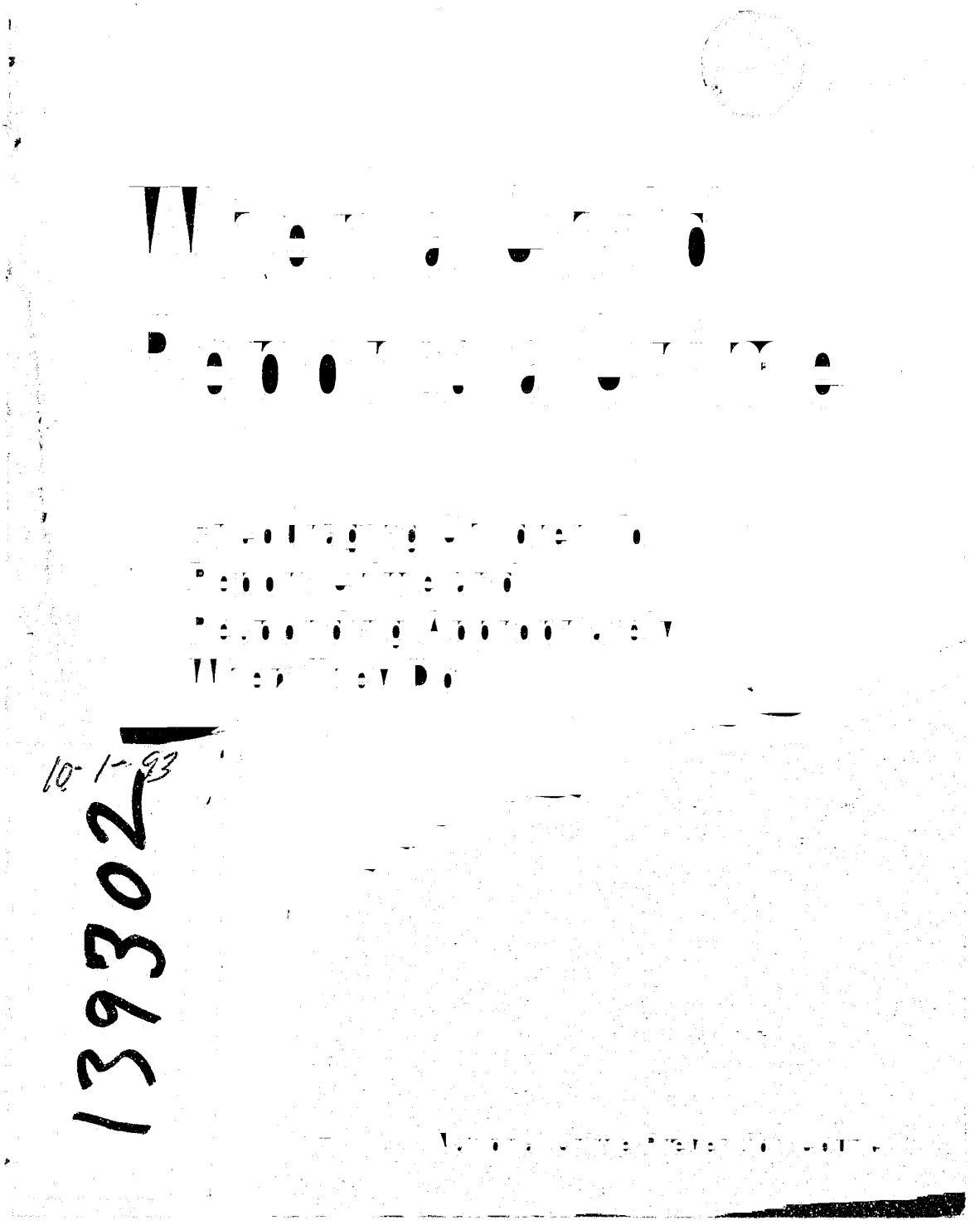

# When a Child Reports a Crime

## Encouraging Children To Report Crime and Responding Appropriately When They Do



National Crime Prevention Council
Washington, DC

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# Foreword

This handbook seeks primarily to help members of the law enforcement community—youth officers, crime prevention officers, and patrol officers. But it can also help professionals in many other fields who work with young people. These professionals might include youth leaders, guidance counselors, school nurses, recreation leaders, and day care personnel.

The National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) set out to write a book that would help people in many sectors to reduce crime against young people by encouraging them to report crime and by preventing their revictimization. The Advisory Panel convened by NCPC concluded that appropriate encouragement, competent handling, and caring follow-up of reports made by young people are keys to reducing both victimization and repeat victimization. The panel suggested a practical handbook that would help those interested in youth and crime prevention, particularly those in law enforcement since they frequently experience reporting situations, face a wide variety of circumstances in which crimes are reported, and have considerable discretion in acting on those matters. This handbook, we hope, fulfills the Advisory Panel's vision.

NCPC wishes to thank the Advisory Panel for its help in framing this effort. Their work provided much of the understanding, direction, and information that were needed.

Lydia Braggs, Phyllis Wheatley Center, Greenville, South Carolina

Martha Frickert, Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, Richmond, Virginia

Hubert Harrell, Berkeley County Sheriff's Department, Moncks Corner, South Carolina

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Janice Rench, Resources for Women: Consulting Services, Cleveland, Ohio

Cliff Sargeon, Ad Hoc Group Against Crime, Kansas City, Missouri

NCPC also thanks Jack A. Nadol, Acting Director, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice and Robert H. Brown, Jr., Chief, Community Crime Prevention Branch at BJA for their thoughtful and constructive contributions to this effort.

Organizations that provided thoughtful reviews and suggestions include National Organization for Victim Assistance, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, National District

Attorneys Association, and National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse.

Several sources beyond those cited in the text provided helpful guidance and concepts, including

*Combatting Child Abuse: Guidelines for Cooperation Between Law Enforcement and Child Protective Services,* Douglas J. Besharov, Rapporteur. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1990.

*The Florida Juvenile Handbook,* Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Tallahassee: Author, n.d.

*When the Victim is a Child,* Debra Whitcomb. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice, 1992.

Personal communications from P. Diane Schneider, et al., Region X, Community Relations Service, U.S. Department of Justice.

The help of the Advisory Panel, the sources noted above, and the external reviewers is gratefully acknowledged; any errors or omissions in this handbook are of course the responsibility of NCPC.

Thanks go to Terry Modglin, NCPC Director of Youth Programs, who conceived and spearheaded this effort; to Jean O'Neil, NCPC Managing Editor and Director of Research and Policy Analysis, who provided much of the conceptual energy and the writing and editing. Also at NCPC, Judy Kirby provided invaluable administrative support; Jacqueline Aker proofed the document; Marty Pociask and Fay Pattee provided design and production support. NCPC's Executive Director, Jack Calhoun, saw this ground-breaking project through many drafts and vicissitudes. Jeff Oshins did the seminal research that uncovered the need for this work; Kevin Haney helped search out innumerable details. Thanks also to consultants Janice Rench for her early writing and Lloyd Preslar for his editing.

# Contents

*You are presenting a drug prevention program at Jefferson Elementary School. The session is almost over and you are reviewing some guidelines about saying no to drugs. One little boy shouts out, "I know about cocaine. My mother hides some under her bed."*

*You have just presented a child sexual assault prevention class to a group of nine-year-olds, using a McGruff puppet. You ask if anyone has questions for you or McGruff. One little girl whispers in McGruff's ear that her Daddy comes into her bed at night and puts his hands inside her pajamas and rubs her between her legs.*

*You are finishing your patrol for the night, and you're eager to get home. A teenager approaches and starts to tell you about a friend he worries about. He thinks the friend has been trying to sell drugs to the neighborhood kids.*

*You've been called to the scene of a drive-by shooting. A 20-year-old lies dead; his 12-year-old brother is wounded; his six-year-old sister is unhurt physically but terrified.*

How do you react in these situations? What do you say to these young people? What difference does the quality of your response make? Law enforcement officers face these kinds of situations frequently. Sometimes the child is a direct victim of crime. In other situations, children may have witnessed a crime or suffered from the consequences of a crime.

Crime events involving young people are frequent and serious. The National Crime Victimization Survey, conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice (Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs) indicates that young people ages 12 to 19 are victimized by crime (including robbery, assault, rape, and theft) at twice the rate of people 20 and older. Children younger than 12 are not interviewed in this survey, but it is clear that these children confront many of the same crime problems, and they are less capable of resolving them. Whether as victims of crime or as witnesses (which can make them secondary victims), young people are vulnerable and are placed frequently in situations where reports are warranted. We know from long-standing statistical

evidence that young people ages 12 to 19 are far less likely than adults to report crimes to the police. The evidence suggests that younger children are even less likely to report. Without these reports, the criminal justice system cannot begin to respond.

A child can be revictimized in many ways—by the criminal or the criminal's friends or family. If children can be encouraged to report, the criminal justice system can frequently offer protection. Being the victim of a crime or seeing someone victimized is traumatic, and the trauma can carry lasting impact. It can color the way a child views the world and may hamper his or her development. And evidence is clear that in all too many cases, people who victimize were first victims—often repeated victims—of crime as children. If the crime is reported, the victim can get help that may prevent his or her future delinquent or criminal behavior.

## This Handbook Can Help You Help Children

This handbook is designed to help you increase your effectiveness in those situations in which young people are reporting (or should be reporting) crime. By handling reporting situations effectively and by encouraging children to report, you make a long-term investment in the mental and physical well-being of children that can have life-long payoffs for them and the community. Here is how this handbook can help you when a child reports a crime.

A *child* is someone under age 18, for our purposes. The younger the child, in general, the less safe it is to rely on our knowledge of adult behavior in handling crime reports. Some material in this handbook clearly applies more to young children; other material clearly applies to older youth.

A *victim* is someone who has suffered from an unlawful act, whether a personal or a property crime. *Revictimization* occurs when the victim is subjected to the same crime or to further crime by the offender (or by friends or family of the offender, usually as retaliation or intimidation). Sometimes the individual can be revictimized when the criminal justice or social service system does not provide the victim with equitable and compassionate treatment.

Revictimization can be as serious as—or more serious than—the original crime. The individual, suffering the effects of the original crime, may well lack the resources to recover from the new assault. At minimum, the pain and loss created by the new (re-)victimization will cause further problems that must be dealt with.

We hope to help you understand:

- how reporting of crime by a child differs from reporting by an adult;

- the psychology of crime reporting by children (which will enable you to get better reports and make better dispositions); and
- how to enhance your working relationships with children and youth to encourage them to report appropriately to you.

Young people are victims of all types of crimes and all kinds of people. Some crime is intrafamilial. Some crimes are committed by peers. Some involve an offender who is a stranger to the victim. Some are crimes against the person, some against property. Crimes that involve drugs and those that involve child abuse get special mention here because of their direct relevance to youth.

This handbook is only a guide. It should be regarded not as a collection of rules, but as a framework for effective action. It sets out some principles that are valuable, ideas that have been proved, and answers that have worked.

By reading this handbook, you should be able to answer questions like these:

- How can you establish conditions that encourage appropriate reporting by children?
- What does a trusted adult look like through the eyes of a youngster? Is it what you say, how you look, your body language that commands trust and confidence?
- What is the most effective way to take a report from a child?
- What can be done to help a child and make sure the child is protected after the report is made?
- When should you involve parents? How can you do so effectively?
- How can you teach young people reasons and ways to report crime?

## Handling Reports Effectively Is Part of Crime Prevention

In the last decade, society has begun to take more seriously the problem of violence against young people. We have launched many crime prevention education programs aimed at them; begun national campaigns to help children refuse drugs; and encouraged them to tell trusted adults when someone does something that may be criminal or that frightens or upsets them.

These programs are necessary, but their value is limited unless young people actually report crimes and unless they are protected from both intentional damage by the offender and inadvertent damage by family, well-meaning adults, or the criminal justice system.

We all want young people to grow up in an environment of trust and of safety from violence and threat. Because this

is not always the case, we must encourage young people to tell adults when they are crime victims or witnesses. These young people have a right to expect that they will be believed and that appropriate action will be taken.

Law enforcement officers have a special, sensitive role to play in this process. Their skills, their rights as agents of the criminal justice system, their self-interest in taking good reports and in reducing crime, and their knowledge of the criminal community make their actions models for many others, and place them in the position of serving as role models or authorities for others in the community who must deal with children in similar situations.

Increased reporting of crime by young people, combined with appropriate responses by adults, can reduce crime, by helping to pinpoint needs and problems to be addressed, by reducing the occurrence of revictimization, and by teaching needed prevention skills to young people. These results, in turn, will help reduce the psychological scars left on young people by victimization, scars that can cast long shadows. Moreover, future crime can be reduced. Too often, the unassisted victim immediately or eventually becomes the victimizer.

Law enforcement officers certainly play a key role in helping children report crime and in preventing them from being further victimized. But the information in this handbook can help others, as well. As most law enforcement officers know, parents, teachers, school officials, members of community agencies and organizations, and neighbors all share the obligation to help children and can benefit from many of the points that follow. This handbook can help them, too.

Obviously, reporting of crime is only part of the story, but if we can prevent young people from being preyed upon or preying upon others, we will reduce crime and its consequences. How responsible members of the community encourage, react to, and follow up on appropriate crime reports by young people will have enormous impact—for good or ill—upon the crime picture for decades to come.

# Young People and Victimization

Crime is no respecter of person, time, or location. A child from any walk of life, from any part of the community, with any kind of upbringing or background may be the victim of a crime. Young people may be the most victimized age group in the United States, and they have little power to do something about their victimization. Even if a child is not victimized personally, witnessing violence can be a traumatic experience—an experience that for too many young people has become a way of life.

*Eleven-year-old Stacy is a good student who enjoys school. She is the third of four children in a hard-working but far from wealthy family. She attends church and is active in the youth group there. She has never been in trouble with the law, and the most serious crime she has experienced was the theft of her scissors in first grade.*

*But recently, drug traffic has come to the neighborhood. Stacy must walk past a drug house on the way to and from school. She has heard stories about drugs, and she knows that two of her classmates were assaulted near the drug house.*

*Stacy started to miss school. Her grades dropped. She had many physical complaints, including upset stomach and headaches. She didn't want to leave home by herself. The school nurse figured that all these events had to be connected, and she talked with Stacy. Finally, Stacy described her concerns. She was afraid of being raped or robbed by the people at the drug house. She had never been accosted, but she lived every day with the threat of violation.*

Stacy's predicament tells a lot about the effects of crime and fear of crime. Fear can be as damaging as crime itself. The effects of crime may be indirect, not easily recognized and not easily understandable even to those who know the victim.

