

- Assure victims that their emotional reactions to the crime are not uncommon. Sympathize with the victims by saying things such as: “You’ve been through something very difficult. I’m sorry”; “What you’re feeling is completely normal”; and “This was a terrible crime. I’m sorry it happened to you.”
- Counter any self-blame by victims by saying things such as, “You didn’t do anything wrong. This was not your fault. You were expertly manipulated by transnational cybercriminals who are expert at getting what they want.”
- Speak with victims as individuals. Do not just “take a report.” Sit down, take off your hat, and place your notepad aside momentarily. Ask victims how they are feeling now and listen.
- Say to victims, “I want to hear the whole story, everything you can remember, even if you don’t think it’s important.” and add “You don’t need to tell me every embarrassing detail, we can stick to the facts.”
- Ask open-ended questions. Avoid questions that can be answered by “yes” or “no.” Ask questions such as “Can you tell me what happened?” or “Is there anything else you can tell me?”
- Show that you are actively listening to victims through your facial expressions, body language, and comments such as “Take your time; I’m listening” and “We can take a break if you like. I’m in no hurry.”
- Avoid interrupting victims while they are telling their story.
- Repeat or rephrase what you think you heard the victims say. For example, “Let’s see if I understood you correctly. Did you say. . .?”; “So, as I understand it, . . .”; or “Are you saying. . .?”

### **Victims’ Need To Know “What Comes Next” After Their Victimization**

Victims often have concerns about their role in the investigation of the crime and in the legal process. They may also be concerned about issues such as media attention or payment for health care.

You can help relieve some of their anxiety by telling victims what to expect in the aftermath of these crimes. This will also help prepare them for upcoming stressful events and changes in their lives. You can respond to

victims’ need to know about what comes next after their victimization by following these guidelines:

- Briefly explain law enforcement procedures for tasks such as the filing of your report, the investigation of the crime, and the arrest and arraignment of a suspect. If this is a transnational crime explain that it may not be possible to prosecute, but that you will refer it to your State’s Cybercrime Unit (if possible) or the FBI.
- Tell victims about subsequent law enforcement interviews or other kinds of interviews they can expect – or not expect.
- Explain what specific information from the crime report will be available to news organizations. Discuss the likelihood of the media releasing any of this information.
- Counsel victims that lapses of concentration, memory losses, depression, and physical ailments are normal reactions for crime victims. Encourage them to reestablish their normal routines as quickly as possible to help speed their recovery.
- Explain that there are victims assistance organizations that can assist them with understanding these crimes and that provide support for victims of these crimes. Indicate that they can contact our organization via our website [www.AgainstScams.org](http://www.AgainstScams.org) or find SCARS on Facebook.
- Give victims any crime victims’ pamphlets listing resources available for help and information. These pamphlet (s) should include contact information for local crisis intervention centers and support groups; the prosecutor’s office and the victim-witness assistance office; the State victim compensation/assistance office; and other nationwide services, including toll-free hotlines.
- Ask victims whether they have any questions. Encourage victims to contact you if you can be of further assistance.

What is most important for officers to understand is that scams are not all of a single type. Many times there will also be a domestic nexus – involving accomplices or “Mules.” It is your obligation to refer this information to entities that can act on this information to help prevent future victimization.

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[contact@AgainstScams.org](mailto:contact@AgainstScams.org) for more information

## **SCARS|EDUCATION™ Reference Library:**

### **Interacting with Scam Victims for Law Enforcement Officers**

#### **Basic Guidelines on Approaching & Interacting with Victims of Cyber-Enabled Crime (Online Scams)**



**From the Society of Citizens Against  
Relationship Scams Inc.  
[www.AgainstScams.org](http://www.AgainstScams.org)**

## BACKGROUND: Supporting Scam Victims

The way people cope as victims of crime depends largely on their experiences immediately following the crime. As a law enforcement officer, you are usually the first official to approach victims.

For this reason, you are in a unique position to help victims cope with the immediate trauma of the crime and to help restore their sense of security and control over their lives.

In the case of scam victims, especially of “Romance Scam” victims – there is not a typical crime scene. Normally the victim is a walk-in. This is typically the first contact where officers are able to address victims and their needs.

This publication recognizes that each crime is different and requires officers to prioritize their performance of tasks in each situation. Generally, officers must attend to many tasks, including assessing medical needs (mental health in this case), determining facts and circumstances, advising other personnel, and gathering and distributing suspect information.

