

Module 3: Ethics in Victim Services

Purpose

This module introduces participants to the concept of ethics and to the Ethical Standards for Victim Assistance Providers developed by the National Victim Assistance Standards Consortium (NVASC).

Lessons

1. Ethics and You
2. National Victim Assistance Standards

Learning Objectives

By the end of the module, you will be able to:

- Recognize when a person is acting in an ethically questionable way.
- State at least one of the NVASC's ethical standards for victim assistance providers and how it is used in an organization other than your own.
- State at least one way to make ethics and standards part of an organizational culture.

Ethics Background

For thousands of years, philosophers, scientists, and teachers in civilized societies have contemplated such matters as the meaning of life, what behaviors are most valued, and the distinction between right and wrong behavior. Perhaps this tendency to pursue such matters is just part of being human or necessary for surviving peacefully. Aristotle in the neo-Greek era taught that leading a virtuous life was the path to happiness and life satisfaction.

As humankind evolved, societies developed their own systems of moral principles based on values. These values are ideals that the society upholds as reflective of the way the world should be and how people should act toward one another. Many of these moral principles are nearly universal regardless of culture or historical time period. For example, most societies expect members to refrain from murder, rape, theft, assault, slander, and fraud. These standards almost always reflect the values of honesty, compassion, and loyalty.

The moral principles are the foundation of ethics, which is the professional discipline dealing with standards of right and wrong. These standards serve as a guide for human behavior and are usually stated in terms of obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues. Developing a code of ethics has been an essential part of all professional disciplines since the ancient professions of medicine and law were established. Victim assistance began as a grassroots movement in the late 1960s but is now evolving as an established profession.

Code of Ethics Purpose

When a profession establishes a code of ethics, the code serves several purposes. It safeguards the reputation of the profession, protects the public from exploitation, and furthers competent and responsible practice.

The foundation for the victim assistance code of ethics consists of underlying values such as client autonomy, privacy, and self-determination; objectivity and abstention from abuse; honesty and equity of service; compassion and respect for individuals; social responsibility; confidentiality; and working within one's range of competence.

National Victim Assistance Standards

Since the late 1960s, the field of victim assistance has evolved from a grassroots movement of committed individuals and nonprofit organizations into a professional discipline. It now encompasses a diversity of organized community and systems-based individuals and organizations whose services to crime victims range the entire gamut of the justice experience.

As this evolution toward professionalism has continued, there has been a call on many levels for greater accountability by victim assistance providers. This is only natural for a movement increasingly recognized by the juvenile and criminal justice systems, academia, and the public at large as a credible, worthwhile and much-needed service. To meet this demand, the U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime formed the National Victim Assistance Standards Consortium (NVASC) in 2000 to develop model program, competency, and ethical standards of conduct for the field of victim assistance. NVASC researched existing standards in similar professions, polled professionals in the field of victim assistance, and utilized the expertise and experience of a representative and diverse core of victim assistance professionals. The result of this work is the NVASC *Standards for Victim Assistance Programs and Providers* published by the Center for Child and Family Studies, College of Social Work at the University of South Carolina.

The book *Ethics in Victim Services* is based on the NVASC model of ethical standards. It is designed to help victim assistance professionals identify, analyze, and resolve the many ethical dilemmas they face in their daily work. This book was used to develop this course.

Resources

NVASC Standards for Victim Assistance Programs and Providers

Published by the Center for Child and Family Studies

College of Social Work

University of South Carolina

<http://www.sc.edu/ccfs/training/consortium.html>

Ethics in Victim Services

Melissa Hook and Edwin Meese

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Worksheet 3.1

Is It Ethical?

Scenario 1

Jo, a woman who is trying to leave her violent husband, asks Betty, the victim assistance provider at a local domestic violence shelter, to help her find a place to stay for a while. The shelter has been filled to capacity the past 2 weeks. Betty's friend has a vacant garage apartment. After checking with her friend, Betty offers the apartment as a safe place for Jo and her two young children to stay until everything is settled.

