

Module 7: Overcoming Communication Challenges

Time Required

3 hours

Purpose

To help victim and disability service providers improve their communication skills when interacting with crime victims with disabilities.

Lessons

1. Interacting With Crime Victims (15 minutes)
2. Interacting With People With Disabilities (45 minutes)
3. Meeting Complex Communication Needs (1 hour, 45 minutes)
4. Service Animals (15 minutes)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- List several guidelines for interacting effectively with crime victims.
- List several guidelines for interacting effectively with people with disabilities.
- Identify ways to meet specific complex communication needs.
- Explain how to interact with service animals.

Handout

- Handout 7.1, Interacting With Crime Victims With Complex Communication Needs

Instructor Worksheet

- Instructor Worksheet 7.1, Interacting With Crime Victims With Complex Communication Needs With Answers

Participant Worksheets

- Worksheet 7.1, Interacting With Crime Victims With Complex Communication Needs
- Worksheet 7.2, Rape in New Jersey

Equipment and Materials

No special equipment or materials are required.

Preparation

- Review the video *The Ten Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities*.
- Prepare copies of Handout 7.1, Interacting With Crime Victims With Complex Communication Needs, one for each participant.



Show Visual 7-1.

Introduce Module 7 by **explaining** that the purpose of this module is to help victim and disability service providers improve their communication skills when interacting with crime victims with disabilities.



Show Visual 7-2.

Review the learning objectives.

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- List several guidelines for interacting effectively with crime victims.
- List several guidelines for interacting effectively with people with disabilities.
- Identify ways to meet specific complex communication needs.
- Explain how to interact with service animals.

1. Interacting With Crime Victims (15 minutes)



Show Visual 7-3.

Paraphrase:

Victim service professionals receive a considerable amount of training before they begin to provide assistance to crime victims. They also receive training in assisting target populations; hopefully, this includes crime victims who have disabilities.

A good victim service provider *always* observes respectful and empathetic communication guidelines when supporting victims of crime.

Ask the victim service providers to provide at least 10 guidelines for assisting victims of crime. **Write** the responses on a tear sheet. **Add** these responses if they are not mentioned by participants:

1. Always treat the crime victim with dignity and respect.
2. Always introduce yourself and explain what will happen.
3. Ask how the crime victim would like to be addressed.
4. Show compassion and empathy.

5. Speak directly to the victim rather than someone else.
6. Interact with adults as adults, not children
7. Listen attentively.
8. If you are unsure of what the victim has said, ask the victim to please repeat it; if you're still unsure paraphrase what you think you heard ask the victim if this is what she said.
9. Give the victim your full attention.
10. Be patient; and believe the individual, and remember that the crime victim is under a great deal of stress.

Ask: How many of these guidelines apply to supporting crime victims with disabilities?

2. Interacting With People With Disabilities (45 minutes)



Show Visual 7-4.

Paraphrase:

To those of you who are disability service professionals – don't these guidelines apply to you as well? Are there guidelines you would add?

So many of the basic guidelines for assisting crime victims are the same as assisting an individual with a disability. They help us see the individual as a person first. The fact that a person has a disability should not be a factor.



Show Visual 7-5.

DVD Show the video *The Ten Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities* that is in the PowerPoint slide by clicking on the black box in the slide. Show the entire video; it runs 26 minutes.

After showing the video, **ask** participants with disabilities or advocates for people with disabilities:

- Did you agree with the 10 commandments? Why or why not?
- Have you experienced or witnessed violations of these commandments?
- What was your reaction to the violation?

- Do you think these ten commandments reflect all the “commandments” of communicating with people who have disabilities? If not, what is missing?

Next, **ask** participants who are crime victim service providers:

- Have you experienced, witnessed, or even committed violations of these commandments? What happened?
- Do you think these commandments are reasonable and valid?
- Can you think of situations in which a commandment might have to be violated in supporting a crime victim with a disability?
- Do you think you would have any problems following these commandments when assisting a crime victim who has a disability?

Note how many of the guidelines mentioned on the tear sheet were the same ones mentioned in the video.

Refer participants to Appendix G in the Participant Manual, where there is a copy of The Ten Commandments of Communicating With People With Disabilities.

Paraphrase:

Each of these commandments is a lesson in communication, as well as disability etiquette.

Whether or not you think the ten commandments are all-inclusive, the lessons are valid.

