



Guideline

‘Dealing with the Media’

(media = printed media and radio/TV)

*By Astrid Rubbens, Victim Support Flanders-Belgium and
Irene Staat, Victim Support the Netherlands*

*European Forum for Victim Services
May 2007*

Index 'Dealing with the media'

Page	Subject
3	Introduction
4	1. Dealing with Journalists <ul style="list-style-type: none">1.1 Mutual interests1.2 Different Approaches and How to Deal with Them1.3 Useful Hints for Dealing with Journalists and Interviews1.4 And now, How Do You Build a Journalism Network
6	2. Victims in the Media <ul style="list-style-type: none">2.1 Advantages and Risks for Victims to Appear in the Media2.2 Victims Contact the Media Themselves2.3 Victims Who Are Directly Approached by the Media2.4 Press and Media Ask Victim Support to Contact Victims
9	Annex 1 – Dos and Don'ts for Dealing with the Media <ul style="list-style-type: none">General Dos and Don'ts for Dealing and Contact with the MediaDos and Don'ts for Giving an Interview (Short or Long)Dos and Don'ts for Writing a Press Release
12	Annex 2 – Hints for Working with Victims Having Received Media Requests
14	Annex 3 – Brochure for Journalists
17	Annex 4 – Brochure for Victims about Dealing with the Media

Introduction

During the 2006 EFVS conference in Bratislava there was a workshop about 'dealing with the media'. During this workshop an interesting discussion developed about dealing with the press in general and about victims in the media in particular. There appeared to be a need for a work document that would be available to all EFVS members. On the basis of this work document each member will be able to determine the best practice for its own victim support group. This work document therefore lists the pros and cons around media contacts and victims in the media. In addition, a number of recommendations and hints are given from our profession of communication consultant.

Starting point for both the workshop at the Forum in 2006 and this document is the fact that we all – to a greater or lesser extent – have to do with a society that is changing in respect of media use and media approach. The media regularly want to use the stories and experiences of victims in their reports. Victim support groups are therefore often asked to react to a topical matter, to give its opinion, or "to provide" a victim who wants to tell his or her story.

Each victim support group has the duty to think about its responsibility in this field. This is quite a challenge. Which interests do we have in our contacts with the media, and which interests do the media have? How far do we go when we are asked "to provide" victims for interviews? And, do we coach these victims or not? Numerous questions about which we give thoughts for consideration and which may contribute to making well-considered choices in your own country and within your own (media) culture.

Within Victim Support Netherlands we agree that the interest of the victim should be central in making these choices. The distress and needs of the victim are our ethical basis to develop a policy and working procedure. While working with the press and media it is important to communicate clearly about our own vision and to act consistently.

1. Dealing with Journalists

1.1. Mutual Interests

The media need Victim Support as well as Victim Support needs them. It is a good thing for us to realize this, for both the media and our groups have their own interests in the contact, interview or item. This need not be negative; the interests may match very well, but they may also conflict. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that Victim Support would not be able to gain something positive from it. Each contact with the media is a chance. If only to maintain good contact with the media.

Interests of the Media

The media may have different interests in a contribution from Victim Support or a victim to their item or interview:

- The journalist does not only want to make a factual report of matters, but often also wants to bring a successful story (score, high ratings, bind reading public to him). This is a logic desire and for Victim Support it is of course no problem to co-operate. This contributes to a good relationship with the press (which we need to promote our interests) and gives Victim Support the chance to spread its message. When the object of the interview or item conflicts with the interests of the victim or Victim Support as advocate and you do not succeed in changing this object, you should decide not to co-operate.
- The journalist usually wants to receive a reaction as quickly as possible and tends to regard his own deadline as decisive. Some journalists may be very aggressive in this respect. Victim Support will then be prepared to, so to speak, run the marathon for an opportunity to get into the press. The golden rule however is: do not say anything until you are certain it is true, and you have been able to prepare yourself well for the interview. If this cannot be arranged with the journalist, you had better decide not to co-operate. Press attention is only useful when you spread the message clearly and correctly, and when the method you use matches with how you want to come across. This simply cannot be done without sufficient preparation.