Scenario 2

Marsha, who is a victim assistance provider, is working with Jean, a stalking victim who wants to sue the employer of the man who stalked her. The stalker accessed Jean's financial records through the database at his place of employment. Marsha advises Jean, "Getting involved in a stressful lawsuit isn't a good idea right now. You really need to focus on your recovery."

Scenario 3

Kevin, a victim assistance provider, has been working with Heidi for a couple months. She recently moved to a different town to get away from her abusive boyfriend, and she has asked Kevin not to share her new address and phone number with anyone. One day she calls Kevin; she is distraught and reluctantly discloses that she is thinking about suicide, but she begs him not to tell anyone. He explains that he is obligated to report someone who is suicidal and will give her contact information to law enforcement.

Scenario 4

Rebecca, a white victim assistance provider who majored in psychology in college, realizes that an African-American victim she is working with, Shauna, has a substance abuse problem. Shauna is just starting to open up to Rebecca after several weeks of silence. When Rebecca suggests that Shauna see a substance abuse counselor or check out a 12-step program, Shauna accuses Rebecca of trying to get rid of her because she is black. Rebecca denies the accusation and assures Shauna that she will continue working with her. Rebecca figures that she has had enough experience to help Shauna with her substance abuse problem.

Scenario 5

Jeff, who works long hours as a victim assistance provider at a law enforcement agency, regularly takes records home and finishes up his documentation at night. After he eats dinner with his wife and two adolescent daughters, Jeff spreads his work on the kitchen table and puts in a couple more hours.

Worksheet 3.2

Identify the Relevant NVASC Standards

Scenario: Sue and Connie

Sue, a rape crisis advocate, has been called to the emergency room to assist Connie, a rape victim. Connie is too embarrassed to describe, in the presence of a police officer, the intimate details of the rape. Eventually, the officer agrees to leave the room but asks Sue to report the details of Connie's story to him. According to her agency's policy, Sue should decline because doing what the officer requested would allow her to be subpoenaed if the case comes to trial.

Scenario: June and Abeir

June, the victim services coordinator for a large metropolitan police department, is particularly fond of Abeir, a young Sudanese immigrant who has filed a report on her boyfriend after he threatened to kill Abeir's young daughter. June soon realizes that Abeir has severe mental health problems exacerbated by dynamics within her family. June decides Abeir needs therapy to deal with her anger and understand the threat these issues pose for her daughter. Because June has 10 years' experience as a psychotherapist, she is considering counseling Abeir herself, despite having little knowledge of Abeir's culture.

Scenario: David and Emma

David, the chief district attorney popular for his get-tough policy on crime, is being honored at a political dinner for his public service work. After David's thank-you speech, Emma, a victim assistance provider at a domestic violence shelter, realizes she has an opportunity to ask that he publicly defend his "no-drop" policy, which prevents women from dropping charges against their batterers once they have made a report. A batterer has recently carried out his threat to murder his wife if she ever brought charges against him, even though the woman had desperately tried to drop the charges.

Scenario: Lee and Lisa

Lee Chan works at a nonprofit advocacy center where she provides support to victims of abuse and neglect. She is working with Lisa, a 19-year-old immigrant who lives with her father, sisters, and two aunts and uncles (none of whom have green cards) in a Southeast Asian neighborhood. They suffered greatly in their country of origin, and Lisa feels it is her duty to keep her family together in America. One of Lisa's uncles molests her, but she refuses to report him. She is terrified that an official report will trigger his deportation, and the whole family will turn against her.

Scenario: Carlotta and Inez

Carlotta, a victim assistance provider at the police department, often encounters young women in the Hispanic community who are at risk of violence when they break up with their gang-member boyfriends. Today, Inez was fired upon by someone she believes (but cannot prove) was her ex-boyfriend. Inez reluctantly agrees to stay out of sight while Carlotta looks for a safe place for her to stay. Later that afternoon, Carlotta receives a call saying that Inez has been hospitalized for a gunshot wound she received while standing in front of a popular gang hangout. Carlotta is so angry with Inez for not staying home that she does not want to see her.

