

New Directions from the Field:

Victims' Rights and Services for the 21st Century

Recommendations for the News Media Community

The recommendations below, which appear in the May 1998 *New Directions* Report, have been reformatted for replication and distribution.

The news media play a significant role in public safety by providing important information about the nature and the extent of crime occurring in communities, and efforts to prevent crime and assist victims. Yet the news media also can have a negative impact on individual lives when victims are thrust, often unwillingly, into the limelight solely because of the crimes committed against them. Inconsistent reporting and insensitivity to a victim's privacy compound the drama of crime and often re-victimize the victim. To increase the news media's awareness of victims' needs for sensitive treatment and respect of privacy, the following recommendations are set forth by the field:

1. The news media should adopt codes of ethics or guiding principles that clearly delineate policies sensitive to and respectful of crime victims. These guidelines should include policies that discourage the identification of victims of sexual assault and other vulnerable victims, including children, without the victim's consent.
2. News organizations, victims, and victim service providers should sponsor frequent educational forums for journalists on sensitive media coverage of crime and victimization.
3. University departments of journalism should incorporate curricula that teach students about sensitivity to victims in the news media's coverage of crime.
4. Victim service providers should receive education about media relations and how to be a valuable resource for the press. Training and technical assistance for service providers should be made available from professionals in the journalism community.
5. The victim service and mental health professions, in conjunction with media representatives, should develop debriefing protocols to help journalists cope with the trauma and stress of covering crime and victimization.
6. State public policy leaders and media representatives should explore the development of legislation that would appropriately limit general public access to confidential information about sensitive victims.