Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV) Strategy

SECOND EDITION

TRAINING
INTRODUCTION

The most impactful change that we have seen is the increased training for law enforcement officers on how to respond and work with victims. The training has increased officers’ knowledge on how to be victim-centered and trauma-informed. This not only has increased the positive interactions between victims and law enforcement but has changed the overall perception of how law enforcement interacts with our community.

Casper Police Department
Community Partner

The value of victim response training for sworn and professional staff cannot be overstated. Research and best practices for serving victims are constantly evolving. Training that reflects current information is critical.

Most training academies and field training programs do not include victim-related topics. When included, training is often brief and may be based on outdated information. It often focuses on victim participation as a tool for prosecution. Victim-related topics are rarely a part of in-service training or other mandatory continuing education requirements.

Victim response training should be institutionalized at all agencies. This decreases the chance that these topics will be eliminated when personnel assignments and administrations change. Recommended training topics include:

- Victims’ rights (federal and state)
- Victim compensation
- Critical needs of victims
- Crisis intervention
- Trauma-informed response (including neurobiology of trauma)
- Trauma-informed interviewing and report writing
- Understanding the impact of preconceptions, opinions, or stereotypes
- Victimization-specific responses
- Community resources and referrals
- Vicarious trauma

EXAMPLE

One demonstration site implemented rigorous victim response training standards. Victim-related topics were added to the cadet academy and annual mandatory in-service training. A standing order from the chief’s office was established. It ensures victim response topics are included in all agency training going forward.
Training academies prepare sworn personnel for their jobs. Onboarding for professional staff should be equally comprehensive. Everyone at the agency is responsible for responding to and supporting victims. Victim response training should be included in onboarding for all new hires. Training should be tailored to fit each person’s job. All personnel should have a foundational knowledge of victim-centered, trauma-informed practices. For example, personnel responsible for returning items held as evidence during a homicide investigation should be trained on how trauma impacts homicide co-victims. They should be trained to perform their duties in a way that does not cause further trauma. At a minimum, all personnel, sworn and professional, should be able to:

- Demonstrate concern and empathy for victims
- Properly identify victims’ basic needs
- Apply the agency’s victim response policy to their role and duties
- Understand victims’ rights
- Identify resources for victims and make appropriate referrals

**ELERV RESOURCES**

- Training Bulletin—Critical Needs of Victims

**SAMPLE TRAINING PRESENTATIONS**

- Crisis Intervention
- Critical Needs of Victims
- Effective Communication & Documentation
- Effective Victim Response

**RESOURCES FROM THE FIELD**

- National Crime Victim Law Institute
- Vicarious Trauma Toolkit

**TRAINING PRESENTATION**

- Introduction to Vicarious Trauma for Law Enforcement PowerPoint

**OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME**

- Victim Assistance Training Online
- Victim Law

**BUILDING A STRATEGIC TRAINING PLAN AND INVENTORY**

Most agencies prepare annual reports and strategic plans. Training is fundamental to reinforcing an agency’s mission, vision, and values. Agencies should build strategic training plans that look forward several years. This helps all personnel understand agency priorities. Victim response training should be included at all levels. Training inventories should be conducted regularly. This should include:

- **Training schedules**
  - Who receives training?
  - How often?
SELECTING TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Not all training opportunities are equal. Some questions to consider are

▶ Is the training cost-effective? For example, a train-the-trainer workshop that will certify attendees to train others can be cost-effective.
▶ Who is funding the training?
▶ What is the reputation of the hosting agency or trainers?
▶ Who is facilitating the training? Does the trainer have sufficient experience and education to properly train on the topic?
▶ Are the training content and materials evidence or research based?

Selecting the right personnel to attend training is equally important. Consider personnel who have expressed interest in victim-centered practices, perform their job duties using these practices, and show leadership potential in their assignments. Training can also be beneficial for personnel who are learning about victim-centered practices for the first time or need help understanding these concepts. Select attendees who are invested in learning and will implement what they have learned.

Provide training in a variety of ways to accommodate differing learning styles. For example, some individuals find classroom training to be challenging. Interactive, scenario-based training may be more beneficial for these personnel. Others may prefer self-paced webinars or online modules. Additional training modalities may include

▶ Briefings/roll calls
▶ Group case reviews
▶ Train-the-trainer workshops
▶ Training bulletins
▶ Multidisciplinary cross-training
▶ Recorded webinar review and discussion
MAXIMIZING TRAINING FUNDS

Agencies sending personnel to regional, state, and national conferences should establish clear expectations for attendees. Conferences can be expensive, and agencies can maximize these training dollars. For example, supervisors should meet with attendees before they leave for training. They should review learning goals, recommend workshops, and identify how to share information within the agency. Supervisors should explain why the training topics are important and how the new skills will be used. Without this preparation, attendees may lack focus and feel that it is “just another training.”