## Some Numbers Emphasize the Need

Though there are no ongoing, comprehensive, national studies of youth victimization (national victimization surveys only interview those twelve and older), a number of studies of various kinds of victimization help

emphasize the extent of the traumas that young people in our society undergo:

- Teens (12-19 year olds) are twice as likely as adults to be victims of violent crimes—assault, rape, robbery.
- Teens are more likely than adults to be the victim of someone they know.
- Nearly 700,000 children were the victims of abuse—physical, sexual, emotional—in 1986.
- One in five children has been afraid to go to school because of the threat of crime.

Property crime also creates victims—victims who experience reactions similar to those of victims of violence. Teens are substantially more likely than adults to be property crime victims, research shows. The theft of a prized possession raises the victim's sense of vulnerability and fear. And children who live in households hit by crime are victims as well. A child whose home has been burglarized can well feel the same sense of personal invasion and assault that an adult resident feels.

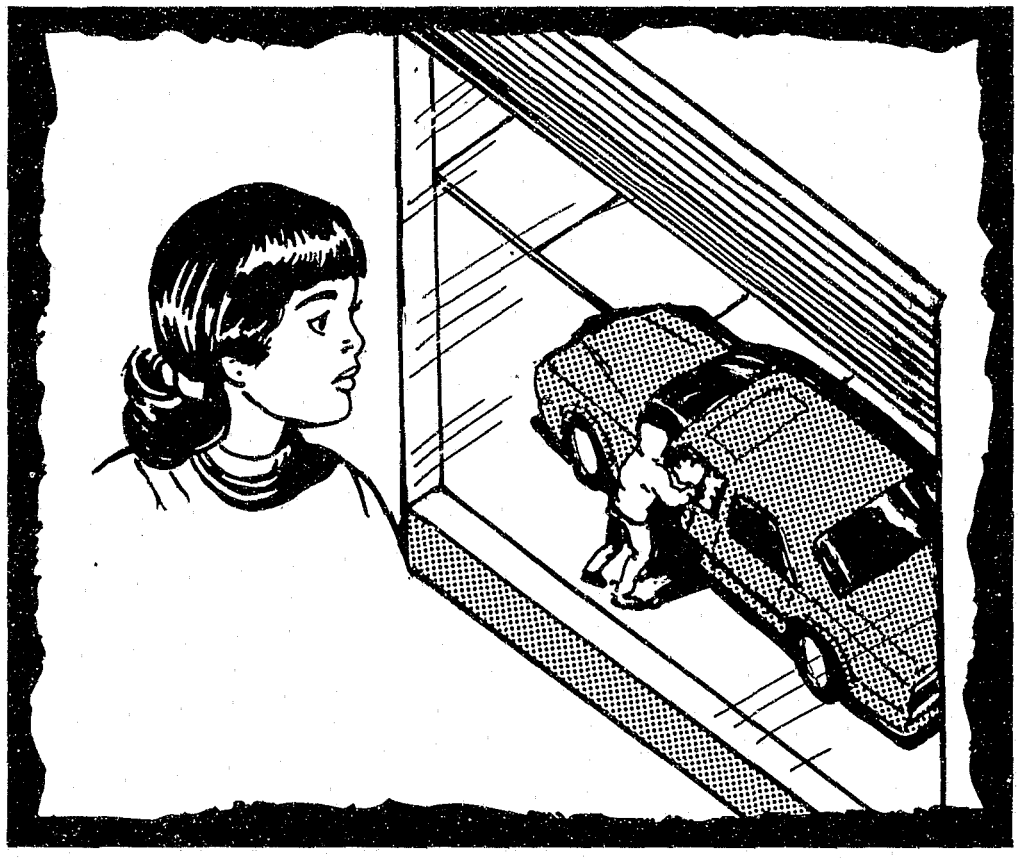
## Why Are Children So Victimized?

What makes children more susceptible to being crime victims? In part, actions that might be acceptable by adults or between adults are unlawful if they involve children. Our laws provide additional protection to children, because they are younger and less powerful than adults. In part, children don't always know better; they don't realize that they have been victimized.

Children may be at greater risk for other reasons as well:

- Especially as they reach the teen years, children are likely to have more independent lifestyles that put them in locations where and when more crime occurs.
- Children may have dysfunctional families that don't or can't provide support and guidance.
- Many are susceptible to peer pressure, including negative peer pressure.
- Teens in particular spend a lot of time with their peers, a group that includes a higher percentage of offenders than other age groups.
- Children may lack positive activities and be attracted out of boredom to dangerous settings.
- Children, especially teens, seldom accept the idea of their vulnerability; they feel invincible.
- If children do not report crime, they can be revictimized by the same offender.

- Children may be loyal to a family member even if that family member breaks the law.
- Children are not always aware that a crime has been committed against them.
- Especially if they are younger, children are more likely to be trusting and naive and may be more easily led.
- Children often have fewer resources than adults, including such intellectual and emotional skills as resolving conflicts without violence.
- Some children are subject to the control of adults who drink to excess or use drugs; the connection of alcohol and other drug use to crime and child abuse has been well documented.



- In some situations, children have grown up with the idea that violence, drug abuse, and thefts are simply a part of normal life.
- Parents may be unable to control circumstances or may be unaware of risks.

## Levels of Personal Violation Vary

When children are victims of crime, they experience physical, psychological, financial, and emotional injuries similar to those of adults. The scars are imprinted longer and sometimes more indelibly on the young. For both children and adults, the depth of injuries varies with the characteristics of the crime.

Television usually shows the good guys eventually winning, healing, and recovering. The event is concise—usually an hour or less, at worse a mini-series. Justice triumphs; equity is restored. The criminal is caught, the case prosecuted—or at least it's clear that that will happen. All the loose ends are tied up.

But reality is different. For many victims, children and adults, one of the greatest shocks of victimization may be that the consequences of the event aren't wrapped up neatly and that there are lasting effects and lingering loose ends. For children, there is the rude shock of finding that adults cannot always "make it better." Parents may need your help to understand that they have not failed in this situation, that the child's reaction is a normal if distressing one, and that they can do many things that help the child work through the impact of the victimization. For example, sharing information about developmental needs of children or about stages that victims go through and ways children may act can be enormously helpful to parents seeking to help their children.

Crime reduces the victim's sense of security. Some crimes reduce that sense of safety severely, others less so. Many people think that property loss has little or no effect on the long-term psychological well-being of the victim, but all crime injures. Crime disproportionately hurts those with the fewest resources—the poor, the young, the unemployed, the unattached. The fewer the total resources a person has, the greater is the proportionate loss. And children generally have the fewest resources of all.

For example, the harm caused by an auto theft depends on the significance of the automobile in the victim's life. In a well-established family with two or three cars, insurance, and a stable income, the theft may cause relatively minor disruption. However, to a young adult carrying minimal insurance who needs the car to get to and from work or to the single parent who needs the car

to get a child to and from child care while he or she works, the theft of an automobile may represent a major disruption, even a potential economic crisis.

**Most Important Reason for Not Reporting Crimes to Police**

| | Ages | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 12-15 | 16-19 | 20+ |
| Problem regarded as a private matter | 15 | 26 | 27 |
| Crime was reported to someone else | 23 | 9 | 7 |
| Object was recovered | 17 | 17 | 13 |
| Not important | 15 | 11 | 7 |
| Not important to the police | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Fear of reprisal | 6 | 5 | 6 |
| Lack of proof | 3 | 5 | 7 |
| Too inconvenient | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Police ineffecient | 1 | 2 | 4 |

*Adapted from *Teenage Victims: A National Crime Survey Report,* U.S. Department of Justice, 1991.

The property crime of burglary similarly produces personal trauma. When one's home is violated, the victim feels a sense of violation because the home represents refuge and bastion. A child knows, or at least senses, that his or her home—perhaps even his or her own bedroom—was invaded.

Obviously, a crime that involves violence to the person (such as assault, robbery, or rape) generates an even higher level of lost security and vulnerability. The victim fears death, injury, powerlessness, continuation or acceleration of the violence, lack of control, and more.

The ultimate violation, of course, is murder. The victim's family and friends who are left behind also have been violated, experiencing loss as in any death but also knowing that the loss was not the result of accident or illness but of the intentional result of a malicious, willful act.

## Why Don't Youth Report Crime More Often?

Less than half of all crime in the United States is reported to police although more reporting can lead to less crime. Police chiefs and sheriffs in a national survey by

NCPC and Northwestern University said that increased citizen reporting of crime was a top prerequisite for reducing crime. Young people report crime to police significantly less frequently than adults, according to the National Crime Victimization Survey. Comparing their reasons (the survey covers only 12-to-19-year-olds) with those of the adult population suggests some issues to be concerned about: lack of sense that the incident is important, belief that recovery of object resolves the issue, and (for younger teens) reporting the crime to someone other than law enforcement. Although we do not know with statistical certainty the proportion of under-reporting for children under 12 years of age, it is reasonable to assume that they are no more likely than teens to report many kinds of crime.

Even if a parent or trusted adult receives and believes the child's report, it may never come to the attention of authorities. A survey in Boston showed that among 48 families in which a child had been sexually abused, only 56% of the parents had reported the crime to authorities. Also, child-serving professionals such as doctors and social workers sometimes fail to file reports when they suspect child abuse, even though reports are mandated. They may try instead to enroll troubled families in counseling or treatment.

## Fear, Lack of Knowledge, Other Issues Can Block Reports

There may be one or a combination of reasons beyond those noted above for young people not reporting crime:

- Some don't know that they can report.
- Some fear they will not be believed.
- Some fear being called a "snitch" or being ostracized by peers.
- Some echo or mimic parents' expressed lack of faith in the criminal justice system.
- Some fear retaliation.
- Some may not have a sense of personal trust in the police or a particular officer.
- Some don't want the responsibility of sending someone to jail.
- Some don't realize that they are victims.
- Some have tried to report but nothing resulted.

- Some, especially young children, may lack the verbal skills to report.
- Children may fear separation from their parents or may want to be loyal to family members.
- Some children fear law enforcement officers—or even the weapons they carry—more than they fear the criminal.
- Some children fear punishment, either from parents or from the criminal justice system, if they were at all involved in the act (even as witnesses, not accomplices).

By understanding the many reasons that young people may have for reluctance to report a crime, you can better understand how to select from a variety of ways in which to overcome that reluctance, in order to increase reporting.

## Children's Reliability as Witnesses

How much can children remember as witnesses to crimes? How much can they be swayed or influenced by adults? People in all parts of the criminal justice system have been concerned about the credibility and reliability of testimony from children, both in reporting crime and in prosecuting offenders.

On the one hand, children have been known to tell the truth when adults would not. On the other hand, children have been known to misreport, whether through misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Many people have based their attitude toward children's reliability as witnesses more on personal experience and anecdote than on verified evidence.

In the last few years, some studies have finally been undertaken to examine the question of children's roles as reporters of events. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) has published *When the Victim Is a Child* (Second Edition, 1992), which sets out knowledge to date about working with child sexual assault victims throughout the criminal justice process. One important research finding was that although a strongly projected adult attitude may influence a child's interpretation of events, the child's report of the actual process of the event remains accurate whether the adult tries to bias it or not.

Recent research sponsored by NIJ looked at children as witnesses in a broader context ("New Approach to Interviewing Children: A Test of Its Effectiveness," 1992). Third and sixth graders were witnesses to a staged incident about which they were interviewed by college students about the incident using either the traditional or the cognitive technique. The children witnessed a second incident and were interviewed

by sheriff's deputies also using one of the two techniques. Results showed that the children recalled information with a high degree of accuracy and completeness — more than 80%. The cognitive interview process (described in Chapter VI) was found to be the more reliable — producing recall accuracy as high as 90%. It was also clear that having the chance to practice the cognitive interview in the first event helped young people when they were called on to witness the second (unrelated) event.

# [illegible]

Witnessing or being a victim of crime produces different manifestations and reactions in different people. There are three major determinants of how a child copes: (1) the child's stage of development, (2) the specific circumstances surrounding the incident, and (3) the reactions of trusted adults to the disclosure of the abuse or the crime.

*The tinkling of broken glass and the thud of wood hitting against wood startled Juan out of a sound sleep. Lying on the floor in a corner of the living room, Juan rolled himself closer to the wall and tucked his head under the blanket that served as both his mattress and his cover.*

*He could understand only a few of the words yelled out by shouting adults over the screams of children. "Drugs," and "If you think this is bad, wait 'til tomorrow," and "You're dead, bitch."*

*Juan could see only shadows in the half-lit room. The thing that caught his eye and made his heart race with fear was the sawed-off shotgun he saw in the tall man's hand.*

For any witness, child or adult, this incident would produce high anxiety. But Juan's way of demonstrating this anxiety will depend in large part on his developmental age. If he is developmentally six years old, the suddenness of being awakened by the noise and loud voices probably generated most of his anxiety. Juan may or may not identify the actual event as criminal behavior or even life-threatening, depending on what he is accustomed to hearing. However, he may exhibit his anxiety by regressing to the safety of younger behavior—by bed wetting or clinging to his mother, for example—or by becoming very quiet and withdrawn when he had been outgoing.

If he is developmentally 12, Juan can comprehend much more readily the physical threat of people breaking into the house with guns in the middle of the night. He knows that this is a crime and that the police should know. Still, he will display directly or indirectly the effects of his victimization. He may act out, for instance—ignoring adult requests and commands, bullying younger children, becoming physically aggressive. Juan might stay out late at night or run away in order to cope.

To best help children who have been victimized or who have witnessed a crime, it helps if you know some basics about childhood development. This information can also be helpful to parents of children who have been victimized. Research is limited on children's emotional response to witnessing or victimization, but their stages of development suggest needs and responses that can help guide your reactions. Of course, all that follows presumes that you have moved to take care of the most immediate medical and security needs of the young person involved.

## Stages of Development

A child's intellectual, emotional, and social growth occur in stages that define the child's view of the world, sense of reality, and relationships with other people. Remember that the child's developmental age may not be the same as his or her calendar age. Developmentally, a child may act the same age, older, or younger than that chronological age. A child of age ten could act like a six-year-old or 12-year old, depending on his or her developmental stage.

### The Littlest Ones

**Situation:** From infancy to about two years of age, children are acquiring basic physical skills and the rudiments of communication. They address and manipulate their world physically rather than emotionally or rationally. By age two, most children are speaking in partial or short sentences and can relate the elements of a story. They may recall what they have seen, but only from their own perspective and their own very limited frame of reference. They are extraordinarily egocentric and concrete but often incomplete and non-sequential. To them, time is either extremely immediate or eternal. There is no understanding of such a thing as delayed gratification of needs or desires. When mother leaves, the child may think she will never return. But mother does return, and trust is built each time this happens. Although traumatic events are not recalled later, the child may experience problems later without understanding why.

