



*Victim Advocacy:
The Many Hats Worn by
Advocates to Serve Victims
and Their Communities*

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Disclaimer

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Agenda

- Discuss the model of victim advocacy: a brief history, how it differs from other models of service provision, victim-centered vs case-centered services
- Explore types of advocates and how this relates to confidentiality policies
- Explore many roles of advocates, types of advocates, & victim services provided by community-based advocates
- Explore how victim advocacy programs and their services benefit victims
- Explore some of the challenges and barriers of victim services in tribal communities
- Discuss how collaboration with other disciplines benefits victims by improving their safety, community safety, and offender accountability.



Learning Objectives

- Participants will have a greater understanding of
 - The history of victim advocacy
 - The different models of victim advocacy programs
 - How confidentiality is different depending on the type of program
 - The many roles advocates play and the services they provide
 - How these programs benefit victims
 - The barriers and challenges victim advocacy programs can face serving tribal communities
 - How collaboration with other agencies benefits victims by increasing safety and offender accountability



Historical Perspectives of Advocacy

Tribal nations were mostly matrilineal in social structures. Women were considered sacred and powerful

Late 1960's-1970's – Era of self-determination, social activism sparked an upsurge of women organizing, speaking out about violence happening in their communities and in their homes

This era gave birth to advocacy model based in social and system change work, first battered women shelters started, model of advocacy based in victim empowerment and safety and batterer accountability

Social and systems change pushed for change in attitudes about gender equality, policy and legislative changes at all levels

Shelters and advocacy programs set up

1994 first Violence Against Women Act

Tribal coalitions sprung up, more programming in tribal communities through Tribal Governments Program, etc.

Role of the Advocate

“To act as the **biased** supporter of women; advocating for the **expressed** interests and safety of women (and their children) including safe space and other resources to regain control over their lives. To provide leadership and expertise based on women’s experiences within justice, law enforcement, social service and medical systems. To **prioritize women’s safety** and **offender accountability** in all aspects of the work including **maintaining confidentiality.**” (emphasis added)

From: Mending the Sacred Hoop, S.T.O.P. Violence Against Indian Women Technical Assistance, Feb. 1996 (emphasis added)

Role of Advocacy From A Tribal Perspective

Ending violence against women, and all other forms of violence, lies in our ability to reclaim our roles and responsibilities as relatives.

Advocates ideally role model this sacred connection.





“Advocacy is about being a good relative”.

What are the types of advocates and how are they different?

Community based, grassroots - Work for tribal, non-profit, or independent organization

System based - Work for criminal justice agency such as victim witness advocates, prosecutor, law enforcement, hospital based.
Confidentiality and training factors

In some tribes and states, victim advocates must have 40 hour training by certified training site in order to be protected by victim-advocate privilege.



Advocacy is different than mental health or social services

MENTAL HEALTH/SOCIAL SERVICES

- Diagnosis
- Treatment/case plan
- Case centered
- Internally imposed trauma
- Worker expected to maintain status quo & adapt to system requirements
- Bureaucratic hierarchies

ADVOCACY

- No diagnosis
- No treatment plan/ plan is developed by victim
- Victim Centered
- Externally imposed trauma
- Social/systems change integral part to create accountability
- Grassroots, greater sense of comradery



Many Roles of Advocates

KNOWLEDGE CHECK: WHAT ROLES HAVE YOU SEEN ADVOCATES PLAY
WHEN SERVING VICTIMS? WHAT SERVICES DO THEY PROVIDE?

(PLEASE PLACE THOUGHTS IN THE CHAT)



Roles of the Advocate When Working With Victims

- *SAFETY*
- Crisis intervention via crisis hotline or in-person
- Determine need for immediate medical attention – treat injuries, emergency contraception, pregnancy prevention, gather evidence
- Provide legal options to victim to file criminal complaint/seek civil legal services by providing referrals, accompaniment, explore concerns, questions with victim, support victim navigating system

Roles of the Advocate When Working With Victims (con't)

- Assess basic needs with victim and provide necessary resources internally or by referral— Emotional support individual or group support, transportation, food, clothing, children who witness abuse, impact of violence on children, emergency housing, locks changed
- Strengthening life skills, identify with victim long term needs for housing, education, employment, mental health/healing services, substance abuse treatment options with victim; provide referrals, follow up care as needed
- Often advocacy program is the coordinating agency for Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs) Coordinated Community Response (CCR) teams from start up and ongoing coordination

Crisis Intervention

- All hours of the night – it's what advocates do – not a 9am-5pm job
- Addresses safety concerns; where they are, where is perpetrator, they have a place to go/stay
- Visits with victim and others that may need support/information, basic needs, concerns, children, **SAFETY**, information about options that are available, to empathize
- Smudges, prays with victim if victim requests that or finds someone who can provide this,
- Let her/him know all feelings are normal to have, no wrong or right way to experience trauma



