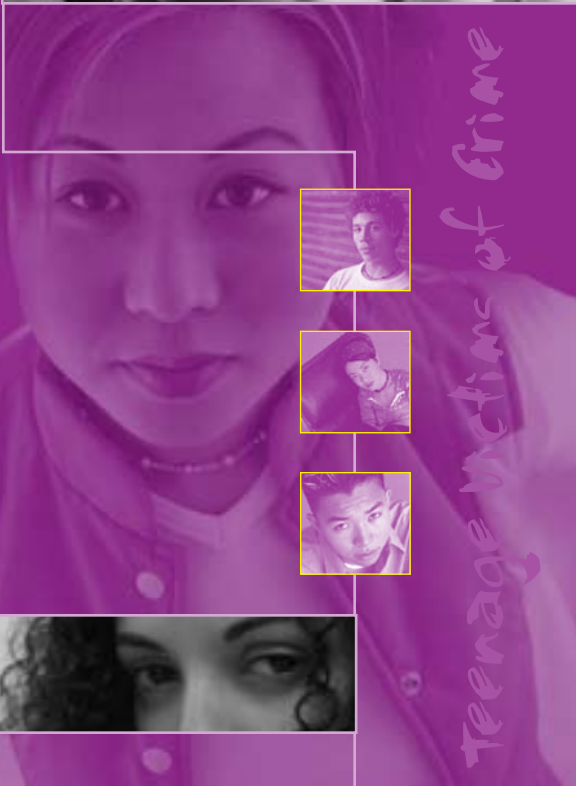


Because Things

Happen Every Day:

Responding to Teenage Victims of Crime
Discussion Guide



Teenage Victims of Crime



COPS★

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR
Victims of Crime

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It took a while for me to learn-actually accept-that people have actually been through the same things I have. I just wish that they would've had a group like this sooner. Not just because something happened, but because things happen every day.

-Yolanda

About This Video

The National Center for Victims of Crime and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice, produced this 20-minute educational video, *Because Things Happen Every Day: Responding to Teenage Victims of Crime*, to illustrate the importance of a collaborative community response to teenage victims of crime.

The statistics are alarming: adolescents represent approximately 14 percent of the general population, yet they comprise about 31 percent of individuals who become victims of violence.¹ In fact, teenagers are approximately twice as likely as other age groups to become victims of violence.² Victimization during adolescence comes at a particularly difficult time in life. Normal adolescent development is characterized by rapid change, culminating in a desire for independence, a search for identity, the development of abstract thinking skills, and a need to separate from adults by establishing close relationships with peers. A teen's peer group becomes increasingly important and, in some respects, more influential than parents or other adults.

Because Things Happen Every Day features two innovative programs that have been effective in reaching and responding to teen victims through the use of peer leadership, in-school support groups, one-on-one counseling, and hotlines. The voices of teens themselves are prominent throughout the video, describing their experiences with crime, as well as what helped them recover their confidence and hope.

How to Use This Video

Because Things Happen Every Day is geared toward anyone who works with teenagers and/or might be in a position to identify and support teen victims. Some examples include:

- Youth development professionals
- Victim service providers
- School resource officers and other law enforcement
- Teen leaders
- School counselors and teachers (or other educators)
- Community groups
- Clergy (or other faith leaders)
- Principals and administrators

The goal of this video is to foster a greater understanding of the impact of crime and violence on teens and the obstacles teens face in coming forward and seeking help. We suggest you review the video several times before presenting it so that you will be familiar with the content and able to guide the training and discussion. Suggested discussion questions begin on page six.

When your training is complete, we hope your participants will come away with these main ideas:

- **Teen victimization is a serious problem.** A pervasive lack of awareness about the scope and prevalence of teen victimization is a serious hurdle in adequately responding to this problem. Any attempt to address teen victimization must involve an education component.

- **Involve teens.** Teens are greatly influenced by their peers. Peer-led programs promote action, and adult-run programs can be maximized when teens are put in a position to reach out and help their peers.
- **Partnerships are crucial.** Programs for teens are greatly enhanced through collaborative efforts among victim service agencies, schools, law enforcement agencies, businesses, faith communities, and youth-serving organizations. Decision-makers should look for opportunities to develop new services or tailor existing programs to directly support teen victims of crime.
- **There are consequences if we don't help teen victims.** Not reaching and providing support to teen victims leads to tremendous personal and societal costs. Many teen victims struggle with poor performance in school, depression, and other problems. Not responding to teen victimization can have life-long consequences.