Interests of Victim Support

Conversely Victim Support also has interests in attention in the media. We want to inform the public of our organization and what it does for victims as well as spread our views.

A good relationship with the press is important to us, because then we can visualize our organization, views and offer. The media may also be used as a channel to influence the authorities. So, we are not just "condemned to each other", there is also mutual interest in a good relationship.

1.2. Different Approaches and How to Deal with Them

The media mainly have the following reasons for approaching Victim Support:

- Following a crime of topical interest, a major traffic accident or a calamity. Journalists will mainly want information about our offer for support. Only give them information about how Victim Support generally acts in this sort of situations. Give any concrete information about support in the situation at in such a manner that they cannot discover the identities of the persons involved; all this for the sake of privacy and professional confidentiality.
- To hear our views on a matter or an idea. It is the duty of Victim Support to speak in the interest of the rights of the victims, but the media regularly approach us about subjects that are only indirectly connected to victims. They ask us, for instance, to take up a particular standpoint about matters such as criminal law, approach of offenders, or the working procedure of other aid organizations. Always consider in advance what the impact of your statements may be and whether you think it right to take up a particular standpoint through the media.
- The media want a contribution from a victim to a radio or TV item for the sake of clarification or illustration. There is much to say about this. You will read more about this in Chapter 2.

1.3. Useful Hints for Dealing with Journalists and Interviews

It is important to list a number of Dos and Don'ts for yourself in respect of dealing with the media. This will make it easier for you to make well-considered decisions, to achieve what you want, and to be prepared for pitfalls and risks. In Annex 1 you will find a list of Dos and Don'ts. The list starts with general Dos and Don'ts and ends with specific hints for e.g. giving interviews.

1.4. And Now, How Do You Build Up a Journalism Network?

We may draw the conclusion that it is to our advantage to have good contacts with the media. It pays to actively invest in a good relationship.

- Make sure that you have an up-to-date database with names, (e-mail) addresses, telephone numbers;
- Make sure that someone quickly speaks to a journalist when he phones (intake);
- Do your best to reach his deadline (when this is impossible, tell him so)
- Always phone back in time: with an answer or, if you do not have an answer, to tell him that things will not work;
- Be honest and open;
- Do not approach a journalist in an unfriendly and suspicious manner -> the press is not a necessary evil, but an opportunity for both parties to create something that may be advantageous to both parties.

If you really want to build up a network actively, maintain regular contact with a number of journalists or agree with them that you will contact them in time when you have news. You can also phone them between times to express your approval about the way a journalist has reported on a subject. This may be a matter that did not come from you, but of which you are happy, because it is e.g. clearly in the interest of victims. There are more possibilities like this. Feel free to be creative.

Be Careful with Standing Agreements

Be careful with standing agreements about giving a journalist some news first. This will restrict your freedom, often create ill-feeling with other journalists, and it will reduce the chance that other journalists will also find your story interesting. When a newspaper reports a fact today, other newspapers will not be interested anymore for the day after, for it will be old news by then. You may, of course, have your own preference without standing agreements and approach certain journalists first when you want to be interviewed about a specific subject, but further do not want to issue any press release.

2. Victims in the Media

Where the interest in victims and victim themes in the media is increasing, we have established that press coverage make increasingly more use of testimonies. Journalists are increasingly more mobile and often arrive at the place of accident or disaster or the scene of the crime at the same time as the emergency services do. Human interest programmes also feature victim testimonies. In addition, dailies and weeklies regularly publish columns and articles on victimship.

Within this development we have reached the following two conclusions:

- Victim Support is regularly requested to assist in providing victims.
- The manner in which victims are presented in the media is by no means always correct or respectful. This is often caused by a lack of knowledge and expertise, but sometimes also by different objectives. Not infrequently is it the journalist's object to reach many viewers or readers, whereby the interest or the care for the victim disappears into the background.