**To Help:** These youngest children when victims of or witnesses to crime need attention to their immediate physical needs—shelter, clothing, physical security, food—and attention to immediate emotional needs. They need direct help rather than verbal reassurance—a teddy bear, a hug, a bottle of juice, a cuddle in a quiet adult lap. They may ask questions but need only the most basic explanations that will answer their concerns. A simple statement, "Mommy had to go to see the doctor at the hospital" is much preferable to "Mommy will be right back" (probably untrue but seen as a promise) or "We think your Mommy will be all right but a bad person hit her and the doctor has

to fix her broken leg and sew up her cuts and keep her there for observation" (excessive). Lying is very seldom desirable, but excessive facts and complex descriptions for children this age can only confuse them.

## Pre-Schoolers

**Situation:** Children two to five years old are developing language skills and learning how to interpret and manipulate the world on emotional and rational levels. They see the world in a relatively limited framework and relate chiefly to their own family members and immediate age-mates. They are beginning to understand time and space. Children at this age may translate a trauma into "acting out" the event during play. The child may remember the event but not remember when it occurred. The child may be able to talk in a limited way about the event, but may give an incomplete reconstruction because they assume the adult knows the facts. The trauma may result in behavior such as crying, sleep disturbances, bed wetting, thumb sucking, and head banging. Children will report events that they understand to be like those that they have been told are wrong, but they may not know an action is wrong until they are told.

**To Help:** In this age group, the child victim is likely to need attention to emotional needs as well as physical ones. The child may need or want basic facts as well. Simple explanations, couched in the child's terms, can help. The child understands some basic ideas about right and wrong, and may well need assurance that what he or she did was right. The child may need acknowledgement that there is indeed a problem and reassurance that he or she did not contribute to it.

## The Elementary School Years

**Situation:** Children from six to ten years of age are generally competent in use of language, but they think and reason in fairly concrete terms. They do not have a clear sense of identity separate from family, but they are beginning to develop a sense of self. They may feel responsible for events that touch them but are not caused by them, such as their parents' divorce or a parent's illness. Children in this developmental stage often react by exhibiting radical changes in behavior. The boisterous child may become quiet. The trusting child may become distrustful. A child once comfortable with adults may cling to peers. Physical symptoms such as stomachaches and headaches can be signs of reaction, as can depression or regression to younger behaviors. Children of this age normally provide truthful, reasonably accurate reports, but they may not be complete. Children in this age group are sometimes more objective about events than adults who impose their own perspectives. But their knowledge and perspective may

be incomplete as well. Their concerns about people go beyond those of their immediate family to friends and extended family. They generally have a clear sense of right and wrong.

**To Help:** These young people need reassurance. You need to make sure they understand that they are not at fault (that the criminal, not the victim, did something wrong) and to express gladness that the child has told about this event. The child will want action to fix or repair physical damage caused. In this age group, children often need help understanding or interpreting the feelings of others involved in the act. They will need informed observation for possibly weeks or months because they may exhibit delayed signs of anger or guilt. They experience concerns about privacy and possible social stigmas, and need to be reassured that classmates and playmates, as well as adults not immediately involved, do not need to be told about the event. They may need some explanation about future steps because they are aware of but do not understand the criminal justice system.

## Pre-Teens

**Situation:** The years from ten to 13 are years of puberty for girls and pre-puberty for boys. Maturing bodies produce self-consciousness and awkwardness. Everything is embarrassing. Peers are important. Changes in hormones and physical development cause moodiness, extreme swings in feelings, and emotional outbursts. These young people have learned to reason abstractly and to generalize and analyze from experience. They are acquiring a sense of justice and injustice, concepts of equity and of right and wrong in a broader context. When young people in this age group are victimized, their behavioral changes may be misinterpreted as part of normal development. Age-inappropriate behavior such as acting or dressing older or younger or associating with older or younger children can be a response to victimization. Depression, violent aggressiveness, suicide attempts, and substance abuse can occur, depending on the severity of the case. Reporting by children in this age group can be specific and detailed. In the cases of many children, it can be affected by their sense of risk, their concern over repercussions for peers and family, and their concern about the future.

**To Help:** In helping these young people, it is important to address their concerns and questions with honesty, to assure them of all possible privacy and consideration, and to reassure them that they are not at fault for the crime on either an intellectual or emotional level. They need to know that they did not deserve or ask for the violation, and that their feelings of loss, anger, and hurt are valid and should be dealt with. It may be important to explain that outside help is available, for children in

this age group may well be reluctant to talk with an adult in their family about their fears and concerns. They may rebel against being treated as "little kids" all the while regressing to younger and younger behavior patterns, so anyone working with them needs to be prepared to deal with this duality.

## Teens to Young Adulthood

**Situation:** Young people 14 to 18 years old are developing toward adult competencies and refining their individual identities. They are seeking increased and visible independence. They may feel omnipotent, omniscient, and invulnerable. Conflict with authority is normal. Most of these youth rely on peer groups for support and draw at least their superficial values from peers. Adolescents want to appear competent and find it hard to admit they need help. Although they are more and more like adults as they move through this age group, they are likely (as are a number of adults) to regress in behavior. They explore alternatives to living in abusive situations. They may exhibit signs of trauma by becoming rebellious, truant from school, abusive of drugs or alcohol, promiscuous, or depressed. Any such behavior by itself should not be re-

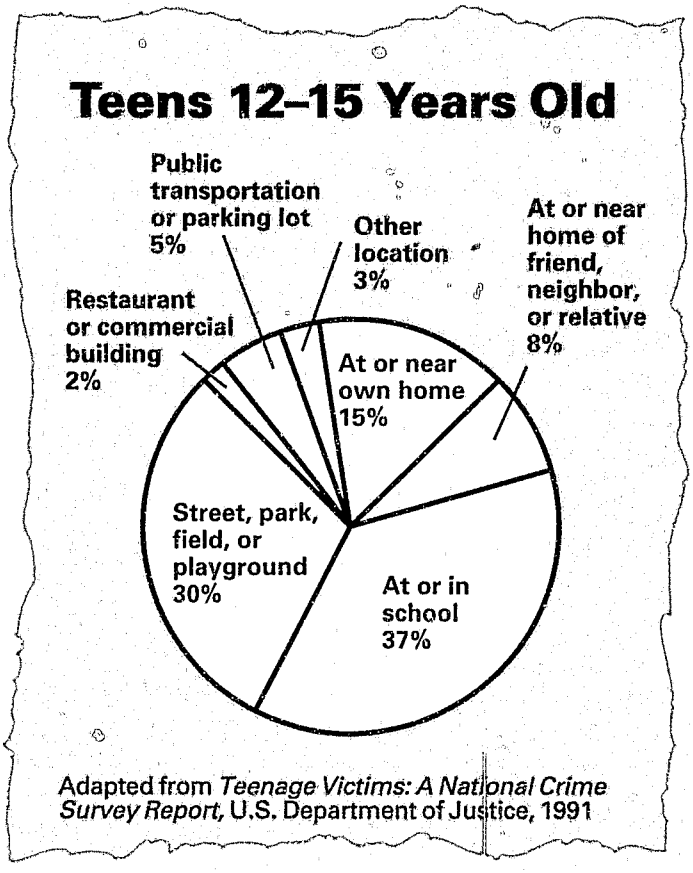
garded automatically as a sign of victimization, but rather as an indicator, a red flag, signalling that something adverse may be going on, something the young person needs help to understand and stop.

**To Help:** These young people need support and caring even though they may be in denial or be oppositional. They want to know short-term consequences and may be concerned over long-term ones as well, but they are not always informed, and may be reluctant to admit their lack of knowledge. They need to know that outside help for a variety of needs is available. Moreover, these young people tend to disbelieve their vulnerability, and may experience extra shock at the very fact that they are not invulnerable. That trauma may be nearly as serious as the criminal victimization itself, and may require more tact and finesse than responding to the criminal victimization.

By understanding the impact of developmental stages on the behavior and reactions of a young victim or witness, you can better relate behavior to the youth's experience, understand the frame of reference the child brings to a reporting situation, and minimize the possibility of the youth's being revictimized.

## Circumstances Surrounding the Crime

The child's reaction to an encounter with crime will depend not only on the developmental age of the child, but on the circumstances of the crime.



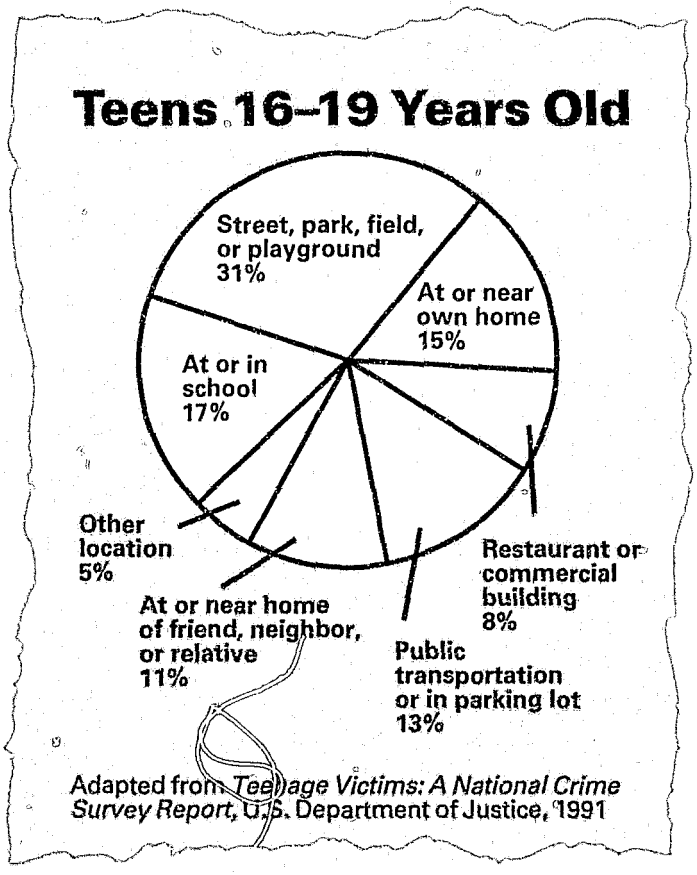

Adapted from *Teenage Victims: A National Crime Survey Report*, U.S. Department of Justice, 1991

Important factors include:

- the relationship between the victim and the offender (the closer the relationship, the greater the trauma);
- the relationship of the event to the victim's daily life (the more closely the event is linked to the victim's daily routine, the more severe the trauma);
- the degree of physical injury or violence (the greater the violence, the greater the trauma);
- the loss sustained by the victim as the victim perceives it (the greater the perceived loss, the greater the trauma); and
- the duration or persistence of the event (the longer or more frequent, the greater the trauma).

Trauma can include emotional and psychological injury as well as physical injury. Broken trust can hurt as much as a broken arm, and the pain can last longer.

The locations of crimes against younger children reflect where they spend most of their time—at home and at school. As children become older, they are exposed to different crime circumstances. As the 1990 National Crime Survey points out, the older the teenager, the more likely that victimization will take place away from home—in school or in public places such as parks, playgrounds, parking lots, and public streets.




Adapted from *Teenage Victims: A National Crime Survey Report*, U.S. Department of Justice, 1991

Another complicating circumstance is the victim's history as a victim. Repeated victimization may generate a numbness to new assaults, or an anticipatory terror that makes the trauma more severe, or a reaction that revives all the previous traumas, compounding the current one.

## Your Reaction to the Report

One of the most influential factors in the trauma of a child's reporting of a crime is the reaction of the person to whom the report is made, whether parent, police officer, counselor, or doctor. The adult's reaction can suggest the way in which the rest of the world will react to the crime, influence what and how much the child is willing to tell, affect the child's perception of self-worth and self-blame in relation to the crime, and whether appropriate action will be taken. Indeed, children's concerns about adult reactions—punishment, blame, responsibility, etc.—are among the major reasons children may decide not to report the crime.

In general, your reaction should indicate that:

- You take the report seriously both in terms of seeing it as a serious event to the child and of believing the child.
- You understand that the child may be feeling a number of conflicting emotions.
- The child will not be punished for reporting.
- Reporting was the right decision by the child.
- You will do your best to protect the child from further victimization whether or not it is generated by reporting the crime.
- Others may be involved, but you will (and do) explain as much as possible what will happen.
- Your concern is for the child's well-being as much as for seeing that justice is done.
- You will take action on (or otherwise move toward resolution of) the child's complaint.

It can be helpful to share these pointers when talking with parents either in group settings (such as PTA/PTO meetings) or when bringing them into the child's reporting. Parents' reactions can do much to either support or undermine your efforts and those of others to help the child deal with the report and the crime-related experience. By reaching out to work with parents in advance, you make your job—and theirs—easier and better if something should happen to the child.

Because how you handle a report from a child is so critical to preventing revictimization by either the criminal and his allies or the criminal justice system, the next sections deal with your obligations regarding reports and good techniques for taking reports and dealing with victims.

Law enforcement officers and many other adults who may deal with child victims or witnesses have broad discretion about how they will handle the child's report to them. Law enforcement officers must report certain things depending on state law and policy within their jurisdiction; child protection workers (and usually other professionals like doctors) must report suspected child abuse. But every police officer knows he or she has not ticketed every traffic offender or detained every child involved in a neighborhood fight.

There are minimum requirements for what must be reported. It is vital that you learn—and periodically review—the key guidelines you must work within. You should:

- Know the reporting laws in your state.
- Know the procedures and policies of your department, including parental notification policies and officially mandated referrals.
- Know the procedures and policies of the schools and other institutions with which you work.

Just as important as knowing your obligations, make sure that the young person you are dealing with understands your obligation. A lengthy discussion or a legal citation is not necessary. A simple explanation suitable to the child's age will do fine. For a seven-year-old, for instance: "Thank you for telling me. (The offender) broke a law—that's a rule that people are supposed to always follow. To stop (the offender) from breaking the rule again, I have to tell _____ about what you have told me. Do you have any worries or questions about that?" Sometimes, the child will plead with you not to tell a parent, even though you know that will be necessary. You might offer to go in person to talk with the parent, to do what you can to help explain the circumstances or to suggest a counseling or other community resource that can help parent and child deal with the situation. But lying to the child or misrepresenting what you must do, especially to children older than two or three, can destroy hard-won trust you've worked to build.

