

# Responding to Victims and the Public

## Lesson Purpose

This lesson provides information for law enforcement officers to effectively **communicate and interact** with victims and the public, fostering cooperation and encouraging victim participation in the justice system.

---

## Training Objectives

1. **Correct Actions When Responding:**
    - Understand and demonstrate behaviors that support **victim respect and empathy** in all interactions.
  2. **Characteristics of Trauma:**
    - Recognize trauma symptoms and learn methods to support trauma-affected victims.
  3. **Sexual Assault Response:**
    - Apply specific protocols and sensitivity when assisting sexual assault victims.
  4. **Communication with Impaired Individuals:**
    - **Audibly Impaired:** Use visual aids, sign language, or interpreters.
    - **Visually Impaired:** Guide and provide verbal descriptions of surroundings.
    - **Physically Disabled:** Provide appropriate assistance respecting the individual's dignity.
  5. **Responding to Elderly Citizens:**
    - Recognize heightened vulnerability, adapt communication, and provide reassurance.
  6. **Non-English Speaking Individuals:**
    - Employ respectful, clear communication and language support.
  7. **Eligibility for Victim Compensation:**
    - **North Carolina Victims Compensation Services:** Eligibility requirements and contact procedures.
  8. **Effective Communication with Limited English Proficient Individuals:**
    - Utilize appropriate communication methods ensuring civil rights compliance.
- 

## Key Legislative References (NCGS)

Several **North Carolina General Statutes (NCGS)** establish protocols and rights for law enforcement response to victims. Important statutes to understand include:

- **NCGS 14-112.2:** Protection for elderly and disabled adults.
- **NCGS 15A-824:** Defines "victim" and "witness" rights.
- **NCGS 15A-825:** Mandates treatment due to victims and witnesses.
- **NCGS 15A-831:** Responsibilities of law enforcement in notifying and assisting victims.

- **NCGS 20-175.2:** Right-of-way laws for pedestrians with white canes or guide dogs, prioritizing blind individuals' safety.
  - **NCGS 90D:** Guidelines on interpreters and transliterators for effective communication with deaf individuals.
- 

## Victims' Rights and Law Enforcement Responsibilities

- **Victim's Rights** (NC Legislature): Victims must be informed about medical services, protection options, case progress, compensation eligibility, and plea deals. They have rights to **make impact statements** and be notified of case outcomes.
  - **Law Enforcement Duties:**
    - Within **72 hours** after identifying a victim, provide details on medical services, compensation, case contacts, pretrial release information, and the status of the accused.
    - Notify the district attorney's office of the victim's contact details if the victim consents.
- 

## Responding to Trauma

1. **Primary Injuries:**
    - *Physical:* Symptoms include rapid eye movements, nausea, and physiological shock responses.
    - *Emotional/Behavioral:* Symptoms include denial, mood swings, and feelings of guilt.
  2. **Secondary Injuries:**
    - Caused by **insufficient support** or lack of empathy from professionals, which can negatively impact a victim's recovery.
  3. **Triggers:**
    - *Words, smells, colors,* and other stimuli can remind victims of trauma, potentially reactivating traumatic responses.
- 

## Sexual Assault Victim Response

1. **Physical and Emotional Reactions:**
  - May include headaches, insomnia, flashbacks, anxiety, and self-blame.
2. **Crime Scene and Evidence Preservation:**
  - Officers should protect evidence by advising the victim not to bathe, eat, or remove clothing.
  - **Local rape crisis centers** should be contacted to provide immediate support.
3. **Interviewing Victims:**

- The officer's demeanor should be **objective and non-judgmental**. Allow victims to recount events at their own pace, and encourage them to access forensic services for evidence collection.
- 

## Communication with Impaired Individuals

### Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- **Communication Tips:**
  - Make eye contact, use gestures, and bring in interpreters if necessary.
  - Use **writing if needed** and keep messages short and clear.
  - **Ask about communication preferences** (sign language, lip-reading, etc.), and ensure privacy to prevent suspects from intercepting messages in sign language.

### Visually Impaired

- **Interaction Tips:**
  - Introduce yourself clearly, offer your arm if guiding, and describe obstacles.
  - **Do not distract guide dogs**; they are working animals.
  - When helping a blind person cross the street, recognize their **right-of-way per NCGS 20-175.2**.

### Individuals with Physical Disabilities

- **General Considerations:**
    - Offer assistance respectfully and let victims instruct on their needs.
    - **Respect assistive devices** as part of the person's personal space.
    - Ensure public areas are clear of obstacles and help the victim feel comfortable by adjusting the environment to their needs.
- 

## Elderly Victims

Elderly individuals are especially vulnerable to **financial crimes** and **physical or psychological harm**.

1. **Interviewing the Elderly:**
  - Make the victim comfortable, allow breaks, and avoid **pressuring for information**.
  - Avoid assumptions about health or mental ability; instead, ask the victim if they need special assistance.
2. **Financial Exploitation:**
  - The elderly may be targeted due to their financial assets. Financial crimes against the elderly can cause significant personal losses and emotional trauma, with annual estimates of losses exceeding **\$2.9 billion**.

---

## Victim Assistance Programs

1. **North Carolina Victims Compensation Services:**
    - Victims of serious crimes can access funds to cover medical, counseling, and other costs. Law enforcement officers must inform victims of this service within **72 hours** of identification.
  2. **Assistance Program for Victims of Rape and Sex Offenses:**
    - Mandates free forensic medical exams for victims, regardless of whether they report the crime to law enforcement.
- 

## Communication Tips for Specific Disabilities

1. **Deaf and Hard of Hearing:**
    - Establish **eye contact**; do not shout or exaggerate lip movements, and consider written communication.
  2. **Visually Impaired:**
    - Give clear descriptions of surroundings and **use verbal directions**.
  3. **Physically Disabled:**
    - Ask for instructions on how best to assist and avoid making assumptions about limitations.
  4. **Elderly:**
    - Communicate with patience, respect, and awareness of possible physical or cognitive limitations due to aging.
- 

## Additional Important Points

- **Respect the victim's comfort level:** Avoid forcing interactions or responses, especially in trauma or elderly interviews.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Recognize and adapt communication methods for non-English speakers, employing interpreters as needed.
- **Preserve Victim Dignity:** In all interactions, respect the personal and cultural boundaries of each individual.