It may be important to victims to bring their stories into the media. This involves advantages as well as risks. It always applies that a positive effect can only be achieved when the victim is treated respectfully. Victim Support also has a duty here.

2.1. Advantages and Risks for Victims to Appear in the Media

The choice between contributing to an interview or not depends on different factors. It is important to consider everything well before making the decision to co-operate or not. The following list of advantages and risks may contribute to making a well-considered choice.

What may be the advantage of appearing in the media?

The publication of a personal story in the media may have a number of positive effects for a victim:

- Visualization of the consequences of victimship.
- Personal contribution to visualize these consequences.
- Gaining recognition for the consequences of a crime.
- Being able to tell your own story.
- Promotion of the process of dealing with the experience.

What are the risks?

The publication of a personal story in the media also involves a number risks for the victim:

- The victim may be hurt once again if the manner in which the story is published does not meet expectations.
- There is a chance that the victim is approached by acquaintances and strangers after the victim's story has been broadcast or published. These reactions may be positive but may also be negative.
- By appearing in the media a number of personal details of the victim will be made public. Persons in the victim's environment who had not been informed initially will receive information of which they do not know how to handle it (e.g. employer).
- Personal details are usually entered into a database at the editorial office and victims may be asked to co-operate again after some time.

2.2. Victims Contact the Media Themselves

Many victims get into contact with journalists by approaching the media themselves. They often do this from the underlying motivation to gain recognition or to demand attention for their situation, their problems.

Victim Support often does not have any direct contact with this group of victims. It must therefore seek ways to contact these victims and journalists so that the victims will be able to state their limits and the journalists will be encouraged to treat the victims respectfully.

Victims may be reached by distributing general brochures with hints. Journalists may be reached by:

- Individual contacts with journalists
- Structural consultation with journalists associations
- The leaflet 'Press and Victim' (see Annex 3)
- Instruction to journalists in training

2.3. Victims Who Are Directly Approached by the Media

In certain cases the journalists will try to find testimonies themselves, e.g. when a disaster or calamity has happened. This is done because of the seriousness of the facts, the news value, the topicality of the matter and, not to be underestimated, the rating and sales figures. Journalists sometimes approach victims immediately after an event has happened, many victims feel ambushed then. It is also possible that journalists contact victims some time later.

Inform victims as quickly as possible

In order to give the victims the chance to prepare themselves it is important that they are informed as quickly as possible about the possibility of being contacted by a journalist.

This information should be given by:

- The police
- Judicial authorities (e.g. the press officer)
- Victim Support or other emergency services

There are five essential messages to be given to the victim:

- There is a good chance that you are approached by one or more journalists.
- Remember that you have the right to say "No" at the journalist's request. You do not have to co-operate if you do not want to.
- You do not have to answer questions immediately; take the time to think and ask the journalist to contact you later on.
- If you do not want to do the talking yourself, ask a trusted representative in your environment to do this for you (next-of-kin, lawyer, and suchlike)
- Ask information or support from Victim Support.

Giving leaflets to victims may help them to think more consciously about what they want or do not want. This leaflet must of course reach the victims before the journalists contact them; this may happen within a few hours after the event.

2.4. Press and Media Ask Victim Support to Contact Victims

Victim Support Groups have adopted different practices for co-operating with journalists with regard to the provision of witnesses. Below some examples:

- Some groups have databases of victims who have indicated that they are prepared to give interviews and testimonies. Upon the request of a journalist the groups contact the victims that meet the requested profile and refer the press to the victim after receipt of the victim's consent.
- Other Victim Support Groups examine their current database of clients whether someone meets the profile and contact these victims. Victims who are prepared to co-operate get the contact details of the journalist. The Victim Support Group makes an offer for support.
- There are also Victim Support Groups that do not provide victims.

