



**SYSTEM ALERT:
ARIZONA'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Victim Advocate's View

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A domestic violence victim's call to 9-1-1 is both a request for help and a gateway into complex legal systems. Victim advocates provide a bridge between victims and an often confusing criminal justice system. Paradoxically, as members of this system, victim advocates often have the most personal relationships with victims while having the least amount of authority to influence the criminal justice system's response to victims. Victim advocates engage in a delicate balancing act; an act that requires comprehensive understanding of and respect for the criminal justice system as well as in-depth knowledge about the unavoidable challenges facing victims who report abuse.

Skilled advocates work steadfastly to secure basic resources necessary for victims to move out of abusive relationships. In tandem to these efforts, victim advocates must maintain positive relationships with all members of the criminal justice system in an effort to relay the victim's input regarding the prosecution of a batterer. Advocates often work within the criminal justice system which views victims as either 'good' (victims who maintain a desire to hold the abuser accountable, agree to testify in court and espouse a commitment to leave the relationship permanently) or 'bad' (victims who question the criminal justice process, do not want to assist with prosecution and will not make a commitment to leave an abusive relationship). Experienced advocates know that labeling victims as 'good' or 'bad' reflects the reality that the criminal justice system is both overloaded and unable to fully address the complexities of domestic violence.

Even as they assist, support and encourage victims to remain engaged in the legal process, victim advocates know that most often the criminal justice system does not respond to victims as individuals, that prosecution guidelines do not ensure that batterers will be held accountable, that the quality of batterer intervention programs is inconsistent, and that many victims will drop out of the confusing, timely prosecution process. Nonetheless, victim advocates persevere in their advocacy efforts. 'The commitment of victim advocates is critical and reflects the best that one person can offer another person; dignity, compassion, understanding and hope for the future.'