

Your Rights as a Client

This pamphlet explains your rights and responsibilities as a client at Victim Support Service and what to do if any problems arise.

Victim Support Service Inc.

Victim Support Service (VSS) is a non-government, community based, not-for-profit organisation, which provides a comprehensive range of services to people who have suffered as a result of a crime.

Our Service Standards reflect our commitment to provide you with the best service we can and to undertake continual improvements.

Service Standards

As the lead agency for victims of crime in South Australia, VSS provides access to networks of supportive professional and community based organisations as well as providing a wide range of direct services.

Access to Services

- VSS provides services to people who have suffered as a result of a criminal offence including those who choose not to report an offence to police.
- Where VSS does not, or cannot, provide a direct service to a client, we will provide clear reasons for this to you and suggestions regarding alternative service options. Where possible, VSS will provide referral to other services.
- Where direct services are provided to clients who speak languages other than English, an interpreter will be arranged free of charge.

Respect

- VSS works from a belief that we are assisting people to build-on to already existing strengths.
- When engaging with our service you will receive courteous and considerate contact and will be treated with respect and dignity.
- You have the right to question or comment on any aspect of your contact.
- You will receive a quality service that recognises individual differences such as age, culture, gender, sexuality, ability, location and circumstance. We recognise, value and respond to the needs of people from diverse backgrounds.

Information

- You have the right to information that is accurate, clear and in a form you can understand. This in turn will promote your ability to make informed choices regarding your contact with VSS. Your right to adequate explanations includes:
 - waiting times;
 - choices and options available;
 - possible outcomes; and
 - the name and position of our staff within the agency.
- VSS is not qualified to offer legal advice, however we may provide information on legal processes or procedures.

Choice

- You have the right to make your own choices in relation to your perceived needs and to change your mind.
- You can withdraw from contact with VSS at any time.

Confidentiality

- Although, as a non-government organisation, VSS is not covered under the Freedom of Information Act, we undertake to abide by the National Privacy Principles recognising your right to access information held about you. You will have to advise VSS in writing, directing your request to the Chief Executive, if you would like to access information VSS holds about you. Our Privacy Policy is available on request.
- All identifying personal information will be kept confidential subject to legal requirements. We are required to notify appropriate agencies in the following situations:
 - suspected child abuse and neglect;
 - unsafe situations with firearms;
 - when we have a reasonable cause to suspect that a person's own safety or the safety of another is at risk; or
 - when we are required to do so under court subpoena.
- If you tell one of our staff or volunteers about serious illegal activity that has not been reported to the police, VSS is likely to report it to them.
- Apart from the circumstances listed above, no information, beyond that necessary for your care, will be available to people outside the service without your consent.
- Counselling notes regarding sexual assault are protected from being provided or subpoenaed to court under Section 67E of the *Evidence (Confidential Communications) Amendment Act 1999*.
- Any information VSS has about you will be kept for up to 15 years after your last contact with us.

Responsiveness

- Telephone calls will be answered promptly and all other services are provided as soon as possible. VSS staff will work with you on agreed time frames and will explain if any delay is anticipated.

Cost

- Services are free of charge.

Safety

- Services and the method in which they are delivered will not endanger the wellbeing of personnel or clients.
- Victims will be protected from further trauma or contact with offenders whilst on VSS premises.
- Particular interests of victims (including freedom from fear, intimidation, harassment and further degradation) and the preservation of privacy will be supported.

Conflict

- Potential or actual conflict of interest by a worker or the agency will be avoided wherever possible.

Consultation

We value and encourage your comments and contributions at any time and invite you to give us feedback on the services we provide. We provide feedback forms to clients on request. We may ask for your permission to be recontacted to participate in our annual client services evaluation survey. Participation in the evaluation survey is voluntary.

If you are satisfied with VSS you may like to become a member.

Responsibilities

In every situation where there are rights there are also responsibilities. At VSS we would ask that you:

- be considerate of the rights of others using the service – especially their right to confidentiality.
- inform us if you are unable to keep an appointment or are going to be late.
- advise us if you have any special needs, such as an interpreter.
- tell us if some information has been difficult to understand.
- inform your worker if you are seeking or receiving a service from another provider/agency about the same matter.
- share all relevant information honestly with your counsellor.

- not attend the service under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs.
- work toward gaining as much independence as possible.

If Problems Arise

If you are unhappy or confused with any aspect of our service please tell us. If you wish to make a complaint it will be taken seriously and we will attempt to resolve it in a respectful, supportive and confidential manner. We suggest the following steps to resolve any problem.

- Attempt to resolve the dispute with the other person without the involvement of another party.
- If you remain dissatisfied or feel unable to discuss the matter with the relevant person, talk to another worker with whom you feel able to confide.
- Talk with, or write to, the manager of the relevant section. If the matter is still not resolved, you would need to write to the Chief Executive c/- the Adelaide office.
- If you are still not satisfied, you may write to the Chairperson of the Board of Management c/- the Adelaide office.

If you initiate a complaint you will not be disadvantaged in any way by doing so, and you will be kept informed of progress in the resolution. This includes any specific time limits to resolve the complaint.