## What *Must* You Report?

Especially when working with younger children, you will find that they believe you, individually, because you are a law enforcement officer (or other responsible adult), can fix the damage, make things right, or take care of the problem on your own. Children tend to see adults as all-powerful. A three-year-old brings his or her parent a dead parakeet and says, "Make it fly again, please," for example. It may be hard for a child to understand why you must bring other people—whether law enforcement, social services, medical, or whoever—into the process. It may be hard for a child to accept the fact that parents must be told and to believe that the parents will want to help. Of course, you should be reasonably certain that the parents are not the source of the problem or otherwise apt to react negatively.

Meanwhile, your jurisdiction and your state have usually defined their expectations and the legal requirements about what you are formally obligated to report. Of course you will abide by those requirements. Further, most people would agree that it is inexcusable not to report in situations like these:

- threat to the life of the child;
- danger of injury to the child;
- failure to report could lead to long term or major psychological damage to the child;
- you can stop a repeat victimization by reporting; or
- the offender presents an ongoing danger to the community.

You can probably come up with other situations in which you and your colleagues would feel obligated to make a formal report, even overriding the child's wishes if necessary.

## Operational Questions

Departments' expectations of what should be reported are shaped by formal policies, training, and informal practices. These policies and practices should support each other, but they may conflict or collide. Some of the questions you ought to be able to answer about your role in a reporting situation include:

- What is the extent of my discretion? When must I take a formal report?
- Under what circumstances (and how) do I bring in the child's parents (or other responsible adult), and when is it inappropriate to do so?
- In what situations should I take the child with me or arrange for other appropriate removal?

- When do I take a report to record information that someone else will use?
- When should I report the incident to someone in another agency or another jurisdiction?
- How do I make appropriate referrals to other community services if I believe they are warranted?
- What are my role and my responsibility after I file a report?

Individual discretion is one of the greatest public trusts placed in law enforcement officers. It can be a challenge, especially when the question involves decisions that might cause further—and unnecessary—harm to the child. No handbook can hope to teach discretion. Experience, guidance from superiors and colleagues, and knowledge of local conditions all go into the learning process—along with your own common sense.

*Tanya, who had just turned 11, came out of the library to find her new bike missing from the rack. She'd only dashed in for a minute to return some books and pick up the latest* Sweet Valley High *novel.*

*She ran back inside to ask the librarian what to do. The librarian suggested calling the police. Tanya agreed reluctantly, already worried over her parents' reaction to the loss of the expensive new bike. She was even more worried because her parents had made her promise to always use the bike lock, and she'd forgotten to.*

*You arrive on the scene. Tanya's worked herself into an emotional upheaval, believing she'll be spanked, restricted for life, and not allowed to use the phone for months when her parents find out. She begs you not to tell her folks.*

What do you do? Consider several things:

- Will Tanya's parents be aware of the event otherwise? (In this case, certainly.)
- Can Tanya cope with the consequences of the crime without adult help? (She probably doesn't have enough money to buy a new bike herself, for one thing.)
- Can you help Tanya by going with her to tell her parents? (Very possibly, by explaining, for instance, that bike thieves have been active in the area and that even locked bikes have been taken.)
- Can Tanya's parents do things to help her that you cannot? (They can, for instance, file an insurance claim.)

If Tanya were older (16 or 17), perhaps you would make different decisions. Or if the loss were different, or the situation less immediately obvious, you

might act otherwise. But in this case, discretion suggests that you explain to Tanya that her parents need to know, that they will realize the bike is missing, and that they can indeed help her. You might discuss with her why she thinks her parents will be angry and talk about how you and she will handle the situation—but explain that you will have to let her parents know.

Discretion in cases that involve physical harm to the child is limited. If one child struck another and no harm was done, why were you even called? If the problem took place at school or at a youth center, you should talk with the adults in charge about their procedure for notifying parents, but you need to rely on your own judgment about your responsibility to tell the parent(s) what happened.

Sometimes, parents will actually react more calmly when you arrive with the child to report, because your presence assures them that something is being done. On the other hand, if the parents are the source of the difficulty—or if a close family member is involved—you may want to think carefully about how you approach and what you say to the adults. If the parents are involved in even unrelated criminal activity, or if their cultural background puts police in a strongly negative light, they may be hostile to any contact between the child and law enforcement.

# Reporting Child Abuse

The reporting of child abuse is the area touching on children and youth that is the most specifically and extensively developed and the most formally regulated. In fact, more professionals are required to report child abuse—or suspected abuse—than any other single category of crime. But even so, it is still not a precise operation.

Law enforcement is the public's general protector, but in most states, child protective agencies rather than law enforcement agencies have primary responsibility to receive and investigate reports of child abuse. Many think, however, that law enforcement officers particularly need to be involved along with the child protective agency when the following situations occur:

- Someone other than a parent abused the child.
- The case appears to warrant arrest or criminal prosecution.
- Child protective agencies cannot be reached, and an immediate response is necessary.
- The child is in immediate danger and child protective agencies cannot enter the home.
- The child must be placed in protective custody against the wishes of parents.

- The suspected perpetrator may flee.
- Help is needed to preserve evidence.
- Protection is needed for the person reporting or for representatives of child protective agencies.

Parents are often unsure of the appropriate reaction to their child's abuse by another. In their anger and grief, they may want to lash out in revenge or to hide what they see as a shameful event.

Be sure that in your reporting to them, you are prepared to deal with these reactions and to help them help the child.

## Shared Responsibility

When both law enforcement and child protective agencies are involved, they should operate under a pre-established protocol or agreement that clarifies the roles and expectations of each. The protocol should cover jurisdiction and responsibility on issues such as who initiates contact, who conducts follow-ups, how information is shared, and who is responsible for what to the court system. The protocol may indicate agency responsibility in specific circumstances, e.g., fatalities, head trauma injuries; unexplained fractures; non-organic failure to thrive; emotional abuse; rape, sodomy, or other sexual abuse.

In a number of jurisdictions, law enforcement and child protection agencies have done more than just define roles—they have developed a joint operating system that minimizes stress to the child, seeks

prevention and problem-solving rather than merely responding to calls, and enables both agencies to meet their missions. In Hayward, California, for example, the social worker rides with the responding officer in family violence cases. In several Massachusetts communities, the agencies have set up joint offices. If you are working with another agency, be sure to coordinate your agencies' work with the child's parents (assuming the parents are not the abusers) as well as your efforts on the child's behalf.

Under the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974, every state must provide for the reporting of all forms of child abuse and neglect. Those who are required to report may include the following:

physicians, nurses, emergency room personnel, other health and medical health care personnel, coroners and medical examiners, dentists, mental health professionals including psychologists, law enforcement personnel, clergy or religious practitioners, social workers, teachers and other school officials, and day care or child care workers.

Clearly, our society holds that everyone has a moral duty to make reports about children who are victims of crime. It is important to note that all states provide legal immunity for any person who does report child abuse.

Deciding to make a report is relatively easy when the child has clear signs of physical abuse, such as fractures or burns. Unfortunately, many signs of abuse and neglect are not so clear. The following list describes situations of child abuse and neglect that need to be reported.

*Physical Abuse:* physical assaults that caused, or could have caused, serious physical injury to the child (for example, striking, kicking, biting, throwing, burning, or poisoning).

*Sexual Abuse:* vaginal, anal, or oral intercourse; vaginal or anal penetrations; and other forms of inappropriate touching. Sexual exploitation of children in pornography, prostitution, or the like should also be reported as abuse.

*Physical Endangerment:* reckless behavior toward a child (such as leaving a young child alone or placing a child in a hazardous environment) that caused or could have caused serious physical injury.

*Abandonment:* leaving a child alone or in the care of another under circumstances that suggest an intentional abdication of parental responsibility.

*Physical Deprivation:* failure to provide basic necessities (such as food, clothing, hygiene, and shelter) that causes, or over time would cause, serious physical injury, sickness, or disability.

*Medical Neglect:* failure to provide the medical, dental, or psychiatric care needed to prevent or treat serious physical or psychological injuries or illnesses.

*Emotional Abuse:* physical or emotional assaults (such as torture and close confinement) that caused or could have caused serious psychological injury. Emotional neglect and developmental deprivation (failure to provide stimulation necessary to prevent serious developmental deficits) can also be forms of abuse.

*Educational Neglect:* chronic failure to send a child to school.

Most law enforcement agencies and social service agencies have clear lines of authority and responsibility for child abuse reporting. In this country, child protective services actually have the responsibility to handle child abuse reports more often than law enforcement. But law enforcement agencies receive a large number of calls about possible abuse cases. That is why a clear agreement on jurisdiction between these agencies is vital to keeping the whole system operating as effectively as possible. The following guidelines can be helpful:

- Personnel of both agencies should clearly understand the jurisdictional mandates of each agency.
- Staffs should display an attitude of respect and professional courtesy that focuses on the best interests of the child. Personality differences, communication problems, lack of training, and bureaucratic issues should not interfere with our ability to work together.
- Respect jurisdictional boundaries. If your agency's position is ignored or bypassed, work through your supervisor to correct the problem. If you are aware that a case properly belongs under another agency's jurisdiction, redirect the case.
- Ensure that rules and protocols minimize duplication of effort and stress on the child and other family members. Better still, explore avenues of cooperative response and reporting, such as joint investigation.

# Encouraging Appropriate Reporting

There are five important ways that you individually can encourage appropriate reporting of crimes by children and youth:

- being or becoming an "approachable adult," the kind of person who projects a sympathetic, supportive attitude and in whom children feel comfortable confiding;
- making yourself available, accessible outside the formal channels and authority structures of the child's world;
- making reporting of crime a community-supported value for children and adults;
- making the reporting systems that serve your community relevant, thoughtful, and responsive; and
- helping to insure that follow-up systems are compassionate and child-focused while meeting legal requirements.

## Being an Approachable Adult

An important element of encouraging children and youth to disclose crime situations to you is your status as a trusted adult. One way to look at that role is through the eyes of the young person. He or she expects that:

- You will listen.
- You will do something to help stop what is reported.
- You will help to make the situation better.

Webster's dictionary defines trust as "assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something." The position you hold and your uniform may lead children to trust you almost automatically. But in neighborhoods where the police (and maybe all government officials) are viewed with suspicion or hostility, that trust may be missing. Adolescents may class you as an authority figure against whom they are "required" to rebel.

*Turning sideways, Jerry sucked in his stomach and looked at his profile. He saw in the mirror a tall young man dressed in the blue uniform of a police officer. The starched white shirt, blue trousers with razor sharp creases, and shined black shoes gave an impression of order and precision.*

*Turning to get his hat, Sgt. Jerry Williams made a promise to himself to get back to working out at the gym to help keep in shape. Before going to the junior high school to make his first presentation on personal safety, he was headed across town for his breakfast meeting with Lt. Bob Myers. Bob was widely regarded in the department as the best in working with youth in crime prevention.*

*After the pleasantries, Bob talked about what he'd learned in his years of working with young people. "Best be yourself, Jerry. If you genuinely like the kids, they will know it. If you don't, they'll know that, too," he advised. "Get to the school early and be available to talk with them about sports or movies or activities they are involved in. Listen, so you get a feel for what's going on in their lives. The more they see you around before or after your presentation, the more they will begin to believe that you are really interested in them.*

*"Finding out what they think, inside and outside the classroom, will help a lot. I try to avoid lecturing them. No one likes being lectured, especially kids. They have a lot to talk about, though, if they think someone will listen to them."*

*Jerry thanked Bob for his time and advice. "I was nervous about reaching these kids," Jerry confessed. "I know that what I have to tell them is important, and you've made me feel a lot more confident about getting through to them."*

*"Glad to help, Jerry. You know," he continued, "we may never know how many kids weren't crime victims or how many went in a positive direction because we were there for them, but we sure will know about those who were never reached because they end up in prison."*

Bob's tips were excellent advice. But being approachable also has a lot to do with the non-verbal image you project. Body movements and style communicate more than the words you speak about the type of person you are and the level of interest and concern you have at that moment. A stiff body, folded arms, and stern face project a closed person. A relaxed stance, together with natural posture and gestures, communicates warmth and openness. Young people are keen observers of adult behavior and will quickly pick up on the conflicting messages when your body says one thing and your voice another.

People who have worked with children suggest several other points to remember to help children see you as someone they can trust and approach with their concerns:

- Be yourself. Don't blindly imitate someone else's style, because it almost inevitably looks contrived and uncomfortable.
- When making a presentation, move into the audience. Crouch, kneel, bend as appropriate to get down to eye contact level with your young listeners.
- Make direct eye contact, both from the front of the room to various members of the audience and when you are dealing one-on-one. (Don't forget to remove those sunglasses.)
- Smile appropriately; remember you're there to make friends.
- Be sure your hand and arm gestures demonstrate openness, not hostility or confrontation. Use open gestures; don't stand with your arms crossed or your hands on your hips.
- Be sure your voice is audible, distinct, and friendly— not abrasive or too loud.

## Being Available

You won't get reports if you aren't there. And that means, when dealing with children, that they must not only see you, but see you as available to them. It means not just choosing locations but selecting contexts that will enable the young person to see you as an empathetic and caring person as well as a protector and an authority figure.

Being available is an important part of encouraging crime reporting by younger children, who may be afraid of you or concerned that their issue is not important enough for your attention. But it takes on a new layer of meaning when dealing with teens and even preteens. They are beginning to feel that they are more like adults than "little kids," and they often feel obligated to work things out themselves rather than seek help from someone in authority. In fact, they may even class you with parents as control figures against whom they should be positioning themselves. Establishing yourself as approachable with this age group will take longer, be fraught with more "testing" of your approachability and reliability, and more fraught with challenges than dealing with older or younger people. But by the same token, once you establish your concern and your approachability as genuine, you will find that teens open up about many things, not just immediate crime reporting.

How can you place yourself appropriately—in time, place and context— for reporting? There are several ways, such as:

- Get to know young people in informal settings like athletics, recreation programs, and clubs and recreation centers, and through casual contacts on playgrounds and during school.
- Appear at functions for young people and, when possible, help sponsor such events. This associates your presence with enjoyable experiences.
- Eat lunch in the school cafeteria.
- Give instruction in the schools on various age-appropriate topics. Leave time after the session for informal discussions. Consider bringing along others (e.g., school counselor or competent colleague) who can help in talking with young people and receiving reports.
- Get to know teachers, counselors, youth program workers, and other adults who work closely with children.
- Know where the young people are in your area—where they live and play.
- Read popular magazines and other materials that describe the opinions and interests of young people. You'll be surprised to find out how little (and how much) things have changed since you were that age.
- Use your sense of humor to help put young people at ease when you talk to them.
- Don't talk down to young people.
- Take time to listen to the non-crime problems that young people talk about.
- Get out of your car and talk to young people. Smile; relax a bit. Involve young people as major resources in crime and drug prevention projects, such as drug prevention, anti-vandalism efforts, and teaching younger children. This provides an opportunity that is less formal and structured than a classroom, a positive and informal experience for both you and the young people.