It is helpful to keep in mind that apprehension of the suspect is the primary duty of law enforcement, but in these cases, most suspects are going to be beyond your jurisdiction and probably in other countries – but not always! Accomplishing this task helps not only the suspect’s current victims but potential victims as well. Sometimes the first officers must delay their attendance to the victims if the situation requires. But it is always important for officers to focus their attention on the victims and their needs. At this point, how the officers respond to the victims, explain the competing law enforcement challenges, and work with the victims is very important.

By approaching victims appropriately, officers will gain their trust and cooperation. Victims may then be more willing to provide detailed information about the crime to officers and later to investigators and prosecutors if the crime can be investigated and prosecuted, which, in turn, will lead to the conviction of more criminals.

### Remember That You Are There For The Victim, The Victim Is Not There For You

You can help victims by understanding the three major needs they have after a crime has been committed: the need to feel safe; they need to express their emotions; and the need to know “what comes next” after their victimization. The information in this handbook is designed to show you how to meet these needs.

## Tips for Responding to Victims’ Three Major Needs

### Victims’ Need To Feel Safe

People often feel helpless, vulnerable, and frightened by the trauma of their victimization. As the first responding officer, you can respond to victims’ need to feel safe by following these guidelines:

- Introduce yourself to victims by name and title. Briefly explain your role and purpose.
- Reassure victims of their safety and your concern by paying close attention to your own words, posture, mannerisms, and tone of voice. Say to victims, “You’re safe now” or “I’m going to help you.”
- Use body language to show concern, such as nodding your head, using natural eye contact, placing yourself at the victim’s level rather than standing over seated victims, keeping an open stance rather than crossing your arms, and speaking in a calm, sympathetic voice.
- Ask victims to tell you in just a sentence or two what happened. Ask if they have any health issues that might need to be addressed. Take care of their medical needs first. Scam victims especially can be experiencing physical stress, and since many of them will be elderly, attention and care should be given.
- Offer to contact a crisis counselor for victims. It is unlikely that a “scam counselor” is available, so domestic abuse counselors can typically help these victims.
- Ensure privacy during your interview. Conduct it in a place where victims feel secure.
- Ask simple questions that allow victims to make decisions, assert themselves, and regain control over their lives. Examples: “Would you like anything to drink?” or “How would you like me to address you, Ms. Jones?”
- Assure victims of the confidentiality of their comments whenever possible. Scam victims are frequently fearful of retaliation by the “scammer”
- Ask victims about any special concerns or needs they may have. Keep in mind that many “scam victims” have severe financial losses, and a social worker may need to assist to guide the victim to available resources and services.

- Provide a “safety net” for victims before leaving them. Make telephone calls and pull together personal or professional support for the victims. Give victims information about local resources available for help or information. You can refer them to our organization for additional support – we provide direct victims’ support groups, however, if the victim is in need of more direct mental health support refer them to local professionals. You may already have a pamphlet that includes contact information for local crisis intervention centers and support groups; the prosecutor’s office and the victim-witness assistance office; the State victim compensation/assistance office; and other nationwide services, including toll-free hotlines.
- Give victim’s—in writing—your name and information on how to reach you. Encourage them to contact you if they have any questions or if you can be of further help. However, you may not have answers for them in the case of cybercrimes. Your state police will have a cybercrimes unit that can be called in. Additionally, you can suggest that the victim turn to our organization for additional information.

### Victims’ Need To Express Their Emotions

Victims need to air their emotions and tell their story after the trauma of the crime. They need to have their feelings accepted and have their story heard by a nonjudgmental listener.

In addition to fear, they may have feelings of self-blame, anger, shame, sadness, or denial. Their most common response is: “I don’t believe this happened to me.” Emotional distress may surface in seemingly peculiar ways, such as laughter. Sometimes victims feel rage at the sudden, unpredictable, and uncontrollable threat to their safety or lives. This rage can even be directed at the people who are trying to help them, perhaps even at law enforcement officers for not taking action immediately. You can respond to victims’ need to express their emotions by following these guidelines:

- Avoid cutting off victims’ expression of their emotions.
- Notice victims’ body language, such as their posture, facial expression, tone of voice, gestures, eye contact, and general appearance. This can help you understand and respond to what they are feeling as well as what they are saying.