Legal, Housing, Economic, & Medical Advocacy

- Visiting with relative to see what they need
- Understanding these systems and how they work, their “rules”;
- Working closely with these agencies on behalf of the needs of relatives – know the people there personally
- Providing accurate information to the relative so they can make good decisions; have information available to give them if that’s safe to do
- Accompanying your relative through the process
- Offering transportation; feeding them or having coffee with them when feasible
- Setting up our own services based in the community, incorporating cultural traditions such as places where forensic exams can be done by Native women, aunties; women clinics where our relatives can obtain Plan B easily, visit with other women; utilizing herbal



Spiritual Healing

- Ceremony, wopakinkte' (wiping off ceremony) – Lakota ceremony
- Cleansing ceremonies – sweats (gender relevancy); cedar baths
- Fasting
- Wiping of tears ceremony
- Naming ceremony
- Feasts: Seasonal, clan gatherings, giving back
- Prayer, solitude
- Song, dance (jingle dress is healing dress)
- Equine therapy; survival camps; women's/men's healing retreats
- What are your tribal nation ceremonies for healing?
- Consult with elders that you trust.





Victim Centered Advocacy is Designed to Re-Empower Victims

- Remember that all services offered to victim and choices made by victim is at the victims consent and choosing
- Maintaining confidentiality is cornerstone of safety; have clear confidentiality policies and procedures
- Empowerment for victims is critical in the work of advocacy
- Know the resources in advocates community, to take time to research programs, meet service providers, know their approach to working with victims of crime before referring victims

Inherent Differences in Advocacy Services in Tribal Communities vs Elsewhere

- Resources are different, often more limited
- Jurisdictional complexities and additional responsibilities to educate non-Native service providers
- Small closed communities making the need to have sound confidentiality policies, privacy even greater to ensure victim safety
- Need for community education is greater to achieve buy-in from the community, to dispel myths about why violence happens, to create safety for victims and families

Service Gaps & Challenges

KNOWLEDGE CHECK:
WHAT SERVICE GAPS
AND CHALLENGES DO
ADVOCATES FACE
WHEN SERVING
VICTIMS?

(PLEASE PLACE
THOUGHTS IN THE
CHAT)

Service Gaps and Challenges

- Transportation to services
- Childcare for victims to attend court proceedings and/or to receive services
- Housing options, both emergency shelter and longer term services
- Substance abuse treatment
- Gaps in emergency shelter services for victims of sexual assault and human trafficking, and elder (accessible spaces)
- Juvenile justice-involved youth often have limited mental health and counseling service options
- Legal assistance





Benefits Of Collaboration

Benefits of Advocacy Services

“This exploratory study highlights the role that advocates may play in reducing victim barriers to participation in the CJ process...” including ***reducing feelings of guilt and self-blame*** (1992), ***dispelling myths that contribute to self-blame*** (1992), ***reducing fear of retaliation if victim participates in the criminal justice process*** by discussing an option of a protective order (1992), ***reducing fears of poor treatment by law enforcement*** (1993), and ***increasing victim’s confidence about participating in the criminal justice process*** (1993).” (Emphasis added)

Patterson, D. and Tringali, B. (2015). Understanding How Advocates Can Affect Sexual Assault Victim Engagement in the Criminal Justice Process. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 30(12), 1987-1997 (emphasis added)



Benefits of Advocacy Services

“...the odds of [victim] cooperation [with prosecution] are more than **three times higher** if the victim met with representatives of the victim/witness assistance program.” Victims feel more supported (617), access resources (617), understand the system better (617), and feel safer (618). (Emphasis added)

Patterson, D. and Tringali, B. (2015). Understanding How Advocates can Affect Sexual Assault Victim Engagement in the Criminal Justice Process. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 30(12), 1987-1997





Questions?

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Please Join Us for Upcoming Webinars!

April 15, 2026 *Victim Safety: Safety needs of Victims, Their Children and Community* 2nd in a 3 part series

This webinar will focus on needs of victims with emphasis on safety needs for primary victim and discuss the importance of doing safety planning, what that is, when it's done. Participants will receive information on the impact of the children who witness, how victims and children can benefit from seeking and obtaining protection orders. Facilitator will explore with participants the challenges that victims may face in regard to protecting their children and reasons they want custody and assistance with visitation by abusing partner.

May 20, 2026 *Walking in the Shoes of Victims: The Journey continues* 3rd in a three part series

In this webinar the facilitator will take participants on a walk-through of systems response to victims experiencing domestic violence and sexual assault. This webinar will focus on types of sexual assault and domestic violence and will identify legal needs and long term needs of victims and how advocates can assist victims with locating appropriate services, share benefits of securing legal assistance and how to work collaboratively with legal services. Participants will also discuss the importance of improving system response, through protocol development in domestic violence and sexual assault response.



For more information, please visit the project website:
www.TribalLegalAssistance.org

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Tribal Legal Assistance Providers for Survivors

Welcome to Tribal Legal Assistance where we focus on promoting effective collaboration amongst victim advocates, lawyers, and lay advocates to advance trauma-informed, victim-centered, and culturally appropriate legal assistance service delivery to survivors on Tribal lands."