Before making a choice as a group it is important to consider the following:

- What do the journalists want to reach with the victim's contribution to their item/article? Does the victim's story add something material to the article or the commentary? Or is the journalist only interested in making the subject more attractive to the viewer/reader. And how does the item do justice to the interests of victims in general and the views of Victim Support.
- What are the consequences for the group? What support can you offer the victims? Can you live up to them?

When you choose as a Victim Support Group to support victims in their contacts with journalists, this must be done in a professional way. This means that this must happen with the relevant know-how,

well prepared, expertly, and on the basis of the freedom and autonomy of the victim. This requires sufficient time and space from Victim Support to coach the victims properly in this respect. Victim Support workers must be trained specifically in supporting victims in media contacts.

The choice therefore depends on the views of the group, the local context and the means and possibilities of the group.

When the choice is made to establish contact between journalists and victims, the following points of attention are important:

- It is important that the victim personally contacts the journalist and that Victim Support consequently does not pass on any personal details.
- Make sure that the victim feels free to honour a request or not. A victim should always make the decision to honour a request from a journalist for personal reasons and certainly not for reasons of 'gratitude to' or 'respect for' Victim Support. Always discuss this with the victim.
- Discuss the need for preparation and support with the victim. Use the hints in the annexes.
- To prevent journalists from overrunning Victim Support with questions, a request could be subjected to conditions, such as including a piece on Victim Support in the interview, article or programme. Make sure that it is also advantageous for you as a group.
- In case you do not have a database with victims you may contact for media requests, do not contact victims that do not get any support anymore. This may be experienced as an intrusion on one's privacy.

Annex 1 - Dos and Don'ts for Dealing with the Media

General Dos and Don'ts for Dealing and Contact with the Media

- Be consistent: act in accordance with a few general criteria established in advance and stick to them.
 - Co-operate with press requests as long as it does not harm the interests of the victims.
 - Do not give any information that may lead to individual victims or their situations.
 - Always formulate your views and your message clearly in advance. If you are not in a position to do so, do not co-operate with the press request.
- Determine in advance who will be spokesperson to the press and in which cases; make sure that this person is prepared for this task.
- Make sure that you know the answer to the following questions after your first contact with the journalist:
 - From which medium does the question originate?
 - What is the reason for the journalist to ask the question?
 - For which programme/column (topical matter or background information) is it meant?
 - When is the deadline, broadcast time/publication date?
 - Is it life or not?
 - What will the entire item/article look like?
 - Will any other persons be interviewed about this subject? If yes, who are they?
 - What information does the journalist exactly want? Facts? Reactions? Views?
 - Does the journalist only want to quote you short or will it be a more extensive interview?
- Never start giving an answer when you are not certain of the answer -> find out first, prepare and then give the answer.
- Realize that a journalist usually works with strict deadlines and take this into account when giving the answer to his question, or when you tell him that you are not able/willing to give an answer or that you are not able to give an answer before his deadline.
- Only make promises you can keep.
- Make sure you know the laws and regulations of your country in respect of journalism ethics, protection of privacy and professional confidentiality.

Dos and Don'ts for Giving an Interview (Short or Long)

- Always be well prepared!
- When you are rushed by the journalist because he wants a quick answer, make sure that you get enough time to prepare yourself. A wrong answer is also useless to the journalist.
- Make sure that you know in advance what is expected from the person to be interviewed.
- Arrange in advance that you may read the article after the interview so that you can change any factual incorrectness. Arrange in advance whether you can see the broadcast beforehand.
- When you do not want to see certain answers/subjects again in the article or the radio/TV item, do not tell them. The journalist has the right to include what has been said in the final result.
- Ask the journalist in advance which questions he wants to ask.

