

## What is a Victim Advocate?

Victim Advocates are trained to support individuals who have experienced crime or trauma. They offer emotional support, information, and resources to help victims navigate the legal system and cope with the aftermath of their experience. Advocates assist victims in understanding their rights, accompany them to court proceedings, and provide referrals to counseling, shelters, and other services. Their work is centered on ensuring the victim's voice is heard and their needs are met, without imposing decisions on them. Victim Advocates empower survivors to regain control over their lives during a difficult time.

While Victim Advocates provide essential support, there are limits to what they can do, and some misconceptions surround their role. Here are a few things that people may mistakenly believe a Victim Advocate can do, but they should not:

1. **Offer Legal Advice or Representation:** Victim Advocates are not lawyers. They can provide general information about legal processes and rights, but they cannot offer legal advice, interpret the law, or represent victims in court. For legal assistance, they often refer victims to attorneys or legal aid services.
2. **Make Decisions for the Victim:** Advocates are there to support and empower, not to make decisions on behalf of victims. Their role is to provide information, discuss options, and help victims understand the choices available to them. The ultimate decisions must always rest with the victim.
3. **Force Victims to Report Crimes:** While they encourage reporting and provide information on how to do so, Victim Advocates cannot and should not force or pressure anyone into reporting a crime. The decision to involve law enforcement is personal, and advocates respect the victim's autonomy in that process.
4. **Serve as a Therapist:** Although Victim Advocates provide emotional support, they are not licensed counselors or therapists. While they may offer short-term crisis intervention and coping strategies, long-term mental health support should be provided by a licensed professional, to whom advocates can refer victims.
5. **Act as Investigators:** Victim Advocates do not investigate crimes or gather evidence. Their role is separate from law enforcement; they are there solely to support the victim, without engaging in the investigative process.