



PSN VICTIM AND WITNESS INTIMIDATION AND RETALIATION TOOLKIT

LAW ENFORCEMENT CONSIDERATIONS FOR VICTIM AND WITNESS INTIMIDATION AND RETALIATION

Victims and witnesses are at risk of being targets of intimidation and retaliation which may be used to discourage victims and witnesses from cooperating with law enforcement.

This guide examines methods commonly used to intimidate and retaliate and discusses how these tactics may affect the ways victims and witnesses respond to law enforcement. This guide concludes with best practices for law enforcement to adopt when handling situations involving victim and witness intimidation and retaliation.

For more information on victim and witness intimidation and retaliation, see the other guides in this toolkit.

WHAT SIGNS SHOULD LAW ENFORCEMENT LOOK FOR TO IDENTIFY INTIMIDATION AND RETALIATION BY A PERPETRATOR?

Perpetrators may increase their presence in a community to intimidate victims and witnesses and instill fear or mistrust in law enforcement. In addition, perpetrators may use seemingly benevolent behavior such as giving money to individuals in the community in exchange for personal loyalty and silence.

Overt acts and explicit threats of physical violence, property damage, reputational harm, extortion, and blackmail as well as threats of deportation are often used to intimidate victims and witnesses. However, perpetrators also use equally threatening implicit acts, such as making a victim aware that the perpetrator knows where the victim lives or threatening an individual close to the victim.

Perpetrators do not always threaten physical harm or violence. Instead, they may use the following methods:

- Accuse the victim of cultural betrayal and family disloyalty
- Financially exploit the victim
- Guilt the victim into believing the perpetrator will change
- Alienate the victim from family, friends, or the community
- Threaten to deprive the victim of food and shelter
- Threaten to take custody of children
- Destroy the victim's workplace relationships through false rumors

Perpetrators may also isolate child victims from figures of authority who could take protective action.



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HOW INTIMIDATION AND RETALIATION CAN IMPACT VICTIMS AND WITNESSES FROM DIFFERENT DEMOGRAPHICS AND COMMUNITIES.

When being intimidated, victims—especially children—often lose their sense of security, safety, and control.

Intimidation can often cause victims to experience shame, sleep disturbances, changes in eating habits, low self-esteem, anxiety, bedwetting, a weakened immune system, self-isolation, psychosomatic symptoms, depression, and suicidal thoughts.

Victims, especially in communities of color, may have longstanding skepticism and fear of law enforcement and therefore might not report acts of intimidation and retaliation. This historical mistrust may also lead victims to take matters into their own hands and pursue vengeance against their intimidators.

When crime in a community is widespread, victims and witnesses may believe that reporting specific crimes might not lead to change and could in fact invite risk of retaliation.

Victims with family members who may also be at risk for intimidation or retaliation may be reluctant to contact law enforcement or may be persuaded by those family members to refrain from cooperating with officers if the family has had previous involvement with the justice or immigration systems. Victims may also recant their reports of perpetrator intimidation made to law enforcement and instead support the perpetrators out of feelings of guilt, shame, and distress that they are breaking up their family.

Victims may choose not to contact law enforcement or access support services because they believe the services are for more “serious” crimes than intimidation or are not available to those indirectly affected by the crime.

BEST PRACTICES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT REGARDING VICTIM AND WITNESS INTIMIDATION AND RETALIATION

Identify Partners

Identify all partners who can assist with victim and witness intimidation and retaliation cases and collaborate with them. Examples may be domestic and sexual violence advocates, sexual assault nurse examiners, and community leaders (e.g., domestic and sexual violence advocates, sexual assault nurse examiners, and community leaders). Be knowledgeable about their resources

Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Children Exposed to Violence and Childhood Trauma

This training includes a toolkit, classroom or online trainings, webinars, and written guides. The training provides practical tools and resources to assist law enforcement agencies in building or enhancing effective operational responses to children exposed to violence (with or without a mental health partner). The training tools are directed to police leaders and frontline officers.

Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims Online Module

The Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV) Strategy introduces federal, state, local, campus, and tribal law enforcement leaders to the concepts and benefits of enhancing their response to victims of all crimes. It also illustrates how every person in a law enforcement agency has a role in effective victim response. Due to the customizable nature of the ELERV Strategy, agencies can easily start small and build on their efforts over time. Implementing the ELERV Strategy can lead to broader community-wide trust and confidence in the police, foster the healing process for victims, increase victim participation, and produce stronger, more comprehensive cases to hold perpetrators accountable.



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and services and how to make referrals, and participate in cross-disciplinary training with them. Understand the limitations they may have around sharing information.

Foster Strong Police-Community Relationships

Interact with community members, especially in marginalized communities, in a meaningful way before crime occurs (not only in response to it). Seek out the leaders and gatekeepers of these communities to establish relationships and communication.

