



Working with **Victim Advocates** in Drug Endangered Children (DEC) Efforts

Victim advocates are specifically trained to support victims of crime, and often children and families are considered victims. Therefore, victim advocates can provide these children and families with a variety of information, support, resources, and assistance. Some victim advocates are paid positions, and some are volunteers depending on the demographics and needs of the community they are serving. Victim advocates may also be called victim service providers, victim/witness coordinators, or victim/witness specialists. Many jurisdictions also have court appointed advocates that assist the courts in recommending what is best for the children. These advocates are called Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA).

Victim advocates' responsibilities vary depending on their job description and what discipline they may be housed under. Typically, advocates can provide:

- Crisis intervention
- Assistance with Crime Victims Compensation application and funding
- Emotional support
- Information on the criminal justice process
- Information on the civil justice process
- Assistance in navigating systems
- Information on available services
- Referrals for victim services
- Assistance at the scene of crimes
- Assistance finding shelter and transportation
- Assistance in gathering information and making recommendations

Victim advocates are a valuable resource for DEC efforts. Children are often the first impacted by a parent or caregiver's use/overdose/death, yet they are often not identified and helped. And they may have little resources for assistance and little support. Victim advocates can assist them. Depending on the laws and policies, the advocates may also help provide details about the plans and actions the child and caretakers are taking, where they can be located and any additional pieces of information about the environment that has been shared with them by the child and caretaker. They can also pass relevant information about the case on to the family.

How Advocates Work with Victims

“Advocates offer victims information about the different options available to them and support victims' decision-making. Advocates do not tell victims what to do. Advocates are committed to maintaining the highest possible levels of confidentiality in their communications with victims. However, the level of confidentiality they can observe depends on their position, education, licensure, and the laws in each state. An advocate in a police department may have to share any information related to an investigation with officers. Yet an advocate at a domestic violence program may be able to keep most victims' confidences private. However, all advocates must report certain types of information to the authorities. For example, they have to report any type of threat to a person (such as clients threatening to hurt themselves or someone else), and they have to report the abuse or neglect of children. It is important for victims to ask about confidentiality rules before they begin working with an advocate” (<https://victimsofcrime.org/help-for-crime-victims/get-help-bulletins-for-crime-victims/what-is-a-victim-advocate->)