# Service Standards

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All grantees must meet the service standards established by the Section, Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault and the organizations providing survivor of homicide and other violent crime advocate certification and general crimes advocate certification.

Crime victims have a multitude of needs that cannot be met by just one agency or provider. The standards that follow identify the rights and services crime victims deserve and as legislatively afforded to them according to Iowa Code 915. All crime victims, agency staff, management and volunteers have an obligation to know about these rights and services and to work collaboratively with other agencies in their communities to provide the best coordinated and collaborative continuum of care available. In general grantees are to adopt standards of practice which:

- Respects people's rights and dignity, especially and specifically during challenging and life altering situations when service providers engage with them in the aftermath of criminal activity and victimization.
- Sets the level of competence expected to assure that all crime victims in Iowa will receive the same or similar level of care for the time they are engaged with any and all service agencies.
- Creates a level of integrity all victim service professionals can offer to the communities in which they live as well as to other victim counselors.
- Encourages and promotes the professionalism of victim counselors to be supporting, advocating and caring for individuals, families and groups who are crime victims and to show care and concern for their neighbors, co-workers and communities.
- Ensures a standard level of service provided to all crime victims in Iowa regardless of type of victimization or location.
- Are ethical, victim-centered and trauma-informed.
- Recognize the value of specialized, skilled providers serving all crime victims.
- Instill confidence in clients and the community that victim services staff and volunteers have skills and competencies to provide victim/survivor-centered, trauma-informed intervention with those impacted by crime across Iowa.

**Victim Counselor, Victim Advocate Best Practices, Expectations**

Victim counselors should engage in activities which allow them to participate in their communities, work to prevent victimization and care for victims and communities in the aftermath of crime. Victim counselors have an ethical responsibility to all who seek assistance, including those from different cultures.

Victim counselors are expected to be competent, knowledgeable regarding violent crimes, and seek ways to increase their knowledge, skills and experience. They will refer victims to other agencies or seek consultation from others when it is best for victims.

Victim counselors are to be honest, credible and transparent with those they serve. They are expected to explain the services their organization can provide, what the client can expect from the organization, how to

file a grievance, confidentiality, informed consent and how to work with the criminal justice system. In addition, victim counselors are to ensure clients they have the option to accept or refuse services and in which situations they can be anonymous.

Safety, stability, healing and justice for victims are priorities for victims and their advocates. Advocates must adhere to strict relationship boundaries and consider privilege and power dynamics, the difference between work and social relationships, and any prior non-victim type relationships, connections or knowledge of the victim. Because victimization may be a longterm issue, creating personal friendships between an Advocate and a client after receiving services is always inappropriate. Provision of services to persons related by consanguinity or affinity, within the third degree is prohibited. Sexual/romantic relationships with current or former clients is prohibited and is also a crime under Iowa Code Chapter 709.15.

Victim Counselors will work to increase victim safety; will respect the authority and autonomy of the adult victim to direct her own life; and will hold the perpetrator, not the victim, responsible for the violent behavior and for stopping the violence.

Victim Counselors will treat the client with respect and honesty in both verbal and nonverbal communication.

Victim Counselors will share knowledge they have with clients as it pertains to the client's situation. This may include but is not limited to the dynamics of domestic violence, sexual abuse, lethality issues, safety planning, effects on children, and the social and political issues that contribute to the continuance of sexual abuse and/or domestic violence and/or other violent crime.

Victim Counselors will accept what a client tells them about the violence.

Victim Counselors should withdraw services precipitously only under unusual circumstances, considering all factors in the situation and taking care to minimize possible adverse effects.

Victim Counselors who anticipate termination or interruption of service to clients should notify those individuals promptly and seek the transfer, referral, or termination of service in relation to the client's needs and preferences.

Victim Counselors will fairly distribute time, goods, and services among all clients. Advocates will not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination based on sex, race, color, age, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, political beliefs, marital status, mental or physical disability, economic, or any other discriminatory basis.

Victim Counselors will have knowledge of and respect for cultural backgrounds.

Victim Counselors will be knowledgeable and accommodating of disabling conditions.

Should one client's needs conflict with another client's needs, Victim counselors will act with regard to one client only after promptly referring the other to another qualified service provider.

Victim Counselors will assess clients to determine the nature of the violence, the extent of the violence, and the safety needs of the client. Victim Counselors will do nothing to increase the danger to or harm the client.

The Victim Counselor has an ethical responsibility to keep records.

Victim Counselors will keep records documenting services provided as mandated by funders in accordance with state and federal guidelines.

Victim Counselors will record documented data, not opinions, speculations, or conclusions.

Victim counselors will allow clients access to their own records.

Victim counselors have an ethical responsibility to themselves.

Victim counselors with education, training, and experience have the right to be called professionals and to be treated professionally.

Victim counselors have an obligation to join with other professionals to promote and support recognition and fair treatment of the profession.

Victim counselors will see to their own empowerment and nurturing.

Victim counselors will recognize when personal circumstances may compromise professional abilities, performance, or judgment, and will take steps to resolve those issues.

Victim counselors will avoid relationships or commitments that conflict with the interests of victims/survivors.

Victim counselors have an ethical responsibility to employers and colleagues.

Victim counselors will adhere to the policies and procedures of their employers.

Victim counselors will treat colleagues with respect, fairness, and courtesy.

Victim counselors should not assume professional responsibility for the clients of another agency or a colleague without appropriate communication with that agency or colleague within the bounds required by confidentiality.

Victim counselors must clearly distinguish in public statements their personal views from positions adopted by organizations for which they work or are members.

Victim counselors will report to competent authorities any conflict of interest that prevents themselves or a colleague from being able to provide ethical services, work cooperatively with colleagues or allied professionals, or be impartial in the treatment of any client.

**Download core program requirements and best practices.**

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