

# General Guidelines for Volunteers

These are some general guidelines for making a phone call, going out on a service call, or providing other services to help a crime victim.

## Making the Initial Contact

### Calling the Victim

- **Give your first name** and say that you are a volunteer with the Good Samaritans crime victim assistance program. Do not give your home telephone number or address. If the victim needs to contact you, he or she can call the Good Samaritans office. It may be appropriate to give your full name later.
- **Identify the program.** For example, state that “Good Samaritans are community volunteers who work with the District Attorney’s Office and the police department.”
- **Protect yourself**—if calling from your home phone, use **\*67 (or 1167 on a rotary phone)** to block your number from displaying on caller ID.
- **Plan for sufficient time** to make your phone calls.
- **Make your calls in a private place** where they cannot be overheard.
- **If a followup call is needed**, find out when is the best time to call.
- **Have your resource and referral** information handy.
- **Keep your paperwork by the phone** and fill it out as soon as you hang up.

### Visiting the Victim

- If possible, **go to the victim’s home during the day** and always go with another trained volunteer.

### Communicating With the Victim

- **Give the victim only information that you know is true.** Never guess. The criminal justice and social services systems are complex and unpredictable. If you do not know the answer to a question, tell the victim that you do not know, but that you will find out and let him or her know.
- **Keep your promises.** This work is about integrity and trust. Never make promises you cannot keep.
- **Be accepting.** Victims come from a wide range of backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs. Their lifestyles may differ from your own. Do not be judgmental. If you find it difficult to work with a particular victim, ask program staff to reassign you.

- **Allow victims to talk about their anger.** It can help for victims to have someone listen while they vent. You can listen without agreeing.
- **Establish rapport** by voicing your concern that the victimization happened to them and that Good Samaritans would like to help.
  - **Ask the victim how he or she is doing.** If the victim is in, or has been in, a crisis, you often can detect it with this question. Ask if the victim if his or her normal routines have been affected. Ask if the victim is doing things that are different.
  - Remember that **you may see a different response on each call.** People are affected very differently by victimization. They may be unaffected, belligerent, or hysterical.
- **Explore and assess the victim's feelings and needs.**
  - Do this by—
    - Listening actively.
    - Clarifying.
    - Reflecting feelings and content.
  - Remember to—
    - Be respectful, warm, and empathic.
    - Deal with feelings first before problem solving.
    - Never make a situation worse than you found it.
- **Allow the victim to forgive in his or her own timeframe.** Avoid urging forgiveness when victims are in the crisis stage. They simply are not ready. Instead, listen to their anger, pain, and fear and allow them to replay the scene over and over. Victims will have plenty of time for forgiveness when the emotional crisis is over.
- **Be supportive.** Don't say anything that would imply that the victim is to blame for the crime. For example, "Did you lock the door?" or "Did you scream for help?" Do not second-guess victims' decisions or tell them what you would have done. If they are alive, the decisions they made were the right ones. Don't tell victims to put the experience behind them or to get on with their lives. Each person has his or her own timeframe for recovery.
- **Strong emotions impair our ability to remember** and process information. Give the victim only as much as he or she can handle and write down anything that must be remembered.
- **After defining the victim's primary and secondary needs,** determine which Good Samaritan services best meet those needs.
  - Primary needs are those that must be met for the victim to achieve immediate physical and emotional safety and security.
  - Secondary needs are related to preparing for the future or to quality-of-life issues.

- **Know your limitations and boundaries.** Sometimes, victims have issues in their lives that require the intervention of a trained, certified professional. Know when to step back and offer to help the victim get the additional help he or she needs.
- **Maintain confidentiality.** All information you receive as a Good Samaritans volunteer is confidential. You must keep names, addresses, and other information about crime victims in the strictest confidence. Do not discuss individual cases with family members or anyone outside the program.
- **Be an advocate, not a rescuer.** You cannot solve all of the victim's problems. Keep your volunteer work in balance. Victims need support that encourages their independence and enables them to get back on their feet.

### **Making Repairs to a Property**

- As soon as you receive a property repair assignment from the team leader, call the victim to set up a convenient time to do the repair.
- Ask for directions to the home and in what area of town it is located.
- Determine if the repair needs to be done on the same day. If it does and you cannot make the repair, ask your team leader to find another Good Samaritans volunteer to do the work..
- Determine from the resident what materials and tools you will need. To replace a lock, for example, you will need as much information as possible, including the type and manufacturer of the current lock, so you can pick up a new lock on the way to the home. Carry tools and equipment with you (e.g., glue, nails).
- If you need materials, contact a program staff member or volunteer team leader, who will have an inventory of available materials and access to them. If you must buy materials, keep the sales receipt for reimbursement or for your records of charitable donations.
- If you replace a lock, keep the old lock and key for possible use in another repair.
- Before you replace a lock in an apartment complex, check to see if management is responsible for replacing the lock.
- If the area you are going to is an unsafe neighborhood, have your team leader arrange police assistance.
- Complete the Volunteer Service Record Report and submit it to the office.