

An Advocate's Responsibilities

Informing of rights

The victim has the right to deny any service or procedure at the hospital. She does not have to give an explanation if she does not want to. Victims should also be made aware of the potential consequences; ultimately, there is nothing the victim HAS to do. In order to obtain a forensic exam, she will need to cooperate with police and be subject to an interview before the police will authorize evidence collection. If the victim does not want to cooperate with police, then the costs of her medical treatment will be her responsibility.

Serving as a liaison between agencies

While responding as an advocate, you will have the opportunity to network and educate other systems. Your ability to serve as a bridge will help to improve relations in the future.

Offering crisis intervention

Validate and Ventilate: Victim advocates support and encourage the victim as the victim ventilates and then validates the experience. Acknowledging the victim's words and feelings is a way to confirm that the reactions are normal responses to an abnormal situation. The victim's feelings can be validated as normal reactions, while not being confirmed as reality.

Explaining the medical process

Explaining the legal process

Accompanying or staying with the victim

This should always be the victim's decision. If you are asked to leave by either medical or law enforcement personnel and you've already asked and confirmed with the victim that they want you to stay, briefly explain to that person the victim's desire for you to remain as their support person. If medical/law enforcement insists that you have to leave, ask to speak with them further in the hallway/another room. It is important you do not have power struggles in front of the victim. If in the end, you are still not allowed to remain with the victim during a period, document your conversation and inform your supervisor. In all cases, advocates should get the name of the responding law enforcement officer and medical person. It will be the role of the supervisor to work with other systems in this regard.

Facilitate decision making

Prepare and predict for the victim the unfolding chain of events in the criminal justice system. Advocates provide the victim with a sense of what will happen next, a "roadmap" of what will unfold. The victim determines how much information is given. Advocates also attempt to help the victim understand typical emotional, cognitive, physical, and behavioral reactions to trauma. Providing the opportunity for victims to learn more about the whole experience of "victimization" allows them to take a greater role in managing their own healing.

Conducting safety planning

Safety and Security: Victim advocates must take the victim feelings of safety (or lack of safety) seriously. Advocates assess the victim's feelings of safety at the moment and validate the victim's fears as well as prepare a safety plan.

Documentation

As required per agency. Advocate documentation should not contain any judgment and details of the assault should not be required. More explicit documentation will be conducted if the victim seeks follow up services within the agency. Advocacy programs should also consider data collection for their statistics regarding demographic and overall assault information. Advocates should not take notes during the call and again, only a brief summary is needed for documentation. This limits what the defense can use in court if subpoenaed. The brief synopsis should focus on the victim's emotional response and not on the aspects of the assault.