## Making Reporting a Community Value

As we noted earlier, the nation's police chiefs and sheriffs see reporting of crimes as one of the most important actions that residents of their communities can take to reduce and prevent crime. Educating adults as well as youth about the need to report crime

can be a rewarding task, because it allows you to explain the workings of the criminal justice system, to show how patterns of crime help with apprehensions, and to explore the ways in which reporting actually results in better protection and more effective prevention. Consider working with others in your agency to develop a presentation on how parents can help children understand how to report crime. Often, parents are willing to learn things that they think will help their children when they wouldn't otherwise take the time or energy. Offer to talk at civic and social clubs, PTA/PTO meetings, church fellowship groups, and the like.

Emphasize reporting in your work with Neighborhood Watch and other civic and social groups in the community—or ask those working on such crime prevention efforts in your community to emphasize it and offer your help. Many residents of a community are afraid they will be embarrassed when their reports of suspicious activity turn out to be non-criminal events. Every law enforcement officer works—or should work—hard to quell that fear and to explain to people, "When in doubt, call us out!" Renewing that message and asking civilian crime prevention volunteers to help spread it can help build your community's support for reporting—a support that will create a more hospitable and encouraging climate for children with something to report. Helping parents understand the child's reaction to victimization and how they can cope with it can actually make them more willing to report, because they feel that they are able to actively help resolve the situation.

## Making Reporting and Follow-Up Systems More Responsive

The victim assistance movement and the research it has spawned have affirmed a basic tenet of human behavior: being rude to people discourages them from doing business with you. Victims who are treated brusquely or unsympathetically, or whose needs are ignored, are far less likely to trust the police or sheriff's staff the next time.

Don't forget that word-of-mouth—reports by people who have been there—is the strongest possible advertising, whether positive or negative. People talk, and if their talk about their experience in reporting crime is positive, others will be encouraged to report. If their experience was negative, others will be discouraged. And for some reason, negative news travels faster and farther than positive news. Ask any TV station or newspaper reporter.

You cannot make every system in every local agency or organization ideal for the encouragement and receipt of crime reports. You can't take all reports

yourself or guarantee that every person is treated warmly and fairly and protected from every consequence after a report is made. But you can be an advocate for the benefits of a responsive reporting and follow-up process. You can talk about the need to help youth with crime reporting. You can explain the need to avoid fear and forestall panic and the need to pursue protection for youth, especially. Work with your department, with the local prosecutor's office, with school officials, with victim assistance and advocacy groups, and with child welfare groups to help create the kind of climate you would want your child to enter if he or she reported a crime.

# Encouraging Reports of Drug Activity

Though overall drug use among young people is down, serious and habitual drug use has decreased little, if at all, and use and abuse of substances remains unacceptably high, as many law enforcement officers can attest. Because drug trafficking and drug abuse may well involve people known to the child—whether family or peers, it is essential that children understand the need to report drug use and trafficking. Children need to know that abusers can often get treatment, that traffickers are hurting many people and indeed the whole community, and that they can be given at least some protection (if this is true) against retaliation. Some guidelines on reporting that you may wish to provide to the communities where drugs are a problem include:

- *Crime in Progress:* For drug activity that is in progress or needs an immediate police response, call 9-1-1. If a patrol car is available, an officer will respond.
- *Situation Ongoing:* Drug activity that police need to know about but that doesn't require immediate response can be reported by calling and filing a narcotics activity report.

If your community has a hotline, anyone including a child can report drug activity to that number, but a report also should be made to the police. A person can report drug activity anonymously, but it is helpful to have his or her name and phone number in case further information is needed. The person can ask that his or her name not be released to anyone. Some communities have had success with "hot spot cards" that identify in detail suspicious activity that local residents have seen. These anonymous cards are usually turned in to a community association and then given to the police. They have provided key leads and even enough probable cause for search warrants in a number of cases.

It is important to motivate the community to report drug activity. Explain that drug trafficking:

- scares away legitimate business and civic activity;
- increases virtually all other types of crime, especially violent crime;
- attracts weapons into the neighborhood;
- distracts young people from more positive pursuits in life; and
- raises the level of community fear considerably.

You can't tell when a child will report a crime or something suspicious. You need to be ready at any time both intellectually and emotionally:

- *Intellectually:* By understanding children's stages of development, good techniques for helping the child report, your reporting obligations, options for handling a report, and resources in your community to help the child.
- *Emotionally:* By knowing your feelings, being able to control your reactions appropriately, and finding strength in knowing that you are able to help.

Responding to young people who are disclosing criminal behavior often elicits strong reactions in those who are called on to help. Anger, disgust, denial, and confusion are not uncommon but can get in the way of your ability to intervene effectively. Talking about your feelings with someone who is experienced and trained can be helpful. This does not indicate a lack of professional skills but rather the strength and maturity to deal with your own feelings candidly.

In rare instances, experience from your own past or your reactions to the dynamics of a particular case may make it difficult or almost impossible for you to deal effectively with the case. If this is a problem, arrange to have the case handled by someone else, being sure you are careful to maintain the child's trust while transferring the case.

## Situation Assessment

Just as in many other cases, you will want to be sure that you understand the situation before you act. It's especially important to have a clear understanding of the child's situation, because you may want or need to vary your reaction substantially based on that situation. Your assessment may take 30 seconds or five minutes, depending on the circumstances and the child involved. It should become second nature—a series of checkpoints for professional behavior that you review almost without conscious effort. You will want to understand:

- what has triggered the child's report;
- whether there is further danger;

- whether the report is direct or indirect; and
- what you should do about the setting.

## What Has Triggered the Child's Report?

The occasion when the report is made says something about the psychological state of the young person at that moment. A child may report a crime immediately, long after the event, in detail just sufficient to be tantalizing, in oblique terms, or in incomplete bits and pieces. What kinds of situations that can bring a child to you with a report? Some include:

- when the child has just witnessed what he or she believes to be a crime;
- when the child has just seen someone hurt;
- when the child thinks that there is immediate danger;
- when the child thinks the offender may get away;
- when the child realizes that an earlier event was indeed a crime; and
- when the child recognizes someone as an appropriate authority to whom to report.

Delays in reporting are not uncommon. The child may not have known the act was criminal, may not have had a chance to talk in private, or may have thought someone else reported the incident. There may have been fear, as we discussed in the last chapter, arising from any of a number of sources. The child may simply have forgotten the event and been reminded of it by the setting or by your presence. Whatever the reason for delay, you should treat a delayed report with as much attention as a current one, all other things being equal.

## Is There Further Danger?

An immediate insight you need is whether the child is at risk of being victimized again or becoming the victim of revenge—whether from parents who may be drug users or chronically violent, from violent persons (including other children) in the neighborhood, or from someone who is fearful of being accused of a crime.

Be especially concerned if the purported offender:

- is close to the person making the report;
- is armed or has a history of violence;
- has sworn vengeance;
- has reason to fear exposure;
- has direct authority over the child; or

- has previously sought vengeance on a crime victim.

If there is a suggestion of further danger, you will want to consider, as the child talks, what resources—social services, family counselors, immediate arrest, child protection workers, etc.—are available to help cope with this situation, as well as what self-protection tips and guidance you can give the child (and his or her family, if appropriate).

## Indirect Reports

Sometimes, children blurt something out, not realizing that they have reported a crime. They may not have meant to say what they said, or they may not have understood the criminal nature of the event. Sometimes they have reported the incident to a friend, counselor, teacher, or relative who has asked you to take an official report. In these cases:

- The child may deny the incident to you. Sometimes just talking about what the child fears might happen (using a "for instance" story, perhaps) can help clarify fears and break the jam.
- The child will need reassurance that he or she did nothing wrong and will receive support and protection.
- The child may try to ignore you or shut you out. Patience, conveying that you care and want to help, and urging the child to explore his or her feelings (anger, sadness, guilt, etc.) can be ways to build a bridge of communication.
- If the child feels that a confidence has been broken (for example, by a guidance counselor or the mother of a friend), he or she may exhibit extreme anger. Explain that the other person truly cares and acted out of real concern.
- If the child continues to refuse to talk, leave the door open by explaining that you always want to help and making sure the child understands how to reach you.

Remember to respect and work with the person to whom the report was initially made—parent, teacher, counselor, or whoever. That person, by coming to you, has worked within the system and placed his or her own trust in you.

## The Setting

You don't need a fancy office or a special corner to talk to a child. But the more serious or personal the event (to the child, especially), the more important it is to find a suitable setting that can help you work with the child and get a report that will enable you to prevent further victimization and act on the present situation. What makes a setting suitable? Here are some guidelines:

- When possible, find a location that offers some privacy, whether you are interviewing one child or a group.
- Look for a setting that is friendly, quiet, comfortable, and relatively free of interruptions. Be aware that what you might find acceptable, a worried child could find threatening, so try to determine casually but clearly whether the child is indeed comfortable talking in this setting.
- Use symbols (e.g., your uniform, a badge, a McGruff doll, a teddy bear) appropriately. Some children who would otherwise withdraw will talk to McGruff with you in the room, for example. A child may not believe you are a "really policeman" if you don't have a uniform and a badge. Another child may not want to talk because he or she sees you as a uniformed authority figure and fears punishment.

## Skills for Interviews

Interview techniques for adult victims and witnesses have been widely written about and discussed. Interviewers of children who have seen or experienced a crime use many of the same techniques, but these techniques are applied somewhat differently.

## Using Active Listening Skills

Active listening skills are helpful in interviewing children as well as adults. They are especially important in checking the accuracy of your understanding of a child's report and in determining the child's need for further assistance and counseling.

- *Paraphrase the Thought*: This means to repeat back in your own words what the person has said.
- *Acknowledge Possible Feelings:* By putting yourself in the other person's position, you will understand what is influencing the person to talk about the situation. For example: "If that happened to me, I would be scared." or "You must be angry at him or her for doing that."
- *Solicit More Information:* You can convey your interest in hearing more by saying:

  "How did you feel when . . .?"

  "Tell me more about when _____ happened."

  "Can you explain a little more about _____ so I can understand?"
- *Ask Open-Ended Questions:* Instead of asking questions that solicit yes or no answers, ask questions that increase discussion by asking how, why, or what. For example: "What do you think will happen now?" or "What can I do to help?" However, in many situations, you will have to ask a younger child very direct yes or no questions. Avoid "why" questions with younger children. They probably do not know why.
- *Demonstrate Non-Verbal Listening:* Active listening is based on non-verbal communication as much as on what is actually said and heard. More than three-quarters of communication is non-verbal. Make eye contact. Use open, relaxed, but attentive posture. Avoid closed gestures (e.g., arms folded across chest). Nod your head to acknowledge your understanding and interest in what is being said. Use sounds like "Um" and "Uh huh" or words like "Oh."

Remember that the volume and tone of your voice and the rate at which you speak greatly influence the way you are perceived. High volume suggests aggressiveness which may cause the person to freeze up. Your tone can express a wide range of feelings from anger to assurance. Monitor it carefully. The rate of your speech should also demonstrate interest. Rapid speaking may give the child a message that you want to hurry up the proceedings, which may cause the child to omit crucial details in order to please you.

## Meeting the Needs of the Young Victim

The child who comes to you disclosing that he or she has been the victim of or witness to a crime will probably still be experiencing the aftermath of the event. Adults, even with professional help, can take years to overcome particularly ugly victimizations. When interviewing children, you need to remember that they seldom have had any help with their feelings before talking with you.

Dr. Marlene Young, Executive Director of the National Organization for Victim Assistance, developed a ten-step approach for conducting an interview that helps the victim. This approach has been adapted for children. Remember that not every child will feel victimized; not every child will be the victim of (or witness to) a brutal crime. But as experience has shown with burglary victims, even those involved in non-confrontational property crimes can feel the sense of violation, loss, and wrong that other victims experience.

- *Life, Death, and Injury:* Clearly, the first step is to respond to the victim's emergency medical needs.
- *Safety and Security:* You need to ensure that the child feels physically safe and emotionally secure. Sometimes reassurance can include a hug or holding a hand. A victim may not want to be touched, so ask if it's OK or desired before offering physical comfort. A teddy bear, a McGruff doll, a blanket, or some other symbol may help the victim feel secure. The victim may have to be removed from his or her current environment—to a relative's home, for example—for there to be a real sense of safety and security.
- *Calm and Comfort:* Ask how the victim is feeling. The victim may be distressed at the crime, at having disclosed the event to you, or at the possible consequences of the event. Be aware that males are not generally as verbal as females, so patience and helpful, gentle prompting may be needed. Be sure that your body language reflects calm and caring, and that you are able to make eye contact. Take care that your tone of voice and your body language convey the appropriate attitude.
- *Give Back Control:* A victim generally feels not-in-control. Let him or her dictate as much of the situation as possible. Ask how he or she would like to be addressed, where you and the victim should sit, whether there are things that you can do to make the victim comfortable. Ask what you should talk about first.

- *Help Ventilate and Validate:* The victim needs to express negative feelings, to get emotions and worries out into the open, and to know that those feelings are not abnormal. If necessary, simply slow down the discussion if the victim is overwrought or crying. Sometimes, helping the person take several slow, deep breaths can help restore some sense of calm and control.

- *Reassure and Respond:* Assure the victim that the criminal, not the victim, is to blame, that reporting is the right thing to do, that the victim's feelings of anger and loss and fear are appropriate and proper. Ask what would help the victim feel less angry or fearful (which also helps restore a sense of control). Don't promise that you will fix everything. Usually you can't.

- *Surmount the Insurmountable:* Often, the victim feels overwhelmed by the event and the confusing and conflicting emotions that it generates. Sometimes it seems impossible to know where to begin to sort out next steps. Helping the victim identify the two or three most important or immediate concerns assists by breaking the apparently massive problem into smaller, more manageable parts.

- *Find a Solution:* Given the victim's most immediate concerns, help him or her identify one or two steps to address those. Be sure that the victim (or an appropriate adult) knows how to gain access to available resources in the community.

- *Predict and Prepare:* Ask the victim's permission to tell someone else about the crime (e.g. a detective, a social worker) if necessary. Explain how that person would help. Remember that the victim has given you his or her trust, and that trust should not be broken lightly, if at all. Explain in simple language what you will do, and what the next most immediate steps might be: "I know someone who can help you with this problem by _____. I'll share what you've explained to me already with _____, who might need to talk with you some more to help." If protective steps are necessary, be clear, calm and as accurate as possible in explaining what will be done to help the child.