- You need to think ahead about what other questions a journalist may ask.
- Formulate correct answers to all questions in writing before the actual interview. Give answers that fit within the general criteria you have established for your spokesperson (see 'General Dos and Don'ts').
- Also formulate your core message in advance (the things you are willing to say and want to see again in the article or radio/TV item); divided into a core message (which you can tell in 30 seconds) and an extensive version (which you can tell in 60 seconds).
- Make sure that this core message comes across. Avoid too many details.
- Do not forget to think ahead about the object you want to achieve with the interview. Your core message is determined by this object.
- Make sure that you bring along (correct) facts and figures about the subject on paper. Journalists always want to know them.
- Be honest and open.
- Use terms and language that are understandable to everyone.
- Every conversation falls silent now and then. Do not try to fill these silences forcedly. As long as you can get your core message across you do not have to give any additional information.
- If there is something you do not know, admit this honestly (never start to fantasize) and, if necessary, offer the journalist to sort it out (if it concerns information that you are able and willing to give).
- A journalist may ask leading questions. Be prepared for this. You do not have to go along with a negative tenor. Remain correct and positive yourself. The fact that the journalist conducts the interview does not mean that he is the only one to lead the conversation.
- Be assertive. You are personally responsible for the quality of the interview. So, if the journalist wanders off the agreed main subject too much, tell him about which subject you do want to talk.
- Even if the meeting starts and ends with some social talk, remember that the interview starts as soon as the journalist enters and ends when the journalist leaves the site. The journalist may use everything that is said outside the actual interview for his article or item.

Take care with TV/radio items:

- When it is not 'live', the recordings will be edited -> pieces may be cut. Give your answers in such a way that the chance that they cut your core message becomes as small as possible. Always return to the core of the matter.
- Dress suitably for TV recordings (some colours or designs distort on screen).

Dos and Don'ts for Writing a Press Release

- Determine what you want to achieve by a message (this determines how you are to write the press release)
- Make sure that you write one press release for only 1 news fact/subject (the pitfall is the wish to discuss several subjects in one press release: this does not work).

- Write at the top of the page in big letters 'PRESS RELEASE' + Date and name + logo sender.
- Write at the bottom of the page, below a line: 'note to the editor/not intended for publication'. Here you can write information for the journalist that should NOT be mentioned in the media. Such as name and telephone number of the spokesperson.
- Preferably write your press release on 1 page.
- Insert page numbers if the message comprises more than 1 page.
- Write the message in text blocks just as newspaper articles are written.
- Write a short heading (1 line) that summarizes the core message or incites to read.
- The first paragraph (maximum 100-120 words) is printed bold and contains a short summary: the text gives a very concise answer to the questions 'who, what, where, when, why and how'.
- The rest of the press release may go more deeply into it. Write the most important information at the beginning of the press release.
- Use short sentences.
- Avoid difficult words or jargon.
- Make sure that the contact person for the press can be reached after sending the press release.
- Allow for the closing times of the editorial offices when sending your press release. (These may vary for each medium).

Example press release (with fake text)

PRESS RELEASE	Logo organization
Place and date	
THIS IS THE HEADER	
Tekst (bold) answering the questions 'who, what, where, when, why and how' in maximum 100-120 words.	
Text giving more details, the most important in this part.	
More text giving more details. (it's possible of course to write a few of these text blocks.)	
<hr/>	
Remarks for the journalist: In any case the name and telephone number form the person who will answer questions.	

