the community.
- Publicize what free services are available and where to find them

In the first weeks and months

- Identify which agency will apply for the federal and state Office for Victims of Crime funding. Only one organization can apply and diverse services can then be subcontracted under the umbrella grant.
- Set up a resiliency center as soon as possible.