Scenario: Sam and Little Saigon

Sam, a community-based crisis responder who speaks Vietnamese, is called out on a homicide in Little Saigon, a city neighborhood where Asian immigrants reside. Neighbors have witnessed the shooting of a teenaged boy, and the alleged killer has been arrested. The boy's parents arrive as the emergency medical team is preparing to remove his body. The parents insist that his body cannot be moved until the Buddhist monk, who is on the way, conducts a short ceremony to support their son's departing soul. A hostile crowd, shouting in Vietnamese, grows as the police officer in charge proceeds with the removal.

Worksheet 3.3

NVASC Standards for Victim Assistance Programs and Providers

Developed by the National Victim Assistance Standards Consortium (NVASC)

SECTION I: Scope of Services

ETHICAL STANDARD 1.1: The victim assistance provider understands his or her legal responsibilities, limitations, and the implications of his/her actions within the service delivery setting, and performs duties in accord with laws, regulations, policies, and legislated rights of persons served.

ETHICAL STANDARD 1.2: The victim assistance provider accurately represents his or her professional title, qualifications, and/or credentials in relationships with persons served and in public advertising.

ETHICAL STANDARD 1.3: The victim assistance provider maintains a high standard of professional conduct.

ETHICAL STANDARD 1.4: The victim assistance provider achieves and maintains a high level of professional competence.

ETHICAL STANDARD 1.5: The victim assistance provider who provides a service for a fee informs a person served about the fee at the initial session or meeting.

SECTION II: Coordinating within the Community

ETHICAL STANDARD 2.1: The victim assistance provider conducts relationships with colleagues and other professionals in such a way as to promote mutual respect, confidence, and improvement of services.

ETHICAL STANDARD 2.2: The victim assistance provider shares knowledge and encourages proficiency in victim assistance among colleagues and other professionals.

ETHICAL STANDARD 2.3: The victim assistance provider serves the public interest by contributing to the improvement of systems that impact victims of crime.

SECTION III: Direct Services

ETHICAL STANDARD 3.1: The victim assistance provider respects and attempts to protect the victim's civil rights.

ETHICAL STANDARD 3.2: The victim assistance provider recognizes the interests of the person served as a primary responsibility.

ETHICAL STANDARD 3.3: The victim assistance provider refrains from behaviors that communicate victim blame, suspicion regarding victim accounts of the crime, condemnation for past behavior, or other judgmental, anti-victim sentiments.

ETHICAL STANDARD 3.4: The victim assistance provider respects the victim's right to self-determination.

ETHICAL STANDARD 3.5: The victim assistance provider preserves the confidentiality of information provided by the person served or acquired from other sources before, during, and after the course of the professional relationship.

ETHICAL STANDARD 3.6: The victim assistance provider avoids conflicts of interest and discloses any possible conflict to the program or person served as well as to prospective programs or persons served.

ETHICAL STANDARD 3.7: The victim assistance provider terminates a professional relationship with a victim when the victim is not likely to benefit from continued services.

ETHICAL STANDARD 3.8: The victim assistance provider does not engage in personal relationships with persons served which exploit professional trust or could impair the victim assistance provider's objectivity and professional judgment.



ETHICAL STANDARD 3.9: The victim assistance provider does not discriminate against a victim or another staff member on the basis of race/ethnicity, language, sex/gender, age, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, social class, economic status, education, marital status, religious affiliation, residency, or HIV status.

ETHICAL STANDARD 3.10: The victim assistance provider furnishes opportunities for colleague victim assistance providers to seek appropriate services when traumatized by a criminal event or client interaction.