- *Say Goodbye:* Make sure the victim understands that you are sorry about what happened and that the criminal, not the victim, is at fault. Assure the victim that there should be no guilt over reporting. Ask the victim to confirm understanding of any next steps.

Explain how you can be reached, if that is appropriate, if the victim wants to talk with you.

This discussion may take three minutes, 30 minutes, or three hours, depending on the nature of the crime, the vulnerability of the victim, the currency of the event, and the need for further action. Whatever amount of time it takes, following these ten steps can help the young person feel supported, cared for, and helped.

## Factors in the Child's Background

In addition to considering what the child has said (or not said) in light of the developmental stage he or she is in (see Chapter III), you will want to reflect on some other issues that may affect what and how a particular child has reported a crime.

- *Moral Reasoning:* Moral reasoning means the ability to distinguish some things as wrong and others as right or desirable. Like other kinds of development, moral reasoning progresses through stages. As children grow older and gain more experience in their world, their reasoning abilities develop accordingly. But some young people may not perceive certain behaviors as being wrong. Values of right and wrong are taught within the framework of family, church, school, and peer groups. The culture or neighborhood may hold a different set of values than the ones you grew up with. What you might consider rude, old-fashioned, abrasive, or violent behavior may be an acceptable act in the child's environment. In some cases, children may not know that any other standard of right and wrong exist.

- *Communication Skills:* Be aware of the child's level of communication skills and compensate appropriately. The child's description of an event may not be as complete or detailed as the description an adult would give. But children are keen observers and by most adult standards, brutally honest. Recall that children may not have developed to a point where their analytic skills enable them to pick out the important parts of an incident. It is better to help the child "walk through" the entire incident than to miss crucial details the child thought were not relevant. Careful, constructive questioning can help fill in the gaps. A youngster may not remember the exact time an event happened but may remember which meal he or she had just finished or was about to eat, or what TV show was on. Remember, too, that the child may not have the vocabulary to describe an event accurately. Letting the child use his or her own words and confirming your understanding by

paraphrasing can encourage communication. Avoid asking questions that are leading or presumptive.

- *Fantasy vs. Fact:* We know that the accuracy of recall is affected by biases, attitudes and previous experiences. Young people actually are less likely than adults to remember erroneous facts, as research has documented. Children may, however, shape their interpretive responses to be congruent with the adult questioner's attitude if that is positive or negative rather than neutral. Young children may have difficulty differentiating between what they actually did and what they only thought of doing. They are, however, able to distinguish who did what to them.

- *Other Events as Influences:* A child victimized by an earlier crime may be overly emotional or overly matter-of-fact in reporting a new incident. A child who has experienced another trauma (e.g. the illness or death of someone close) may be upset or uncomfortable speaking about injury in the context of reporting a crime. An unpleasant encounter with a police officer (or someone similarly in authority) may even have left a sense of ill will or mistrust. Shyness or other personality traits may affect the way in which the child relates an incident to you.

- *Relationship to the Accused:* Children may be particularly frightened or nervous about reporting an incident if the accused has threatened, coerced, or hurt them physically to keep them quiet. This is especially true if the accused is someone who is close and has authority over them. Some children may refuse to report a crime due to a sense of loyalty, fear of consequences, or pressure from the other parent or family members. The child may feel responsible for his or her part in the offense or for letting a situation continue.

## Helping To Secure an Identification

A number of "tricks of the trade" have been developed to assist people reporting crime or being interviewed about crime to provide more complete information. These techniques may help the child recall useful details about the offender or the parties involved in the situation:

- *Physical Appearance:* "Did the person who committed the crime remind you of anyone?" "What was similar to someone else?" "Was there anything special about the person's physical appearance or clothing?"

- *Names:* "If you think that a name was spoken but you cannot remember what it was, try to think

of the first letter of the name by going through the alphabet." "Then try to think of the number of syllables."

- *Numbers:* "Was a number involved?" "Was it high or low?" "How many digits were in the number?" "Were there any letters in the sequence?"
- *Speech Characteristics:* "Did the voice remind you of someone else's voice?" "If you were reminded of someone, what was alike?" "Was there anything unusual about the voice?"
- *Conversation:* "Think about the words that were used." "Were there any unusual words or phrases?"

# A Promising Approach for Interviewing Children

The cognitive interview process has been recognized for some time as a productive way to get more and better information from adult witnesses to crimes. That same process, suitably adapted, can increase the amount of accurate information that a child can provide. Because the technique is familiar to most law enforcement agencies, it can be readily incorporated into practice.

If the interviewer uses the cognitive interview process, the child is able to recall more details of the event and to recall them accurately. Researchers at the University of California Los Angeles-Harbor found that children in sixth grade benefitted even more from the technique than those in third grade. The researchers also discovered that if the child can practice the techniques -- by discussing a completely unrelated, relatively unimportant event (for instance, a sports experience or a visit to an amusement park), the child's recall in the the interview about the event being investigated is even more fruitful and complete. The minimal time that a "practice interview" takes can pay big dividends.

The researchers also reaffirmed the importance of developing rapport with the child, whether the cognitive technique or a more traditional approach is used.

## The Cognitive Interview for Children

In its report on the UCLA-Harbor research ("New Approach to Interviewing Children: A Test of Its Effectiveness," 1992), the National Institute of Justice summarizes three key phases of a cognitive interview for a child witness:

**Phase 1**

- Develop rapport with the child in accordance with recommended guidelines.
- Do not begin by asking the child for his or her name. Greet the child by saying "You must be Mary? My name is Bob."
- Follow the greeting by asking simple questions about the child's world and provide some personal information about yourself.
- Do not ask questions that could be regarded as coercive, such as "Do you want to be my friend?" Use positive, open-ended questions, which are likely to promote expanded conversation: "What are your favorite TV shows?"
- Do not be overly patronizing, such as by making the child feel pressured to "be your friend."
- Empathize with a nervous child's feelings. Indicate the naturalness of such feelings: "I wonder whether it feels scary to talk to a stranger about stuff that is so hard to talk about."
- Prepare the child for the interviewer's questions through a set of four instructions:

1. "There may be some questions that you do not know the answers to. That's okay. Nobody can remember everything. If you don't know the answer to a question, then tell me 'I don't know,' but do not guess or make anything up. It is very important to tell me only what you really remember. Only what really happened."
2. "If you do not want to answer some of the questions, you don't have to. That's okay. Tell me 'I don't want to answer that question.'"
3. If you do not know what something I ask you means, tell me 'I don't know what you mean.' Tell me to say it in new words."
4. "I may ask you some questions more than one time. Sometimes I forget that I already asked you that question. You don't have to change your answer. Just tell me what you remember the best you can."

**Phase 2**

- Ask the child to reconstruct, aloud, the circumstances surrounding the incident. That includes not only such external factors as the appearance of the scene, the people present or nearby, and the weather, but also the child's thoughts and feelings at the time.

- Instruct the child to report everything that happened from beginning to end, including what may not seem important.

**Phase 3**

- Ask the child to recall events in backward order, from the end of the incident to the beginning.
- Use the memory jogging techniques of asking the child to run through the alphabet as an aid to identifying the first letter of a forgotten name; to reflect on whether the suspect's appearance reminded the child of someone else; to recall unusual speech characteristics; and to remember conversations, unusual words or phrases, and reactions to them.
- Ask the child to recount the incident from a different perspective, such as through the eyes of someone else who was present, or through the "eyes" of an inanimate object, such as a stuffed animal that was present.

This adaptation of the cognitive interview method for use with children is discussed in more depth in the NIJ report, which also suggests additional sources of information.

# EARN: A Checklist for Interviewing Child Victims and Witnesses

The acronym EARN stands for four key components of a productive, caring interview with a child who is the witness to or victim of a crime:

- Establish trust.
- Assess the situation and needs.
- Report and remember.
- Needs of the child must be met.

## Establish Trust

- Take time to establish rapport. Because the young person has chosen to talk with you, he or she already feels some sense of trust. Reinforce that by letting the young person know that you are glad he or she told you and that you want to help him or her. Let it be known that you are a friend.
- Use a setting that is not threatening. Ask the child where he or she would like to talk. Suggestions such as a bench outside, a private office, an empty classroom, or a nurse's room may be helpful.
- Validate the child's feelings. You can do this through active listening techniques discussed on page 40.

- Sit next to the child, not across the table or desk. Many children see distant adults as powerful punishers.
- Be honest also about your responsibility to report the case. If this has not already been done. Explain the various options and possibilities that lie ahead.
- Don't promise confidentiality.
- Don't take notes immediately. The child may "freeze up" if you begin writing too soon.

## Assess the Situation and Needs

- Determine the young person's rationality and understanding of what is taking place. At the beginning of the interview, ask basic questions such as "what is you name?" "Where do you live now?" "Where are you now?" "Do you know who I am?"
- Assess the child's safety needs. They may be immediate or long-term.
- Find out what the child needs from you. Needs may include physical safety, psychological assurance that reporting was the right thing to do, or how to deal with the results of later police action.
- Let the child know what action you will take. Try not to overwhelm the child, however.
- Don't assume anything. Leave out your own assumptions.

## Report

- Use the child's vocabulary. This helps the child to see you as an understanding friend. Deal with explicit language, which a child may use to describe experiences. Try to use this language, too. Ask the child to clarify words that you do not understand.
- Reassure the child that it is good to tell. Explain that sharing the information took a lot of courage and was the right thing to do. Reinforce the idea that adults, and not young people, are responsible for solving problems.
- Reassure the child that he or she is not at fault and is not bad. Both adults and children, have feelings of guilt about crimes they were unable to stop.
- If you believe what the child tells you, express that belief. Showing that you believe what the child is telling you develops confidence. You may find inconsistencies in the story. This is normal, especially in relation to times, dates, and details. These inconsistencies generally are different from lying. If a young person lies about the incident, it is often by denying or minimizing what has happened,

due to fear of repercussions. By watching body language, as well as listening to what is said, you will have an indication of whether the story is being made up. Generally, young people do not lie about adult behavior, although they may not be able to place it in context. On the other hand, if a youth is reporting on the behavior of another youth, you may need to be wary of "revenge" or "ratting." Usually, taking the time to find out the relationship the youths have had in the past will give you some idea of what is going on.

- Obtain the help of appropriate other resources. A counselor, psychologist, social worker, or child protective services worker may be needed. A responsible relative may need to be located to take care of the child. Victim assistance professionals can be helpful.
- Explain what you expect will happen next. Reassure the youth that regardless of what happens next, he or she did the right thing by telling you.
- Don't allow the child to feel "in trouble" or "at fault."
- Don't disparage or criticize the child's language or choice of words.
- Don't suggest answers to the child.
- Don't display shock or disapproval of the child or the situation.
- Don't avoid embarrassing subjects. Let the child know that he or she can talk about anything of concern.
- Don't lose your temper. You may be angry at the situation but neither the child nor the situation will be helped if you lose your own control.
- Don't dismiss information as being unimportant.

## Needs of the Child Must Be Met

- Let the child know that you will do your best to protect and help him or her. You will try to help them until things get better.
- Promise that you will always be honest with him or her. And keep that promise. This is an especially important point in dealing with adolescent suspicions.
- Let the child know that he or she has a right to be safe.
- Do your best to avoid repeated interviews, to reduce the potential for needless trauma.
- If the child does not trust you, bring in, as soon as possible, a different person whom the child may trust. This may be someone from another agency.

- Don't conduct the interview with a group of interviewers.
- Don't leave the child alone with a stranger.
- Don't act embarrassed or uncomfortable when the child asks you for help. It may discourage the child and increase the child's sense of isolation and hopelessness.

# Options for Acting on the Report

## Filing a Formal Report

You will have to make a judgment as to whether there is enough information to file a report. This does not necessarily mean there is enough information for an arrest.

## Protecting the Young Person Who Reported

You must minimize risk to the young person who reported the crime. Explain the situation clearly and don't overpromise, but do the following to maintain the security of the young person who reported:

- Avoid using the name of the person who reported the crime unless he or she is the victim and must be named.
- Follow-up investigations, identifications, and apprehensions should be made at a time and place away from the reporter, insofar as possible.
- The child can be known by a code number or call letters (rather than regular name) in the police report.
- If appropriate to the circumstances, urge the youth not to talk to anyone else about the crime and who reported it.

## Protective Custody

It is possible that in cases of serious threat to the child, he or she may need to be placed in protective custody. Custody may be necessary in circumstances like these:

- a child has been severely assaulted or systematically tortured or inhumanly punished;
- the parents have exhibited clear and reckless disregard for the child's welfare;
- the physical conditions in the home are dangerous to the child;
- the child has been sexually abused or exploited;
- nourishment (food) has been withheld;
- the parents refuse clearly necessary medical care for the child;

- the parents suffer from mental illness;
- the parents have abandoned the child;
- the parents may flee with the child;
- the parents are arrested for any reason;
- there is specific evidence that the child's report and/or the subsequent investigation will result in retaliation against the child; or
- there is a significant possibility that the child may harm himself or herself.

Most states give police officers a specific grant of authority to take children into protective custody without prior court approval. About 20 states also give power to child protective agencies.

Protective custody may be required also when a young person reports drug trafficking or another activity in which the offenders are armed and dangerous, and/or when they normally practice or threaten revenge, as is the case with some gangs, for example, or when the offenders are part of the child's household. A judge must sanction protective custody orders.

## Other Means of Removing the Child From Danger

In some cases, it is desirable (or necessary) to arrange to remove the child from the home without resorting to protective custody. This may be necessary to protect the child or ensure that threats from the perpetrator will not intimidate the child. Some questions to be asked in making this decision include:

- Is the child in immediate danger or subject to further injury?
- What physical or emotional injuries has the child suffered, and how serious are they?
- What is the likelihood that the situation that gave rise to the first incident will arise again? (In abuse cases where there are signs of repeated injury, verbal assurance from the abuser or another adult who could have intervened is obviously insufficient assurance.)
- Are the injuries such that a repeated incident will possibly cause serious physical or psychological damage to the child?
- Is there a threat against the household that could result in injury to the child?

If you decide removal is a desirable course of action, you will need to be able to ensure appropriate placement of the child, whether with a trustworthy relative, a temporary children's shelter, or some form of foster care. One difficulty in making these decisions is that you need to determine whether the

trauma of removing the child will be less or greater than the prospect of trauma if the child remains. This is another instance in which a sound cooperative relationship with partner agencies, such as child protective workers and public and private social service agencies, can be a huge benefit because you have these colleagues to call on not only for help in the placement but for aid in making the decision itself.