Annex 2 - Hints for Working with Victims Having Received Media Requests

When victims co-operate with an interview

- Discuss with the victim in advance what he/she will expect from your support and make agreements.
- Ask the victim you support what his/her requirements and wishes are (as regards contents, place of the interview, and suchlike)
- Give all information that may help the victim to make his/her own choices. Encourage the victim to ask for such information.
- Pay attention to the question for permission for recognizable video and sound recordings. (The media sometimes have a victim sign a contract providing that they own the recordings and that they may use them again at any arbitrary moment)
- Make sure that the journalist respects the victim's limits and privacy. Make agreements about this with the journalist in advance.
- Make sure that someone is present during the interview to support the victim if the victim has indicated this wish. Make sure that the journalist is informed of this.
- Ask the victim after the interview or the recordings whether he/she wants to add or delete something if the journalist forgets to ask this. Tell the journalist that he is obliged to do this.
- Always live up to your agreements.
- Never patronize the victim.
- Never put pressure on victims to contribute to an interview.
- Never belittle or trivialize the victims' reactions or the consequences for them.
- Agree with the journalist that the video and sound recordings of a victim are actually broadcast / the interview is actually published at the agreed time. Victims often talk about sensitive matters, it is unseemly to deal with this carelessly.

If you are not present yourself:

- Encourage and support the victim to ask the journalist to clarify the survey and structure before, during and after the interview.
- Encourage and support the victim to ask the journalist to read the text again or to see the video recording beforehand.

Special Points of Attention for Interviews with Children

- Ask the child and the parents (or other support persons) which support they expect. Involve the parents / support persons.
- Make sure that attention is paid to finding a comfortable place for the child.
- Point out to the journalist that he/she sits at the same level as the child during the recordings/interview.

- Explain to the journalist what he/she may or may not expect from children. For instance, very young children are often not able to express their feelings in a situation.
- Stress to the child, the support persons and the journalist that there are no right or wrong answers.
- Point out to the journalist that he/she should discuss the contents of the interview with the child and the support person in advance.
- Point out to the journalist that there should always be a support person present during the interview.
- Point out and ask guarantees that the interview and/or the recording of the child is published and/or broadcast.
- Point out that the interview should be limited in time: 30 minutes for children under the age of 9; 45 minutes for children from 10 to 14 years old, and a maximum of one hour for adolescents.

Annex 3 - Brochure for Journalists

Source: Victim Support Flanders, Belgium

The Press and The Victims – Tips for journalists

Good news is not news

The press have always been particularly interested in things that go wrong in society. Good news is no news it is often cynically said. And this makes sense, for the press is the guardian of democracy. It is the press's role to let the public know about things that go wrong. It is only if we speak openly about them, that we can do something about it.

Crime and accidents are important news items. Security is an important political issue, and we want to know that everything is being done to ensure the safety of the general public.

However, crime, accidents and disasters create victims. There are the people directly involved in the event: dead or wounded victims and people traumatised by what they have seen and experienced. And then there is a wider circle of people who are touched by the event: the family, children, siblings, partners, parents, neighbours, colleagues and school friends. Even witnesses can be profoundly shocked by dramatic accidents or disasters.

For the press, the key is to report on the facts, but also to consider the feelings and needs of the victims. It can be cathartic for a victim to tell the world their story. It can give them the feeling that the outside world now knows 'the truth'. They can feel they are finally recognised as victims.

However, getting this right is a sensitive matter.

Witness reports

Caroline (9 years old)

'a lady from the television asked my mummy and me if we wanted to say something about how I felt after he died. Daddy didn't want to live anymore. We went to a real studio. It was very exciting. I did my best for Daddy. It was going to be on television on Monday, and I was ready for it. Everyone in my class was going to watch. But because a war broke out somewhere far away, I didn't get on the television. I felt really bad about that.

Kris (42 years old)

'The interview went really well. Many people responded to the article in a positive way. Even the politicians sat up and took notice. But I wish they had corrected the mistakes I had pointed out!'

Tips for journalists

a) Collecting information

Shortly after the event, victims are often in a delicate frame of mind. Some are very emotional, others are very calm. These are normal reactions to very extreme situations. However, it does mean that victims are not always able to judge whether or not it is the right moment to give an interview. Or they fail to answer the simplest question coherently.