All the guidelines we’ve discussed up to now are meant to convey respect; to let the other person know that you see them as a person first, not as a crime victim and not as an individual with a disability.

3. Meeting Complex Communication Needs (1 hour, 45 minutes)



Show Visual 7-6.

Paraphrase:

A disability may impact someone’s ability to communicate. For example, some people may not have the capacity to speak, and will rely on gestures or sign language to communicate. Others, such as people with severe cerebral palsy or people who are Deaf or have a hearing disability, may be able to speak, but their speech may be difficult to understand. And other people with disabilities may be able to speak clearly, but have difficulty understanding. These are complex communication issues, which can become exacerbated if the person is anxious or upset as the result of crime victimization.



Show Visual 7-7.

Paraphrase:

Complex communication issues are not always the result of physical disabilities. Depending on their specific illness, crime victims with psychiatric disabilities can exhibit a wide range of symptoms that impact communication. The DSM IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) identifies 15 general areas of adult mental illness. Remember that these labels may not prove to be useful since they don't guide how we communicate with a person with a particular type of mental illness.



Show Visual 7-8.

Paraphrase:

For example, a person with an obsessive compulsive disorder may feel compelled to rearrange objects in a room rather than interact with a crime victim advocate. A crime victim with a paranoid personality disorder may perceive hostility or malevolence in the advocate's attempt to help. Or, a crime victim with schizophrenia may believe those who attempt to help are able to read her mind, or that her thoughts are being transmitted to others.

Ask: What are some other ways a psychiatric disability might impact communication with a crime victim?



Show Visual 7-9.

Paraphrase:

In many cases, the crime itself is a stressor that can trigger the emergence or recurrence of symptoms. Victim service providers must be prepared to find methods of communicating with all crime victims, regardless of disability or type of disability.



Show Visual 7-10.

Paraphrase:

It's important to understand that abusers and perpetrators may take advantage of communication issues to silence people with disabilities. Do you remember, in the *End the Silence* video, there is a man who uses a speaking device, a Liberator, as a communication tool. He operates the Liberator with his foot, and it is the only way he can communicate. His abuser hit his foot with a ruler, and burns his foot, and breaks his Liberator machine. Without a means of communication, he has limited means of resisting or reporting the abuse.

Ask: What other ways might an abuser use communication issues to silence a crime victim?



Show Visual 7-11.

Paraphrase:

Communicating effectively with victims of crime is challenging. When the crime victim has a disability that further impacts communication, the challenge is even greater. However, the need to communicate effectively in the crisis of being a victim of crime is critical.



Show Visual 7-13.

Instructor Note:

You will use **Instructor Worksheet 7.1, Interacting With Crime Victims With Complex Communication Needs With Answers**, for this activity. If any of the responses included on **Instructor Worksheet 7.1** are not covered by participants, include those responses during the activity debrief, as time allows.

Introduce the activity.



Activity: Interacting With Crime Victims With Complex Communication Needs (30 minutes)

- 1. Mix groups to ensure that each table includes as many disciplines as possible.*
- 2. Refer participants to Worksheet 7.1, Interacting With Crime Victims With Complex Communication Needs, in the Participant Manual. Explain that the worksheet lists several types of complex communication needs related to various disabilities.*
- 3. Assign each group a specific communication need and allow them about 15 minutes to list as many communication/interaction guidelines as they can for their assigned communication need.*
- 4. Ask each group to share their responses with the rest of the participants.*
- 5. After each group responds ask other groups if they have anything to add to the list.*

Debrief the activity by **distributing and discussing Handout 7.1, Interacting With Crime Victims With Complex Communication Needs.**

Tell participants that these tips for communicating with crime victims with various types of disabilities are not meant to be an in-depth resource. They are, however, general guidelines that you might find helpful when working with crime victims with disabilities. The guidelines have been adapted from *A Law Enforcement Guide for Working with Children with Autism, Intellectual and Communication Disabilities*, developed by Scott J. Modell, Ph.D. and Marcie Davis, M.S., and published by the New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, Inc., and by the Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers, www.adata.org/adaportal/Communication/communication-techniques.html.

Wrap up the activity by explaining that crime victims may not always be able to communicate clearly due to the trauma of the crime, a disability, a combination of the two, or some other reason. The victim service provider must be prepared to accommodate these situations, and quickly.

Ask participants to consider these same communication issues, but assume that the victim has acquired them as a result of the crime. How would the interaction be different?



Show Visual 7-13.