You may consider removing the offender instead of the child from the home by filing a protection order prohibiting contact between the child and the offender. Be sure that the adult caretaker understands and will honor the order, and agrees to call law enforcement immediately if the offender returns.

## Arrest

In the general course of criminal justice, an arrest of someone is a perfectly desirable action. The judicial system then deals with that individual's guilt or innocence and, if necessary, appropriate punishment. In cases of child abuse or other domestic violence, however, it may be difficult to arrest the individual, or it may not be appropriate given the evidence immediately available. Some research suggests that in spouse abuse, arrest of the abuser actually reduces recidivism, but no similar research has been done on the issue of arrests in child abuse cases. Generally, departments pursue arrest in circumstances like these:

- A criminal prosecution is likely.
- An arrest is necessary to ensure the safety of the child making the report or disclosure.
- An arrest will enable the child to stay in the home.
- Arrest may help to obtain evidence or get more information from the victim or offender.
- The crime is serious enough that arrest seems mandatory.
- There is a threat to public order.

The Attorney General's Task Force on Domestic Violence stated in 1984 that in cases of domestic violence, it is presumed that arrest is the appropriate response when there is serious threat to a victim or when there are situations involving serious injury to the victim, abuse or threatened abuse of a victim, or a violation of a protection order.

## Training in Abuse Detection Is Important

If at all possible you should receive formal training from a professional in recognizing possible signs of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. Some signs are subtle; some require analysis of behavior and attitudes of the child and

adults rather than an assessment of physical evidence only. And in some states, there are specific requirements about information needed for action. Training by someone experienced in dealing with these cases is important. Once the abusive event has passed, the adult who abuses is often adept at lying to him/herself and to others about the abuse. Many abusers are convinced—and will sincerely try to convince you—that they will never repeat the incident, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

### Referral

Most communities have a number of resources that can assist a child who has been the victim of or a witness to a crime. Juvenile authorities, child protective agencies, counseling centers, family service centers, youth bureaus, victim assistance agencies, and mental health centers—government as well as private—can offer a variety of kinds of help. Many local governments have put together community services guides or information booklets. If yours has not, you may want to develop your own. Better still, work with a team of your colleagues in relevant agencies to produce one. On page 69 is a list of local resources that you might use to build a referral list. Be aware that in many cases, the family must be involved in a referral, but sometimes agencies can make exceptions when the referral is to remove a child from a terrible home situation.

## Drugs—A Special Concern

Young people are deprived of a healthy, functioning environment when drug use and trafficking take over a neighborhood. Drugs may bring a new level of threats of victimization and intimidation to the young people who live or attend school or work in the community. Threats of retaliation, as news reports often confirm, can become deadly reality. Moreover, drug dealers may seek to recruit young people as look-outs, runners, or even small-scale dealers. And, of course, the presence of drugs in the community can encourage use by those so inclined, including youth.

These are among the reasons that reporting of drug activity in the community is especially important. As many law enforcement officers who work with young people can attest, they are often far more "in the know" earlier than adults in the neighborhood. If youth in your neighborhood see you as approachable and trustworthy, they can be an enormous asset in curbing drug traffic before it gets a real hold. It is helpful to be able to explain to them the kinds of things that you would like to have them report.

### Signs of Drug Activity

Young people—and their parents—need to understand it is sometimes hard

to be certain that what they are seeing involves drugs, but that some patterns may indicate drug activity:

- An unusually large amount of traffic coming to a building—in cars, taxis, or walking, often at strange hours. Visitors may sometimes pound on doors or shout to be let in. This traffic is usually quick, with people staying only a short time. Sometimes, someone comes out to meet them.
- Finding drugs or drug paraphernalia (syringes, pipes, etc.) in the area.
- Repeated, observable exchanges of items, especially where money is visible.
- Offers to sell drugs or conversations about drugs that you overhear.
- Noxious odors from in or around the building, such as "musty smells."
- Buildings where extreme security measures seem to be taken.
- Buildings where no owner or primary renter is apparent and there are no regular residential activities—yard work, painting and maintenance, and so on—but where people are "around."

There are details about the drug activity that can be helpful, and youth can often help provide them. Young people in Oakland, California, neighborhoods, for instance, provided important information to help in developing probable cause for search warrants and in building small claims court nuisance cases against owners of drug houses because they could answer questions like these:

- Have you found any drug paraphernalia?
- How long has the activity gone on?
- What is the address where the drug activity is occurring (including the apartment number)?
- What type of building (single-family home, business, apartment)?
- Where on the property is the drug activity taking place (at the front door, out the back window, in the alley)?
- Do you know where the drugs are kept?
- What is the pattern of activity? (Times of day and days of the week when it is heaviest? How many people go in and out in a given hour? Do cars drive up to the house, or do people park and walk up? Do they arrive in taxis? From which direction do they come? Toward what direction do they leave?)

- Do you know the names of the people you think are dealing?
- What do the dealers look like? What do the customers look like?
- What type of cars do the suspected dealers drive? What are the tag numbers?
- What are the license numbers of customers' cars? (License numbers alone won't result in an arrest, but can be useful.)
- How many people live in the house? Are there children?
- Are there any dogs? What kind? How many?
- Do you see any bars or other reinforcements on house windows and doors? Any signs of alarm or security systems?
- Have you seen any weapons? What kind? How many?

Make sure that both children and adults understand also that just because someone is unpopular, obnoxious, or peculiar does not make that neighbor a drug dealer. Similarly, just because a person is of a different life style, racial or ethnic background, or economic level, is not proof—or even grounds for suspicion—that the individual is dealing drugs.

At some point in your career—perhaps at many points—you will encounter a child from a group that doesn't do things the way you're accustomed to doing them, people who celebrate holidays, conduct family business, commemorate events, mourn their losses, and judge their actions by standards unlike your own. But that child deserves and needs your sympathetic support and help in reporting crime, whether as victim or witness, and receiving appropriate follow-up aid. The pain of victimization is a human commonality that transcends culture.

If we are part of the dominant culture, we may fail to realize that there are other perfectly legitimate ways for a society to operate. What we learned from our culture seems to be the "right way." Then, by definition, every other way is incorrect. It is this kind of thinking that leads people—even those who are well-intentioned—to be culturally insensitive.

Cultural differences arise because two groups of people have established different values, standards of acceptable behavior, shared traditions and communication patterns, and different expectations about such things as attire, attitude, and social governance. The hardest thing to learn, often, is that different does not equal wrong or improper.

The United States is culturally diverse. Despite the speed of modern electronic communication by telephone, television, fax, and computer, and despite the mobility of families throughout the nation, we still see regional differences within our own nation. A grinder, a hero, a hoagie, and a sub may all describe precisely the same sandwich. But without the locally appropriate term, you may be unhappy with what you're served. Within our nation's boundaries, we have Aleuts (Eskimos), Native Americans (Indians) of various tribes or communities, a Spanish-speaking population that has for many generations lived in the Southwest, and Hawaiian Islanders, to name only some groups that have at least some key values different from those of the dominant culture.

Within one city or county, there may be a dozen—or even two dozen—significant groups that have a distinctly

different cultural heritage from that of most of the people living there. Some of these people have just recently arrived from other nations; others have retained their culture's traditions and characteristics through family and community ties. For many adults, a key part of their responsibility is preserving what is valued by their cultural group through the children by transmitting to them key knowledge and beliefs.

There is no simple way to sort out what these cultural groups actually consist of. People who speak Spanish may belong to any of more than twenty cultural groups. Although an Argentinean and a Venezuelan speak the same language, Spanish, they are not culturally identical—just as someone in the U.S. speaking English is not the cultural twin of an English-speaker in Scotland. African-Americans have identified key cultural features of the African heritage that they have blended with elements of their experiences in the U.S. to create a culture that may not be at all like that of a group of people who have just come from Kenya. A Thai and a Vietnamese may both have been born in Southeast Asia, but they do not necessarily even speak the same language. It is true that broad groups (for example, Hispanics or South Pacific Islanders) share a number of cultural features—but the differences may be as important as the similarities.

Just as language is not the best definer of cultural background, physical traits can be highly misleading. Do not judge which culture a child may adhere to by physical appearance. Culture is not dictated by skin color or physical characteristics.

## Culture and Children

Many adults, especially in a cultural minority group, see it as vital to pass along to the children of their community their cultural values and practices. In communities where the adults are immigrants or first generation residents, the language may well be passed along, also. Meanwhile, these children are attending school and playing with children of the dominant culture, picking up that culture's behaviors and values from reading and watching television, and facing crime risks similar to those of other children in this country.

It is almost inevitable that you will encounter a child victim of or witness to a crime who does not share your cultural background. The child may exhibit many superficial cultural characteristics that seem familiar (such as clothes, hairstyle, slang), but may react to a trauma like crime by resorting to the culture of comfort, that of the parents or grandparents.

Because communication rests so firmly on the foundation of culture, it is especially important to be sensitive to

cultural differences so that you can do your best to insure meaningful, accurate communication and to allay fears that may at first seem unfamiliar or even foolish to you. A child whose parents escaped from an environment where the police were armed oppressors, for example, is less likely to see you in a uniform as a warm, comforting figure than is one who grew up with "Officer Friendly" ideas.

How do you learn enough about all these cultures to communicate? Experts suggest that you work to develop "cultural competence."

## Cultural Competence

An officer of the law should be "culturally competent" to work effectively in a multi-cultural environment. The Community Relations Service of the U.S. Department of Justice has said that "becoming culturally competent is a developmental process for the individual and for the system. It is not something that happens because one reads a book or attends a workshop or happens to be a member of a minority group. It is a process born of commitment to provide quality services to all."

Cultural competence is the understanding of how values, beliefs, attitudes, and traditions influence behavior—the understanding of the content and dynamics of specific cultures, including one's own, and the ability to use this knowledge to work productively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Being aware of your own values and their sources is a good starting point for learning to be sensitive to differences between yours and other cultures. Being conscious of how your values were developed can help you bear in mind that the child (or adult) you are dealing with may have a whole different experience—norms and values shaped over years by history, family, peers, religious and ethical training, and social institutions unlike those you are used to.

Understanding the culture's rules for family relationships is especially important in dealing with a child from a culture in which you were not raised. For example, a healthy family by Western standards has an open structure. Members are encouraged to express themselves and communicate their feelings. Contrast this with the Asian model. The family is paramount and controlling, and high value is placed on absolute obligation and strict accountability to the family. Thus, the more you are conscious of the often-unwritten rules that your own family drew from your culture, the more able you are to identify and work with differences between your background and the child's.

## Things To Consider

When working with a child who has been raised in a different culture, you need to consider such things as:

- the cultural background and your degree of familiarity with it;
- the length of time the youth and family have been in the United States, if immigrants;
- standard English or other language skills of the youth and of the parents and other significant adults. For many families, differences in language ability exacerbate other differences;
- possible distrust of officials. People in uniform and in government offices may generate a fear based on the child's cultural background, the behavior of officials in prior encounters, or even in another country;
- the social class or standing (especially the social class in the native country for immigrants and first-generation residents) and educational level of the parents;
- the role expectations for males and females, parents, grandparents and children;
- religious and ethical values; and
- rules and expectations for interpersonal relationships in that culture.

## The Child in a Family Context

Before coming to you, young people may already have turned to a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or cousin. There are instances in which the culture forbids family members from becoming involved. For example, in a number of Hispanic cultures, families often enlist an unrelated member of the community to arbitrate in cases of domestic violence. Family members are not allowed to "interfere."

Newly immigrated families experience vividly the painful ambivalence of trying to live in two cultural worlds. The children, especially, may face enormous strains because they are not fully a part of their parents' culture and not completely assimilated into the dominant culture, or at least the dominant peer culture. Dress styles, play, and peer interaction patterns, and entertainment choices often become battlegrounds for the conflict generated by this ambivalence. Parents fear that their children will lose precious cultural ties and heritage if they lose proficiency in the non-English language, if they accept too many of their peers' ways, or if they refuse to observe traditional practices.

The family's cultural environment is an important context, even if the child does not so indicate. If a child from a culturally distinct background must be relocated for protective purposes, every effort should be made to place that child with relatives or with friends who belong to the same cultural group. Adding the trauma of cultural readjustment to the trauma of victimization can be overpowering for even the strongest of children. If such a placement is not possible, efforts should be made to insure that the foster parents or other caregivers are at least culturally competent.

## Cultural Difference in Communication

A child grounded in another culture may use body language, gestures, or symbols in ways that are radically different from those of the dominant culture. For example, someone who does not make eye contact might be seen by most in the main culture as lying or exhibiting guilt. But in most Far Eastern cultures, a polite person is supposed to make only limited eye contact with anyone older or in authority. Similarly, gestures or posture may not mean to the child what they mean to you. In some cultures, gesturing with the left hand is considered an insult. Moreover, patterns of speaking may carry over from the other language to English. For instance, a child may be trained by culture to speak only when spoken to, and to answer quietly and as briefly as possible. If you simply decide the child really doesn't have anything to say, you

will have missed an important opportunity to help.

If you are approached by a youth of a different cultural background, it could be an indication that the child feels imminent danger. Your intervention may be critical to the child's safety, no matter how time consuming or difficult it may be to bridge the cultural gap. It is sometimes helpful to have a "cultural interpreter"—an adult competent in the mainstream culture who understands the traditions, values and beliefs of the young person's culture and speaks the other language. This person may be a colleague or an adult in that community who is able to bridge the spaces between the cultures.

## Actions Affect Tensions

In working with children of other cultures, you will want to be sensitive to ways in which your actions might inadvertently heighten tensions or escalate problems:

- appearing defensive rather than neutral and fact-finding;
- confirming—whether intentionally or not and whether by action or inaction—preconceived notions about police behavior as depicted in movies and on TV, reported through rumors, or experienced elsewhere;
- "flashing" accoutrements such as nightsticks and sidearms;
- giving the impression that you already know what the child is trying to relate; and
- suggesting that you are linked in some way to immigration authorities.

There are things you can do to reduce or diffuse tensions:

- Act on the recognition that power may be assumed but authority must be earned.
- Avoid responding in kind to a child's emotional outbursts.
- Be willing to repeat questions and instructions calmly and in reasonable tones.
- Anticipate that the child may exhibit hostility, anger, or fear, and be aware that these are not personal attacks on you.