Using action plans can also help attendees prioritize learning and maximize cost-efficiency. Existing action plans should be shared with attendees before the training event. This clarifies how the training topics fit into the agency’s larger goals. Attendees can also use blank action plan templates during the training. This tool helps organize information and identify post-training action steps.

“Attendees of off-site trainings are expected to continue to attend training to develop their skills and knowledge on those topics. As subject matter experts, they now present on these topics during roll call and will be available for their co-workers to answer questions related to the topics when the information is implemented on-scene.”

Saginaw Police Department
**EXAMPLE**

One demonstration site team sent personnel to a national intimate partner violence and strangulation conference. Upon their return, attendees developed and presented a training module on these topics to the patrol division. This assignment solidified attendees’ understanding of the training material. They also took ownership of sharing this valuable information with the rest of the department.

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**MULTIDISCIPLINARY CROSS-TRAINING**

Personnel should participate in multidisciplinary cross-training whenever possible. Participants should include personnel from multiple internal divisions and external partners. Victim response training is particularly suited to cross-training. Most of the research on these topics come from outside the law enforcement profession, including psychology, social work, neurobiology, and medicine. Multidisciplinary cross-training can help attendees

- Learn about the roles of other disciplines in the criminal justice system
- Develop internal and external partnerships
- Collaborate to address ongoing issues in the community
- Explore multiple approaches to serving victims

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“When you go to classes that are intended for other professions, it really helps you see and understand why they’re doing what they do. It’s also sometimes very hard to keep doing your job when you don’t see the success rate that you would like. So, when you go and spend time with other professionals, it really inspires you and makes you want to go back to your job with new vigor.”

Casper Police Department System Partner

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**RESOURCES FROM THE FIELD**

**OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER**

Professional Development Scholarships
Once additional staff were exposed to ideas presented in the ELERV Strategy, they became more comfortable with applying the information when interacting with victims and seeing the strategies as tools to enhancing their own policing skills. On a daily basis, patrol staff are using the skills learned in the training focused on the importance of language when writing reports—and they are also applying this to their on-scene victim interaction dialogue.

In addition to victim interaction, which has been tremendously affected by the ELERV strategy, SPD staff members are now more vocal about wanting to initiate new programming to better support the department and community. When SPD staff members are able to attend off-site training, they interact with other police departments and learn about strategies and tactics they are using in their own communities and adapt the idea to fit SPD and Saginaw.

Saginaw Police Department

Community partners can help develop and facilitate/co-facilitate training. This format can solidify partnerships, be cost-effective, and support buy-in from stakeholders.

**Example**

One demonstration site included their agency-employed victim services personnel as trainers. These changes were initially met with resistance. Training officers and agency veterans were hesitant to welcome non-sworn victim services personnel into the training program. Many officers questioned the efficacy of the ELERV Strategy and related changes in the agency.

To overcome this barrier, the victim services personnel partnered with agency leaders and veteran training officers who publicly supported implementation. They co-facilitated the training workshops. Reticent trainees saw officers they respected and trusted partner with victim services and endorse the new strategies.

With time and positive collaborative experiences, the victim services trainers established independent credibility within the agency. Their unit is now seen as a valuable agency resource.
Another demonstration site lacked funding for outside training. They developed “training exchanges” with several community partner agencies. Community partner agencies provided roll call trainings on mental health first aid, responding to individuals with dementia, autism spectrum disorders in children and adults, and general agency and service updates. In return, the law enforcement agency provided training to community partner agencies on the criminal justice process, community crime statistics, and active shooter response. Neither agency had to use budgeted funds. They co-facilitated most of the training events (i.e., law enforcement and community partners presented together). This strengthened their partnerships and ensured training was presented through a multidisciplinary lens.

**CONCLUSION**

Enhancing victim response requires examination of core agency values, behaviors, and protocols. Training is required to institute and sustain changes. Effective victim response strategies will change as research, technology, investigative techniques, and resources evolve. Training content and materials should be regularly updated to reflect current information. Cost-effective, multidisciplinary training plans for all personnel contribute to enhanced victim response.

**ELERV RESOURCES**

**VICTIM-CENTERED RESPONSE: PATROL, INVESTIGATION, AND POST-INVESTIGATION**

Sample Multidisciplinary Co-Training

- Patrol Response Worksheet
- Investigation Response Worksheet
- Post-Investigation Response Worksheet