- Try to imagine what it is like for the victim. Take care to ensure his or her comfort as much as possible.
- Identify yourself clearly and explain what you expect and what the victim may expect from you.
- Consider the emotions, reactions and wishes of the victim. Be supportive before, during and after the interview.
- Respect the victim's wishes and leave him or her alone if that is what he/she wants. Make an appointment for a later interview if that is what they want.
Be very careful about approaching relatives, friends or acquaintances of the victims for further information. They might not be aware of the facts.

Keep appointments and inform the victim of the outcome whatever happens.

b) Writing up the news

Victims have usually not asked to be the centre of attention. Even if they are prepared to tell their story, they do not necessarily wish to become public property and have all the details about their personal lives made public. Consider whether it is really necessary to identify the victim and to reveal their address or other details. Explicitly request permission from the victim if you do intend to use their name or other personal details.

Some groups deserve special attention:

Minors

Children are particularly vulnerable. Take this into account and consider the child's point of view. Make clear agreements and keep your promises. Give correct information. Always discuss the interview before you begin, with both the child and the supporting adult. Emphasise that there are no wrong or right answers. Children are likely to have big expectations about the publication or broadcast of their interview. Be clear about this and take into account that not publishing an interview with a child will be perceived negatively by the child. Children in care may not legally be identified so as not to jeopardise the child's future. You may neither publish their names nor use photographs or film. If you do so, you may be prosecuted.

Victims of sexual violence

Victims of rape or harassment may not be mentioned by name nor photographed or filmed. Infringement of this law may lead to prosecution.

What if it affects YOU?

Hearing and seeing shocking events, and the suffering it entails, can affect the journalist too. That impact is often underestimated and is too often considered simply part of the job. Talking about it with colleagues or family may help, but may not always be enough. If you find something is particularly hard to stomach, contact the VVJ secretariat at nr 02/235 22 70 or info@journalist.be. If we cannot help you ourselves we will refer you to a specialist in trauma.

Guidelines for the press in dealing with victims – approved by the Council of Journalists in 2003

The press will uphold people's right to privacy and dignity. The right to information must always be balanced against the right to privacy.

The press will refrain from publishing names and identifying information, and will be tactful in taking and publishing photographs of accidents, disasters or crime. The identity of a well known person or public figure may merit publication of identifying information.

In their search for information, the press will not exert undue pressure on victims or their support network. The press will not intimidate nor trouble the victim for an unduly long period of time.

The press will cover intimate family ceremonies or funerals with respect and consideration for the wishes of those involved.

Both directors, head editors, editors and journalists are responsible for upholding the principles of privacy in general, and these guidelines in particular.

Victim Support in Flanders

Victim support with the police

Since the reforms of the police force, the care of victims and their families has become a core task for the police. Police personnel are trained in receiving and passing on correct information to the victims. It is also their task to refer victims to victim support (see further)

Victim Support in the public prosecutor's offices

Every court is linked to a house of justice, which has its own services for victim support. Their task is to raise awareness of victims within the courts and to provide support. They offer victims assistance during court hearings, help in access to files, information on procedural developments and support when a perpetrators' early release on parole is being considered.

Victim Support within the Centres for General Welfare Work

These services are formally recognised by the Flemish community. Within each court area there is a Centre for General Welfare Work which is charged with providing victim support services. Victim Support offers its services to all victims of crime, the families of suicide or those bereaved through traffic accidents, the victims of disasters, the relatives of victims or witnesses. The services include psychosocial help, juridical information, and practical support. Support can be provided in the victim's home and out with office hours where required.

Therapy for victims.

A small minority of victims need very specialised and long term help. These victims can be referred to mental health services, trauma centres, etc.

Journalists can contact Victim Support for more information on victim issues. We can also help to make direct contact with victims:

Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk (support for the centres for general welfare work)
Contactperson : Astrid Rubbens
Diksmuidelaan 36A, 2600 Berchem, Belgium
+32 3 340 49 17 and +32 497 87 58 46
www.steunpunt.be

Annex 4 - Brochure for Victims about Dealing with the Media

Source: Victim Support the Netherlands