Educate Victims, Witnesses, and the Community on Intimidation and Retaliation

Host presentations and other events on the crime of intimidation and retaliation, using sites such as schools, houses of worship, fairs, and town halls. Make people aware of victim services and other community service providers in the area—as well as national, state, and local resources for legal, medical, and financial assistance—if they are experiencing retaliation or intimidation.

RESPOND TO VICTIM AND WITNESS INTIMIDATION AND RETALIATION

Respond swiftly and seriously to acts of intimidation and retaliation and prepare well-written, detailed case reports. Identify your biases before you engage with a victim, and adjust your response to meet the needs of the victim. For example, in the case of domestic violence, disengage from any prejudice you may have towards a victim seeking the dismissal of charges against the batterer.

ENGAGE VICTIMS AND WITNESSES WITH A VICTIM-CENTERED, TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

Take a victim-centered approach, which means to focus on the needs and concerns of victims to deliver services in a compassionate, sensitive, and non-judgmental manner. Consider victims' fears as well as potential sources of intimidation—whether reputational, social, familial, financial, legal, or interpersonal—to mitigate the sources and effects of the intimidation. Utilize trauma-informed interviewing. Consider formalized training on implicit bias, forensic training, working with children, and other topics that can help you work with victims.

Implicit Bias Training Course by the National Institutes of Health

This three-module course helps users learn what bias is, how to recognize it, and how to minimize its effects. It expands on the original two-module course "NIH Implicit Bias" by providing users with knowledge and strategies to create psychological safety and enhance employee engagement to foster an inclusive workplace culture.

National Crime Victim Law Institute Training and Technical Assistance for Law Enforcement

A crime victim's first contact with the criminal justice system is predictive of whether they experience re-victimization or empowerment and whether they continue to access justice or choose to disengage. Law enforcement professionals are often the first point of contact for victims. The National Crime Victim Law Institute (NCVLI) is providing in-person and technology-assisted trainings and technical assistance to law enforcement agencies across the country to help them create and enhance trauma-informed practices grounded in victims' rights.

Resource List

View this resource list for relevant training opportunities and informational documents on engaging victims and witnesses with a victim-centered, trauma-informed approach.



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For a more detailed understanding, please see the “Trauma-Informed Engagement with Victims and Witnesses of Intimidation and Retaliation” guide of this series.

Be consistent and accountable to victims; update victims on their cases, and challenge any perceptions about law enforcement’s inability or unwillingness to protect and advocate on behalf of victims to justice system actors.

Empower victims by providing both verbal reassurance and written information about investigative procedures, including information that discusses victim, witness, and community intimidation and retaliation—as well as proactive tactics for victims to ensure their safety, including how to document any contact made by the perpetrator. Also let victims know that law enforcement can support them at all stages, and provide them with contact information.

See the following resources to learn more about strategies for law enforcement-based victim services:

[Exploration of Challenges in Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Focus Groups with Victim Service Directors](#)

This research review examines the results and implications of the Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services and Technical Assistance Program (LEV Program) survey and interviews, which were conducted to better understand the current state of law enforcement-based victim services programs. Several topics were identified as areas for future training and technical assistance, including victim services unit workload, staffing, and ethics.

[Final Report on the Survey of Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services](#)

This final report presents a detailed analysis of the findings from the LEV Mapping Survey, which gathered information about the landscape of law enforcement-based victim services around the United States. Based on the survey results, this document offers recommendations to support the sustainability of law enforcement-based victim services programs through long-term funding, strategic growth, agency integration of victim services personnel, data collection and evaluation, and training and technical assistance.

[Building Community Trust Through Law Enforcement’s Response to Victims of Crime](#)

This document describes some of the programs sponsored by the Office of Victims of Crime (OVC) that work with law enforcement to ensure that victims receive both services and guidance from the criminal justice system and are included in policy-making and the implementation of services related to community safety.

Trauma Informed Law Enforcement Strategies for Combatting Victim, Witness, and Community Intimidation (Webinar) by the National Center for Victims of Crime

Across the country, law enforcement agencies are seeking training and technical assistance to inform policies and approaches for engaging with victims, witnesses, families, and communities experiencing intimidation and retaliation. This National Center for Victims of Crime webinar discusses how law enforcement agencies are currently using trauma-informed approaches to intervene, mitigate, and combat the effects of intimidation and retaliation in their local, state, and federal jurisdictions.



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[Pathways Toward Collective Healing: Law Enforcement and the Communities They Serve: Collective Healing in the Wake of Harm](#)

This report profiles five demonstration sites participating in the International Association of Chiefs of Police's (IACP's) Collective Healing Initiative (CHI). This report discusses lessons learned from the demonstration sites to help law enforcement agencies develop a victim-centered, trauma-informed, and collaborative response to healing victims.

[Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims \(ELERV\) Strategy, Second Edition](#)

This document describes the ELERV strategy as well as information gained and lessons learned from three agencies that served as ELERV pilot sites.



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Check out our other guides in this series, as well as National Center for Victims of Crime's "*Trauma-Informed Strategies to Address Victim and Witness Intimidation and Retaliation*" webinar.

