

# Victim-Centered Media Guide

Thank you for your interest in writing a news story related to a person, hereinto referred to as “resident”, under the care or custody of the Maine Department of Corrections. It is widely recognized that media coverage of crimes can sometimes have unintended and harmful consequences for crime victims. Regardless of a resident’s positive progress and accomplishments, it is crucial to always maintain a sensitive and respectful boundary and remember that aggrandizing a resident may inadvertently further distress victims. Whether broadcasted, printed, or online, news media has the power to strongly influence public opinion. It is imperative that the victims are treated with dignity and respect. To that end, we offer you this ‘Victim-Centered Media Guide’ as a helpful reminder of relevant considerations when covering these stories, in an effort to collectively reduce the potential for any unintended harm to victims.

**When writing an article, consider the victims:** Although a resident may be bettering themselves while incarcerated, the person(s) harmed by their choices may still be experiencing pain and suffering (physical, emotional, financial, etc.) due to the criminal act. Prior to publication, evaluate the impact the media coverage may have on victims. Consider the factors below to avoid re-victimization or the triggering of emotional distress.

- A. Consider the time frame:** Any publication may cause severe re-victimization regardless of how recent the crime or how much time has passed. Special consideration should be given to “anniversary dates” (i.e. date of crime, date of death, birthdays, etc.).
- B. Understand the effects of crime on victims:** Crime impacts victims in many ways that are not always obvious or uniform. Exercise due diligence in researching the crime and the impact the crime has on its victims. Results of your research can help guide you to ensure the context won’t re-victimize or trigger a victim.
- C. Educate yourself on “triggers”:** A “trigger” is a sensory reminder that elicits fear, shock, anger, worry, etc., due to a painful memory. No two crimes or victim experiences of victims are the same. To gain a better understanding on “triggers” research online or reach out to victim advocacy agency. Most importantly, remember that words matter! Referring to crimes as “mistakes” can cause a great deal of harm to victims by invalidating or trivializing their experiences.
- D. Give the victims a voice:** Before reaching out directly to a victim always remember to be especially considerate. Not every victim will be ready to share their perspective or want to be contacted. It is recommended you work with a victim advocate to reach out to the victim on your behalf. Victims should have time to gather their

thoughts and the opportunity to provide a first-hand perspective on the crime, its impact on their lives, or even their opinion regarding the coverage of the publication.

- E. Refrain from sharing victims contact information:** Honor a victim's right to privacy by not including any of their contact or location information in your coverage.
- F. Enlist the help of an Advocacy Agency:** Victim Advocacy agencies are an alternative to contacting victims directly. These agencies are experts in their field and can be of great support to victims and act as liaisons with media professionals.
- G. Report accurate information:** Make sure the details of your news piece are accurate. Always verify details given to you by a resident, with the understanding that their incentives may influence the scope and framing of the information they provide. Reporting inaccurate or incomplete information can further traumatize victims by minimizing the seriousness of the crime or by placing the blame on the victims.
- H. Provide resources: Acknowledge the article is about the resident/client but provide resources to the readers/viewers who may also be victims.**
  - a. National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-7233
  - b. National Sexual Assault Hotline: 800-656-4673
  - c. National Parents of Murdered Children: 888-818-7662
  - d. Maine Department of Corrections, Office of Victim Services: 800-968-6909

**For more information regarding victim sensitivity and the media, please go to:**

Justice Solutions. A Guide for Journalists Who Report on Crime and Crime Victims.

<http://www.mediacrimevictimguide.com/>

2000 National Victim Assistance Academy. Chapter 18: The News Media's Coverage of Crime and Victimization.

[https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc\\_archives/academy/chapter18.htm](https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc_archives/academy/chapter18.htm)