## Language Barriers

Some recent immigrants may have limited dealings with persons beyond their immediate family or fellow native language speakers. Police in communities with sizable non-English-speaking populations must deal with the barriers that this situation raises. Many departments—or the local unit of government as a whole—have developed a

comprehensive list of people able and willing to serve as translators. Some are fellow officers or government employees; others are residents of the community who simply want to help out. Sometimes graduate students studying a particular language may be available through a nearby university. Be familiar with the resources and guidelines available to you for dealing with non-English speakers. Here are some key general pointers:

- Do not assume that a person speaking heavily accented English or no English is "faking it."
- Don't make comments that people should "fit in" or speak better English. They speak two languages. Not many people can say that.
- Give the same full attention to investigating a situation when some of the parties do not speak English as when all do.
- Be sure that anyone serving (or offering to serve) as interpreter is fully qualified and has had experience. Translating under pressure in a way that maintains culturally appropriate context is a difficult skill.
- Don't use the occasion of reporting as an opportunity for language lessons. Be candid about your inability to speak the other language; never lie about it.

## Cultural Sensitivity and Competence Pay Off

Careful observation, hard work, and diligent investigation can help you become culturally competent and aware. Learning how different cultures work can be an enormously enriching experience that adds much meaning to your own cultural traditions. It can help you in working with adults from various parts of your community and can make an enormous difference in your ability to reach out to, communicate effectively with, and prevent the further victimization of a child.

Ideally, a child who is the victim of a crime or who sees a crime committed will already understand why he or she should report that event and what will be most helpful to you in taking a full and useful report. One of the first tenets of crime prevention, in fact, is reporting of crime by concerned community residents. Many officers spend countless hours explaining to community groups what's suspicious, when to call 9-1-1 and when to call the non-emergency number, what information to provide, and what will be done with the report.

Teaching children what to report about and how to report crimes gives the children a new skill equal to that of many adults they know, helps children recognize victimization when they experience it or see it, encourages actual reporting of crime, and builds a sense of community participation by the young people.

Another critical component of crime prevention is letting young people know that they are important to the building of a safer, better community. They need to understand that justice doesn't just happen; it comes from the sense of responsibility and obligation that we have to each other as members of our society. When we do not report criminal activity, both the community and the individual pay the price.

Crime reporting might be a special presentation, but it can easily be integrated into the many crime prevention presentations that practitioners make to classrooms and youth groups throughout the year. We'll review here briefly some key concepts that you will want to convey. Remember that in teaching crime reporting, you may receive reports right on the scene. Be prepared with appropriate support from at least a teacher or counselor, especially if serious crimes are revealed. Be sensitive to needs for privacy and for the reporter's ongoing relationship with peers when you get these reports.

## Crime Affects the Community

Most young people are ego-centered. They need your help to realize how crime affects people other than the immediate victim, indeed how it can touch everyone in the community:

- The victim's family and friends suffer.
- Those living in the area fear that they may become victims. They are afraid to leave their homes. They become isolated and lose trust in others.
- Crime and the fear of crime change the way people act and feel toward the community at large.

## Teaching About Crime Reporting

Helping young people learn why and how to report crime should be tied closely with the idea of preventing crime. If reporting is taught without the context and framework of prevention, it can too easily become a tacit message to accept crime and report it, not seek to stop it before it happens. One way to help young people understand how crime can be prevented is to challenge them to think of things they can do to help right their own school or community. Some projects young people have taken on successfully include teaching self-protection and drug prevention to younger children; creating songs, skits, and other performances with crime prevention messages; operating peer counseling or mediation services; establishing school crime watches; producing public service messages for children and adults using prevention themes; removing graffiti; and cleaning up neighborhoods.

Assuming that the prevention and action context are set, there are key points that any presentation on crime reporting should cover:

- Some things are wrong. They are crimes and must be reported.
- The first means of stopping crime is to report it. It may lead to an immediate arrest, an end to the crime being repeated, and at the minimum the police will know that there is a problem.
- Everyone should feel a responsibility to report crime because we must work together to achieve a reduction in crime.
- Just because a person makes a report does not mean the offender will be arrested. The police must feel the crime is serious and that there is sufficient evidence against the suspect.
- A person needs only to suspect that child abuse is occurring to report it. That person is protected from being sued or put in jail because he or she makes a report.
- There are different ways and times to report crime. A person may want to talk to the officer alone or to telephone him or her later.

Either way is fine, but people should be sure to notify the police if they are in danger or have been victimized by crime.

Teaching parents how to help their children avoid or deal effectively with victimization can help set key atmospheres to encourage children to make appropriate reports. Consider covering such subjects as process and importance of crime reporting, the ways in which parents can help children deal with victimization, and how they can teach their children to prevent crime.

## Options for Reporting

Because young people have limited life experiences, they often have difficulty seeing alternatives—understanding that there are options available in every situation. Helping youth recognize alternative ways in which to report crime and still keep their anonymity may lower the fear factor and increase reporting. You may want to suggest talking with a trusted counselor or teacher, using an anonymous hotline, or working through other avenues available in your community.

**Persons to Whom Youth May Report**

| | |
|---|---|
| Parents | Other Relatives |
| Friends | Teachers |
| Police | School Health Personnel |
| Church | Older Youth |
| Coach | Counselors |

## Techniques That Can Help

When teaching about reporting, or subjects like sexual assault prevention or drug prevention that can also trigger reports, bring a counselor or other professional with you, if possible, to handle disclosures. Let young people know that this other person is available to talk privately.

Whether or not you bring a professional, schedule enough time and be sure to let the young people know that you will be available after class for discussion of the topics presented. This is a way to permit reports without labelling them as such.

Pass out a telephone number that kids can call for help or to talk. Be sure that everyone gets the number in written form.

Here's how one officer found a teaching style that helped students develop and clarify their own ideas about reporting crime:

**Ways To Report**

Police Report
Hotlines
Guidance/Counseling Session
"Concern Boxes"

*Hands waved as Sgt. Williams moved into the sixth-grade classroom and asked, "Why should we report crime?"*

*"It helps the police catch criminals."*

*"Yeah, it might keep me or my family from being victims, too."*

*"That's right," said Sgt. Williams. He wrote each student's idea on the blackboard.*

*"What about the problems of so many people getting hurt?" Sgt. Williams said as he continued to write. Again, the students agreed. Sgt. Williams reviewed the list of reasons why it is good to report crime.*

*1.Reporting may keep you, your friends or families from being victims.*

*2.People are tired of being hurt by criminals.*

*3.Reporting crime will make our neighborhoods and streets safe again.*

*4.Crime is wrong and we need to stop it by reporting it.*

*Then Sgt. Williams added another one:*

*5.Crime is everyone's problem, and by reporting it, everyone can be part of the solution to crime.*

*Sgt. Williams moved to the next blackboard and wrote:*

"Things to Report"
*"Safe Ways to Report"

*Then he turned to the class and asked for suggestions. The list under Things to Report filled up quickly—drugs, stealing, setting fires. Sgt. Williams could hardly keep up with the list of crimes the students were shouting out.*

*"What about my mother's boyfriend beating on her and us kids when he gets stoned?"*

*"Yeah," someone said.*

*"Adults having sex with kids."*

*Williams heard some girls giggling. "What if it's your father or brother or uncle?" Williams asked. There was silence. Then someone said, "You should still tell."*

*"Yes, you should," Williams said. "But it would be hard, wouldn't it?" The kids nodded their heads in agreement. "Who could you tell, if that was happening?"*

*The students stopped laughing and looked at each other, some lowering their eyes.*

*"What about telling your mother first?" Williams wrote "Mother" under the column Safe Ways to Report.*

*One girl said, "What if she doesn't believe you?"*

*"Then who else could you tell?" Williams asked.*

*"Teachers," "Counselors," "The school nurse," "My best friend," the class shouted. They laughed as Sgt. Williams struggled to add the flood of words to the chart.*

*"Those are all good people," said the Sergeant. "How about your guidance counselor and your minister or Sunday school teacher?*

*"Remember the four basic steps about reporting abuse? Say no. Tell someone you trust. Keep telling until someone believes you. Remember it's not your fault." These were added as a new list.*

*"Very good. Now, let's list safe ways to report if you are afraid to talk with someone. How could you do that?"*

*Williams wrote on the blackboard as the class recited ways to report crime that they had seen on television or in books or heard about from friends or on the radio.*

*"Now let's look at how you can really get involved," said Williams. He wrote another heading on the chalkboard:* "Things You Can Do to Make the Community Safer." *"Any ideas?" he asked.*

*"Report crime!"*

*"Help little kids."*

*"Make sure my friends and I lock our bikes."*

*"Don't commit crimes!"*

*"Clean up the playground." More ideas came from around the room.*

*"Good thoughts! This is a great class," Williams said as he stood back from the blackboard. "Look at the lists you made. Let me tell you two other things about reporting crime. First, being afraid does not make you a wimp or a sissy. When other people do something wrong, especially to you, it can be frightening, no matter how old you are. Second, if you tell an adult who doesn't believe you or help you, keep telling adults until you find someone who will help you."*

*Sgt. Williams had persuaded the students to develop their own ideas about how to report crime and how to prevent it, and helped them think through for themselves reasons that reporting was important to them. It was the kind of lesson that would help them now and throughout their lives.*

## Local Resources

Victims of crime and witnesses to crime need a variety of other support services. These range from short-term crisis intervention to long-term counseling. No single service agency is in a position to provide all the necessary help. The efforts of medical, educational, and other service providers from numerous fields must be coordinated carefully to ensure emotional and physical safety for young people who witness crime or are victims of crime.

Some of the services that are available in many areas include:

- 24-hour hotlines;
- professional medical and legal advocacy;
- counseling;
- crisis intervention;
- explanation of the criminal justice system;
- social services referrals;
- court accompaniment upon request;
- public education and crime prevention programs;
- professional volunteer training programs;
- help in filing claims for victim compensation;
- support groups for victims and their families; and
- speakers bureaus.

# National Resources

This list of national organizations is a sample of the many that are engaged in providing a variety of assistance involving children who are victims of or witnesses to crime. Some of the groups have broader agendas, including child well-being, and prevention of abuse or neglect.

**Al-Anon and Alateen Family Group Headquarters**
PO Box 862
Midtown Station
New York, NY 10018-0862
212-302-7240
800-356-9996 (hotline)
Works with families, friends and others involved with alcoholics in an attempt to share strength, hope, and understanding.

**American Bar Association Children and the Law Section**
1800 M Street, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
202-331-2200
Extensive sources of help on the subject of children and their relationship with the law both as victims and victimizers.

**Big Brothers of America/ Big Sisters of America**
2037 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215-557-8600
Federation of professionally staffed local agencies administered by volunteer boards of directors. The local agencies provide children from single-parent homes with an adult friend who can give regular guidance, understanding, and support.

**Child Welfare League of America, Inc. Information Services Division**
440 First Street, NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20001-2085
202-638-2952
Devoted to the improvement of care and services for deprived, dependent, or neglected children and youth and their families. Offers services such as education, training, and information and referral to citizens and to people working in child welfare agencies. Extensive publications list.

**Childhelp U.S.A.**
6463 Independence Avenue
Woodland Hills, CA 91367
818-347-7280
Provides residential care for seriously abused children; conducts public education campaigns.

**Cocaine Hot Line**
PO Box 100
Summit, NJ 07902-100
800-COCAINE (hotline)
Responds to emergency calls about cocaine use.

**Covenant House Nineline**
800-999-9999 (hotline)
Round-the-clock prompt referrals in local communities.

**Drug Abuse Information and Treatment Referral Line**
800-821-4357
This referral line provides drug-related information to the general public, helps drug users find and use local treatment programs, and acquaints those affected by the drug use of a friend or family member with support groups and/or services.

**Institute on Black Chemical Abuse**
2616 Nicollet Avenue, South
Minneapolis, MN 55408
612-871-7878
Assessment and referral organization providing out-patient care, aftercare, family counseling, evening support groups, and an annual training session.

**National Association for Children of Alcoholics**
11426 Rockville Pike, Suite 100
Rockville, MD 20852
301-468-0985
National nonprofit membership organization for children of alcoholics and those in a position to help them. Maintains a clearinghouse of resources.

**National Center for Missing and Exploited Children**
2101 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 550
Arlington, VA 22201
703-235-3900
Provides extensive technical assistance as well as locator assistance to parents or other concerned adults in cases of child disappearance or abduction; provides information on prevention, intervention, and dealing with victimized children.

**National Child Abuse Hotline**
800-422-4453 (hotline)
Residential treatment center for abused children; national toll-free hotline; out-patient family evaluation and treatment services; specialized foster care program; and national public education and research programs.

**National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPCA)**
332 S. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1600
Chicago, IL 60604-4357
312-663-3520
Established in 1972 in response to the increasing incidence of infant deaths due to purposely inflicted injury. The NCPCA was formed to help prevent child abuse, which it defines to include non-accidental physical injury, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and exploitation of children. The NCPCA is dedicated to involving concerned citizens in actions to prevent these abuses. Its goals are to stimulate greater public awareness, to promote the development

of programs, to advocate needed change, and to establish cooperation among organizations that are concerned with child abuse. A full range of printed materials is available.

**National Council on Child Abuse and Family Violence**
1155 Connecticut Avenue, NW,
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036
202-429-6695
Community-based prevention and treatment centers that help children and others who are victims of abuse and violence. Seeks to increase public awareness of the nature of family violence. Advocates support for prevention and treatment centers. Collaborates with similar organizations to form an informal network. Many services and publications are available.

**National Criminal Justice Reference Service**
Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20850
800-638-8736
World's largest criminal justice library. Can computer-search abstracts of articles, books, etc. and provide direction to justice clearinghouses on juvenile justice, drugs and crime, criminal justice statistics, and justice assistance clearinghouses.

**National Institute on Drug Abuse**
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857
301-443-6245
800-662-HELP (hotline)
Responds to emergency calls about substance abuse with hotline counseling, referrals to treatment resources, etc.

**National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA)**
National Headquarters
1757 Park Road, NW
Washington, DC 20010
202-232-6682
NOVA helps a wide range of victims, including children. Offers technical counseling, information and referral and other services and public support to victim assistance programs. Also provides counseling and support services directly to victims. Serves as clearinghouse on state and federal legislation. Materials and publications are available.

**National Runaway Switchboard**
380 N. Lincoln Avenue
Chicago, IL 60657
800-621-4000 (hotline)
800-972-6004 (in Illinois)
Helps runaway young people find shelter.

**National School Safety Center**
4165 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Suite 290
Westlake Village, CA 91362
805-373-9977
Sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education, focuses on school crime prevention throughout the country. Special emphasis placed on efforts to rid schools of crime, violence, and drugs, and on programs to improve student discipline, attendance, achievement, and school climate. Provides technical assistance and training programs; produces training films, and publishes *School Safety* news journal.

**National Victim Center**
309 West 7th Street, Suite 705
Fort Worth, TX 76102
817-877-3355
Provides victim assistance network, training, public information and education campaigns, training, materials (e.g., pamphlets, brochures, booklets), and referrals.