SECTION IV: Administration and Evaluation

ETHICAL STANDARD 4.1: The victim assistance provider reports to appropriate authorities the conduct of any colleague or other professional (including self) that constitutes mistreatment of a person served or brings the profession into dishonor.

Module 3
Ethics in Victim Services

Learning Objectives

- ❖ Recognize when a person is acting in an ethically questionable way.
- ❖ State at least one NVASC ethical standard for victim service providers.
- ❖ State at least one way to make ethical standards a part of an organizational culture.

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Ethics and You

3-3

Activity

Is It Ethical?

Worksheet 3.1

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Ethics Background

- ❖ Ancient civilized societies developed systems of moral principles based on values.
- ❖ Early ethical codes of law and medicine were set in place.
- ❖ Victim assistance evolved into an established profession.



3-5

Code of Ethics Purposes

- ❖ Safeguards reputation of the profession
- ❖ Protects public from exploitation
- ❖ Furthers competent and responsible practice


3-6

Foundation for Code of Ethics

- ❖ Client autonomy, privacy and self-determination
- ❖ Objectivity and abstention from abuse
- ❖ Honesty and equity of service
- ❖ Compassion and respect for individuals
- ❖ Social responsibility and confidentiality
- ❖ Working within one's range of competence

3-7

National Victim Assistance Standards



3-8

Victim Assistance Field Background

- ❖ Moved from grassroots beginnings to a professional discipline
- ❖ Encompasses a wide diversity of individuals and organizations
- ❖ Provides services over the entire range of the justice experience

3-9

Victim Assistance Field Background

- ❖ Greater accountability by victim assistance providers was needed.
- ❖ Field is viewed as credible, worthwhile, and providing much-needed services.
- ❖ National Victim Assistance Standards Consortium (NVASC) was formed to develop professional standards for the field.

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NVASC

National Victim Assistance Standards Consortium

- ❖ Created in 2000 by OVC
- ❖ Purpose: To create model program, competency, and ethical standards
- ❖ Result: *Standards for Victim Assistance Programs and Providers*
- ❖ *Ethics in Victim Services* – book based on the NVASC model

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NVASC Ethical Standards

- ❖ **Scope of Services**
 - ◆ Professional activities
- ❖ **Coordinating within the Community**
 - ◆ Collaboration
- ❖ **Direct Services**
 - ◆ Relationships
- ❖ **Administration and Evaluation**
 - ◆ Monitors activities and relationships

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Scope of Services

- ❖ Professional activities
 - Follow the law
 - Accurate representation
 - Professional conduct
 - Professional competence
 - Inform about costs

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Coordinating within the Community

- ❖ Collaboration
 - ◆ Respect colleagues
 - ◆ Share knowledge
 - ◆ Improve systems

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Direct Services

- ❖ Relationships
 - ◆ Respect civil rights
 - ◆ Protect victim interests
 - ◆ Nonjudgmental
 - ◆ Self-determination
 - ◆ Confidentiality

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Direct Services

- ❖ Relationships
 - Terminate appropriately
 - Good boundaries
 - Non-discriminatory
 - Support colleagues
 - Avoid conflict of interest

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Administration and Evaluation

- ❖ Monitors activities and relationships
 - ◆ Reports mistreatment
 - ◆ Reports misconduct

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Activity

*Identify the Relevant
NVASC Standards*

Worksheet 3.2

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Activity

*NVASC Standards
in Your Organization*

Worksheet 3.3

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Is it Ethical?
Revisited

- ❖ Was the victim assistance provider acting in an ethically questionable manner?
- ❖ Any additional rationale?
- ❖ What NVASC standards might apply?

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Ethical Organizations

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Activity

Creating Ethical Organizations

3-22

Review of Module Learning Objectives

- ❖ Recognize when a person is acting in an ethically questionable way.
- ❖ State at least one NVASC ethical standard for victim service providers.
- ❖ State at least one way to make ethical standards a part of an organizational culture.

 U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
Office for Victims of Crime



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