Paraphrase:

Sometimes, even if the mechanics of communication are not problematic, *understanding* may be. For example, you may be able to talk to someone, and he or she may be able to respond, but that doesn't mean that an individual has a complete understanding of what you say. This is particularly true of crime victims who have intellectual or developmental or psychiatric disabilities.

Often crime victims are uncomfortable discussing a crime, particularly if it was sexual in nature. Some may not know the correct terminology. And others, especially those persons with developmental disabilities, may not understand that a crime has actually occurred. It's helpful if victim service providers are knowledgeable about the characteristics of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, such as listening for euphemisms and metaphors, and a reluctance to discuss the crime itself. While it's not within the scope of this training to teach you how to identify these nuances, training and information are available.



Show Visual 7-14.

Introduce the activity.



Activity: Rape in New Jersey (20 minutes)

1. *Refer participants to Worksheet 7.2, Rape in New Jersey, in the Participant Manual.*
2. *Allow them a few minutes to read the description, then generate a discussion by asking the following questions.*



Show Visual 7-15.

If you were providing support to this young woman as a crime victim or disability service provider:

- Would it be your responsibility to try to obtain the truth from the crime victim? If so, what would you have done to find out what happened?
- How could you help make the crime victim understand what had happened, and the importance of explaining exactly what happened?
- What resources might you find helpful to the crime victim to understand what happened to her and what your role is?
- What do you do if someone you are assisting changes his or her story about an incident? What do you do if the person has an intellectual or developmental disability?



Show Visual 7-16.

Paraphrase:

If a crime victim has acquired a disability as a result of a crime, the issues are very different. Not only is the crime victim dealing with the crime itself, but he or she is adapting to a profound change in their life. A crime victim with a disability may very well be more likely to focus on the crime itself, while the crime victim who has just become disabled may be more concerned about the newly acquired disability.

Ask: What additional issues would you need to consider when offering support to a crime victim with a disability acquired from the crime?

Communicating with crime victims – whether or not they have a disability – is not easy. But that’s our job – to provide support to all crime victims. We need to see the person first, treat them with respect and empathy, and identify any supports they may need. In addition, we need to do what we can to ensure that they are as safe as possible from future harm.



Show Visual 7-17.

Paraphrase:

In many cases, a Safety Plan or Individual Response Plan can be vital in creating a sense of security for the crime victim, and protecting the individual from further abuse. Response plans should be tailored specifically for the individual at risk.

Refer participants to Appendix H in the Participant Manual.

Paraphrase:

Here is an example of a safety plan for victims of domestic violence, and an Individual Response Plan for a child with a developmental disability.

Remember, the types of supports crime victims need may change over time. Be patient, understanding, and reach outside your own comfort zone to ensure victims receive timely, appropriate, and efficient services.

Refer participants to Appendix I – Disability Resources and Organizations. **Explain** that most of these organizations can provide more information on how to communicate with people with various types of disabilities.

4. Service Animals (15 minutes)



Show Visual 7-18.

Paraphrase:

Service animals are defined as dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. Beginning on March 15, 2011, only dogs were recognized as service animals under titles II and III of the ADA. Examples of work or tasks include:

- Guiding people who are blind.
- Alerting people who are deaf.
- Pulling a wheelchair.
- Alerting others and protecting a person who is having a seizure.
- Reminding a person with mental illness to take prescribed medications.
- Calming a person with posttraumatic stress disorder during an anxiety attack.

Service animals are working animals, not pets. The work or task a dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person's disability. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service animals under the ADA.

Some state and local laws define service animal more broadly than the ADA does. Information about such laws can be obtained from the State Attorney General's Office.

There are also emotional support animals, which provide emotional support in cases of extreme anxiety or panic attacks. Emotional support animals do not necessarily have "task specific" training that supports the disabled person and are therefore trained differently than service animals. Generally, title II and title III entities must permit service animals to accompany people with disabilities in all areas where members of the public are allowed to go.

Do *not* pet service animals; they might lose their concentration, which could put their owners in danger. They are working animals, not pets!



Show Visual 7-19.

Review the learning objectives and **ask** whether these were met.

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- List several guidelines for interacting effectively with crime victims.
- List several guidelines for interacting effectively with people with disabilities.
- Identify ways to meet specific complex communication needs.
- Explain how to interact with service animals.



Show Visual 7-20.

Ask if there are any final questions before moving to the next module.