Using This Video with Teens

Although this video is aimed at raising adults' awareness of the problem of teen victimization and the range of possible responses, you may also wish to show this video to teens. If you do, be sure to warn the teens that they will see several young people talking about their own experiences of victimization, and this may trigger uncomfortable feelings for them if they or someone they know has been victimized. Be sure to give teens a resource number to call if they would like to talk to someone about a personal experience. If possible, have a trained counselor available to youth who need immediate support after or while viewing the video.

Some of the discussion questions below may be used with youth, and some additional ones may be added, depending on the purpose of the viewing. If showing the video to a group of teen leaders who want to start a victim outreach or support effort, the discussion leader should solicit the teens' ideas of how they want to get involved, encourage the teens to make a list of adults in the community who can support their efforts, and end the discussion with a concrete action plan.

Program Profiles

SafePlace, in Austin, Texas, is a large victim service agency that addresses various types of violence against adults and teens. SafePlace, which operates a hotline and provides free, confidential counseling to teens, works closely with school counselors and staff to form support groups for teens. SafePlace casts a wide net to attract teens in middle schools and high schools who are victims of various types of violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and dating violence. SafePlace educates teens about the effects of violence and helps them deal with problems experienced at home or at school. SafePlace organizes support groups of 6-12 teens each that meet for a total of 24 sessions. Girls and boys attend separate support groups which are held at schools. SafePlace's "Expect Respect" initiative has been featured on national television.

The Students Terminating Abusive Relationships (STAR) Program is an peer leadership and education program in Westchester County, New York. STAR's mission is to speak out against interpersonal and societal violence and to promote healthy relationships based on equality, respect, and trust. STAR members include high school and college students who attend monthly meetings to learn more about dating violence and how to plan and implement awareness activities in their schools and communities. The White Plains High School STAR chapter offers a model approach for establishing partnerships between schools, victim service providers, and

the local police department. STAR's community partners include: local middle schools and high schools, police departments, United Way, Junior League, Westchester Mental Health Association, YWCA, religious institutions, Boys & Girls Clubs, Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD), and local businesses. STAR collaborates with the White Plains Police Department, and officers frequently give awareness-raising talks to high-school students. STAR was started by the Northern Westchester Shelter in Pleasantville, New York. The Northern Westchester Shelter was founded in 1980 as a safe haven for domestic violence victims. The Shelter provides free confidential counseling, legal aid, support groups, and a 24-hour hotline.

Questions for Discussion

After showing Because Things Happen Every Day, allow for at least 15 minutes to discuss audience reactions and explore how your program or community could improve its response to teenage victims of crime. Offered below are suggested questions, grouped by topic area, to help guide your discussion. Also highlighted are direct quotations from the video that help illustrate particular discussion points.

Teen victimization: The facts

- ***What crimes do teen victims experience?***

Teen victims experience the whole range of crimes that adults experience, including domestic violence/dating violence, burglary, assault, identity theft, stalking, harassment, and homicide.

- ***How is responding to teen victims similar and dissimilar to responding to adult victims of crime?***

Susan Herman: "Teenagers need many of same things, many of the same resources and services that adult victims of crime need. They need support; they need safety; they need safety planning; they need individual and group counseling. They need advocacy for those who go through the criminal justice process. They need compensation; they need orders of protection. The full range of services and resources that we've made available to adults need[s] to be adapted and need[s] to be made accessible to teenage victims of crime."

However, because teens are making the transition from childhood to adulthood, support for teen victims must take their developmental stage into consideration. For example, teens are strongly influenced by their peers, so peer-led education and support are especially beneficial for this population.

- ***What are some reasons why a teen might not come forward if he/she is being victimized?***

Society often blames the victim. In addition, teens often think that they will be punished or arrested if, at the time of the victimization, they were in a situation where drugs or alcohol were involved. Additionally, many teens are aware of mandatory reporting requirements and do not want their victimization brought to the attention of law enforcement or child protection authorities.

Reaching Teens

- ***What are some effective strategies for reaching teens?***

Going to where teens are (e.g., setting up tables in the mall or hanging flyers on school bulletin boards and around the community); using "teen-friendly" language; forming trusting relationships; facilitating youth-led outreach efforts; ensuring confidentiality; and making educational information and support groups easily accessible to teens.

