

## Serving Specific Victims

Good Samaritans volunteers must adapt not only to the individual crime victim's personality, belief system, and circumstances but also to the specific nature of the crime. **The following exercise** can help volunteers prepare for encounters with victims of different crimes.

Think about each victim category and unique response or problem, and write down what you would do to assist these specific populations. (Adapted from *Bridging the Systems to Empower Victims: Mental Health and Victim Services Training Guide*, Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, published by the Office for Victims of Crime, May 2000)

<b>Older Victims</b>		
PROBLEM	COMMENTS	SOLUTION
1. Tremendous fear of crime	Senior citizens are no more likely to become victims than the rest of the population. Their fear, however, is much greater. Street crime is a serious problem in inner cities.	
2. Acute financial loss	Senior citizens on fixed incomes suffer.	
3. Change in lifestyle	Crime often changes habits.	
4. Loneliness	Crime further isolates older individuals, who are frequently very lonely.	
5. Family reactions	Often children pressure their parents to move in with them or into a nursing home for safety. These kinds of pressures undermine the older person's feeling of independence.	
6. Reluctance to get involved with criminal justice system	Older victims may fear the criminal justice system.	

## Burglary Victims

PROBLEM	COMMENTS	SOLUTION
1. Feel home has been violated, is no longer a safe haven	“If I can’t be safe in my home, where can I be safe?”	
2. Reluctant to leave home	Afraid that their house will be burglarized if they leave.	
3. Reluctant to stay home	Afraid they will encounter a burglar in the house.	
4. Express lots of “I Should Haves”	“I should have ... locked my door ... put in that new lock ... stayed home.”	
5. Heavy financial loss	Home may be stripped of valuables.	
6. Sorrow at loss of items with sentimental value	Often this personal loss concerns the victim more than a monetary loss.	
7. Disgust at the destruction that may accompany the burglary	Difficult to understand vandalism. Destroys faith in people.	
8. Realization of isolation	Particularly apparent with suburban, mobile families. Victims may feel frustrated and saddened that their neighbors don’t look out for them.	
9. Frustration with police who don’t investigate as thoroughly as the victim expects.	Believe that the police should immediately take fingerprints and send them and other potential evidence to a crime lab. Do not understand law enforcement’s limitations. Often feel they “know” who did it—and believe that police should be able to prove it.	
10. Expense of securing home	Victims with financial resources often go out and buy elaborate and expensive security systems. Indigent victims may not have money to make even the simplest repairs.	

<b>Robbery Victims</b>		
<b>PROBLEM</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>	<b>SOLUTION</b>
1. Fear of venturing out alone on the street	Often entails major changes in lifestyle. May have to curtail activities such as jogging and taking long walks.	
2. Relief at survival	Realization of mortality. In personal crimes, particularly when a weapon is used, the thought "I'm going to die" often flashes through the victim's mind.	
3. Frustration at loss of personal effects	The most frustrating part of the post-crime period may be all the hassles of replacing documents.	
4. Intimidation, fear of retaliation	Muggers often threaten, "I'll get you if you report this."	
5. For commercial robberies, fear on the job	Employees of fast food establishments and 24-hour stores are particularly vulnerable.	

<b>Assault Victims</b>		
<b>PROBLEM</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>	<b>SOLUTION</b>
1. Tremendous anger and bitterness	Feel the attack was personal, directed at them as individuals.	
2. Realization of mortality	Even more so than when robbed, victims believed at some point during the assault that they were going to die. If severely injured, they might not feel "I'm lucky to be alive."	
3. Physical injury	Victims may neglect medical care because they— a. Deny the problem b. Do not have the money or insurance needed for medical care	
4. Medical bills	For uninsured or underinsured victims, bills are often a large source of worry. Many people have never had to face the level of debt they may incur for medical care.	

5. Time lost from work	Families often lose a source of income. There is little short-term (1–6 weeks) financial assistance available.	
6. Fear of reprisals	May be more likely than in robbery cases.	
7. If the assailant is a family member or friend: feelings of betrayal	It's difficult to accept that someone the victim trusted turned on him or her. May be hard to avoid contact with the offender. May not want to report the crime.	
8. If an assault is the result of a traffic incident: fear of driving, bewilderment	These feelings are common. People use their cars as an outlet for anger. They take other frustrations out on anyone they see in their way.	
9. If the assault is the result of jealousy: the victim feels very vulnerable	Jealousy is a powerful motivator. These situations should be taken very seriously.	
10. For male victims: shame at "losing" a fight	These emotions can be very strong. Some men will feel they lost face.	

### **Survivor Victims (Family of a Homicide Victim)**

PROBLEM	COMMENTS	SOLUTION
1. Acceptance of death	Stages of grief.	
2. Funeral arrangements	Family is not prepared. They can be easy prey for unscrupulous morticians.	
3. Financial problems when a breadwinner is killed	Families may not be prepared for the financial burden, which is a difficult realization for them.	
4. Delayed emotional reaction	The initial feeling is denial. Often the early days are filled with support from family and friends. A difficult period sets in after 2 to 3 weeks.	
5. Children's reactions	Children need to know as much truth as they can handle.	
6. Need information about the case	Families may want to know every detail to assure themselves that the victim was in no way to blame.	

7. Media publicity	Survivors may learn of the homicide in a news report. Reports can contain information that is not flattering to the victim or information that the victim had not shared with family. Media may request interviews when the family is not prepared to answer questions.	
8. Feel powerless in the criminal justice system	Unless they are a direct witness, family members have no official role in the proceedings. They may want to gather evidence on their own, getting enmeshed in the details of the case.	
9. Ordeal during trial	The trial reactivates the grief process a year or more after the incident. Family may insist on attending the trial. The prosecutor will welcome their presence (affects the jury), but the family will probably hear the defense try to discredit the victim.	
10. Loneliness	Often unanticipated. Can be crushing.	
11. Can't stop ruminating	Survivors can't stop thinking about the deceased or about the actual homicide.	
12. Want revenge	Family members often want the murderer to die. They find it difficult to accept plea bargaining or a finding of insanity.	