Request Individual TA Through the Project Website: www.TribalLegalAssistance.org

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Request Training and/or Technical Assistance

The Tribal Law and Policy Institute and project partners will approach training and technical assistance (TTA) in a holistic and culturally responsive way, understanding that each Tribe and its culture are unique. Cross discipline collaboration can help address the unique needs of American Indian/Alaska Native survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. This is where pairing lawyers and lay advocates with Tribal victim advocates can prove especially impactful for survivors on Tribal lands.

The target audience for this TTA may be experiencing challenges and barriers to better serve victims from Tribal lands such as lack of knowledge regarding culturally appropriate needs of victims, learning more tools for safety planning with victims as they access legal assistance, lack of understanding Tribal sovereignty and Tribes exercising criminal authority, not prioritizing the importance of protecting victim information (ex: confidentiality), lack of knowledge around the dynamics of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence such as motive for violence, why victim returns to abuser, needs of children who witness violence.

Please share your training/technical assistance request with us and we will get back to you within 5 business days.

First name

Enter your first name



Last name *

Enter your last name

Email *



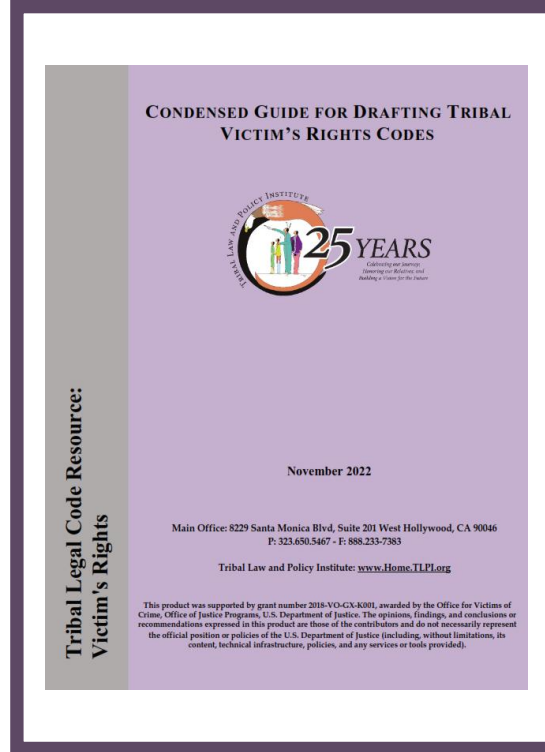
Individual TA Requests

There is no wrong door - you can also request individual TA by contacting us directly



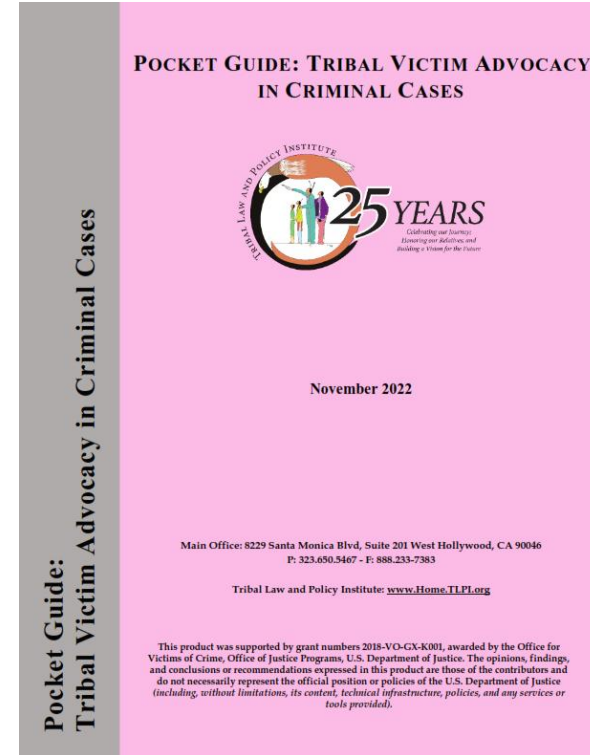
- Examples of Individual TA that you can request:
 - Assistance in finding a particular resource
 - Questions about individual cases/situations (but we can't give legal advice)
 - Examples of procedures, policy, or codes
 - Support developing procedures or policies
 - Support developing an MOU with an advocacy program, legal services provider, or others





Tribal Legal Code Resource: Victim's Rights, Condensed Guide For Drafting Tribal Victim's Rights Codes

Tribal Legal Code Resource: Victim's Rights, Condensed Guide for Drafting Tribal Victim's Rights Codes is designed to assist tribal governments with the development of victim right's codes. This resource was written with the belief that tribal governments have the ability to draft victim right's laws centered on their tribal beliefs that convey compassion for those harmed by crime and the importance of protecting the rights of victims, and to prevent revictimization.



Pocket Guide: Tribal Victim Advocacy in Criminal Cases is designed particularly for community-based advocates as a quick reference guide to better assist victims as they navigate the criminal legal process. This Pocket Guide contains things such as a quick review of the general criminal legal process and victim rights with an emphasis on safety planning at every juncture. While this Pocket Guide is designed primarily for community-based advocates, it may be useful for other professionals who work with victims.

POCKET GUIDE: TRIBAL VICTIM ADVOCACY IN CRIMINAL CASES

... and more resources!

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