Susan Herman: "We have to go where teens are, we have to speak their language, and we have to help them in ways that they want to be served."

Ally: "It's important for communities to get the information out there, because if they don't know then nobody's going to reach out for help. Teens aren't going to just volunteer their information if they don't know where to go, and they don't feel safe talking to just anyone."

- ***What outreach techniques can be used to reach teens?***

Within the school setting, hanging flyers and posters in the hallways or on bulletin boards, coordinating youth-led presentations in classrooms, and holding school assemblies are all effective ways to reach teens. In addition, teachers and counselors can speak directly with teens who might be at risk. They are in a unique position to notice if an individual has been behaving differently or has drastically

changed his or her appearance. School officials should be knowledgeable and able to make referrals to support groups or other appropriate resources.

Garreth Horwood: "Oftentimes a group member, before he's met me, has talked to the counselor or the teacher about a personal experience or two. Sometimes it's based purely on what the counselor or teacher has seen in terms of behavior: has that student acted violently? Have they suggested that maybe they've been hurt or abused? Maybe they've even seen physical signs like a bruise or something like that."

Nolan Correa: "One of the recommendations I would like to make for other administrators is to go out into your community and look to see if there is a group, such as SafePlace, that can come in and assist your staff, community, and students... These groups are there to educate and help, but we must go out and find them."

In Westchester, New York, the STAR program holds school assemblies to educate students about dating violence and set up tables at a local mall on a Saturday afternoon to provide literature to teens.

- ***In what ways did the programs in the video enlist teens in their outreach efforts? In what ways can you involve teens in your own outreach initiatives in your community?***

The Northern Westchester Shelter recognized the need for an effective way to reach a population of victims that was underserved and developed Students Terminating Abusive Relationships (STAR) to meet that need. Because STAR is a student-led group, teens are able to reach out to other teens in ways that they know first-hand are effective. They give presentations about warning signs, types of abuse, and ways to help a friend in need. STAR teens actively encourage both their male and female peers to sign up for the STAR program.

Ally: "As part of the STAR group, we reach out to teens in the community by putting up posters and flyers at the YMCA, the library."

Detective Tribble: "It's better perceived from one teen to another than as myself, as an adult and as an authority figure, talking to young people."

- ***What are the consequences of not responding to teen victimization?***

Teens are twice as likely as any other age group to be victims of violent crime. Teen crime victims are at a greater risk of doing poorly in school, abusing drugs or alcohol, having problems eating or sleeping, being revictimized, and becoming an offender of violent crime themselves.

Brandon: "Whenever I'd get mad at my house and I can't really hit my mom or anything... I went and take it out at school."

Barri: "We cast the net kind of wide to attract as many kids who have had any form of victimization at all to participate. Because we know that those kids are at greater risk for being victimized again and for using those abusive behaviors in their own relationships."

Responding to Teens

- ***What are some of the indicators, as told by the teens in the video, that a teen might be being victimized?***

— *Physical injuries*

Yolanda: "I'd come to school with a black eye and I'd have bruise marks on my neck, shoulders, and arms."

Karis: "I had been cutting because I don't know how else to deal with it... I used to have these huge gashes all over my arms."

— *Isolation, withdrawal, or over-dependence on a dating partner*

Alexa: "He put me down and threatened me. He wouldn't let me go anywhere without him... I lost all my friends. I completely lost who I was. I had no personality. I had nothing because he cut me down and destroyed my self-esteem."

— *Feelings of shame, decreased self-esteem, and decreased interest in activities*

Karis: "I started to blame myself."

Brandon: "It just made me angry all the time, and I never really had a smile, and I was never happy."

Yolanda: "It just takes a toll on everything. You're worried about this or you're not concentrating on your work or you're not doing something right or you don't perform well athletically because of it."

- ***Think of some examples from the video in which teens (a) needed help but felt that they could not seek it, or (b) attempted to open up to an adult, but did not receive the help that they needed.***

Karis: "It went on for about a year and I didn't, I just couldn't tell anyone."

Amber: "I didn't know how to tell them, you know. I don't talk to my parents. I'm not open with my parents. We don't have a good communication thing going on."

Yolanda: "Sometimes during class I would just go outside and cry and wonder why nobody didn't want to help me."

Brandon: "I would tell someone in between times but no one really listened."

- ***How can you make your outreach and support activities more effective and positive?***

Yolanda: "You want to be able to have that one person reach out to you and help you and say, 'This is what I want to do. This is what I want to help you with.'"

Barri: "If a child makes a disclosure to you, he or she trusts you, so you need to know how to respond in an effective manner. You should listen. Believe that child. Ask that child what they need to feel safe, and ask them how you can help them."

Yolanda: "I was talking to one of my English teachers, and she really just realized how much that I go through."

- ***What was the motivation for starting the Threat-Share Committee at Reagan High School? Who participates in the committee meetings, and what purpose does it serve?***

Principal Correa put together the "Threat-Share Committee" after the murder that took place at his school. The Committee consists of counselors, administrators, teachers, and department chairs. They meet once a week before school starts to share ideas about any possible student that may be at risk or currently experiencing violence of some sort. They converse about students whose behavior, dress, or attitude has changed, so they can then meet with those students to tell them about the SafePlace groups.

Collaboration & Partnerships

- ***How did Reagan High School in Austin, Texas, make use of their community resources in responding to a severe incident of teen victimization?***

Following a fatal stabbing of a young woman by the victim's boyfriend, the principal of Reagan High School held meetings and reached out to the school's staff, the school district, and the community-at-large for support and ideas for how to start a program to address the issue. They collaborated with SafePlace, which was already established in Austin, and arranged for confidential teen support groups to be held inside the schools for any teen who wanted to talk about victimization.

- ***Why is law enforcement an important component of a comprehensive response to teen victims?***

Involving law enforcement lets teens know that the police are not the bad guys and that they are there to help. School Resource Officers (SROs) can be a very effective resource because they are in the schools where teens are and are well-informed about teen victimization issues. They also often have informed interactions with students and come to be seen as trusted figures in the school community.

- ***What role does Detective Tribble play in the response to teen victims in Westchester?***

Detective Tribble gives presentations and conducts workshops with the students about victimization issues. He encourages teens to use the resources available to them, such as a confidential victim services hotline.

- ***How does the Austin Police Department interact with SafePlace?***

The Victim Services Coordinator at the Austin Police Department makes many visits to the local high schools. SafePlace also partners with groups like Communities in Schools, which invites school resource offices to give classroom presentations on various victimization issues.

- ***Describe the partnerships that you saw in the video. How did they come about? Who are your partners currently? Who else in your community should be involved in this effort?***

Both programs shown in the video demonstrate effective partnerships with local law enforcement, including school resource officers. The partnership that Reagan High School formed with SafePlace came about when the principal went into the community to look for a group that could assist his staff and students with the issues of violence that occur in school. In Westchester, schools call the Northern Westchester Shelter, home to the STAR program, and invite experts to come in and give presentations to the students. In addition, SafePlace provides training and consultation about victim issues to agencies in the community that serve youth (e.g., Extenda-Care, which provides after-school services and summer programs for teens; OutYouth, a gay, lesbian, and transgendered youth organization; the Boys & Girls Clubs; the Austin PTA; and Communities in Schools, a nonprofit social work agency).

Endnotes

¹National Crime Victimization Survey, Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, 2004 (data from 2003).

²Ibid.

Additional Resources

National Center for Victims of Crime

www.ncvc.org

The National Center for Victims of Crime is dedicated to forging a national commitment to help victims of crime rebuild their lives. The National Center's toll-free Helpline, 1-800-FYI-CALL, offers supportive counseling, practical information about crime and victimization, and referrals to local community resources, as well as skilled advocacy in the criminal justice and social service systems.

The National Center's **Teen Victim Project** web site (www.ncvc.org/tvp) offers teen-friendly fact sheets on various crimes, descriptions of current youth-led programs, and additional teen-related resources.

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Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)

U.S. Justice Department

(www.cops.usdoj.gov)

The mission of the COPS Office is to advance community policing in jurisdictions of all sizes across the country. Community policing represents a shift from more traditional law enforcement because it focuses on preventing crime and the fear of crime at the local level. Community policing puts law enforcement professionals on the streets so they can build mutually beneficial relationships with the people they serve. By earning the trust of community members and making those individuals stakeholders in their own safety, community policing makes law enforcement safer and more efficient. The COPS Office provides grants to tribal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to hire and train community policing professionals, acquire and deploy cutting-edge crime-fighting technologies, and develop and test innovative policing strategies.





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