

## **Immediate Aftermath of Crime**

### THE CRIME JUST HAPPENED – WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

The list presented here includes the most immediate options to consider after victimization. Some of the medical options include time-sensitive considerations that are important in the first hours or days after victimization. Reporting can be done at any time, but most police officers will tell you that for the sake of your safety and the safety of the public, it is ideal if crimes are reported as soon as possible after they occur.

#### ➤ VICTIM ADVOCACY

Depending on what kind of crime you experienced, it can be especially helpful and comforting to speak to a victim advocate from a crisis agency in the community. An advocate can explain the various options available - both immediate and longer-term - answer your questions, provide support, make referrals to resources, and in some cases, accompany you to these resources. Your immediate reaction may be “I don’t need help” but people can be especially vulnerable and out of sorts after victimization or trauma, and this is exactly the time when it can be most helpful to have the assistance of an advocate. The services of community advocates are confidential [link to list here]. What is a [victim advocate](#)?

No matter what kind of crime you experienced, help is available. If you have already reported to a police agency, there are Victim Services staff available to help you either through the police department where you reported, or through 1-800-VICTIM-1. Learn more about [Delaware Victim Services](#). Victim Services staff will follow up with you, keep you informed about what is happening with the investigation, and connect you with other resources. A significant difference between community advocates and police-based Victim Services staff is that police-based advocates may not keep confidential the information you share from the police or detectives investigating the crime you reported. (They will not share your information with those outside of the criminal justice process.)

#### ➤ MEDICAL CARE & EVIDENCE COLLECTION

There are many types of victimization that may require medical attention, and if you are considering reporting to police, a forensic exam will be important so that evidence can be collected for use in prosecution. Forensic exams may be performed in cases of sexual assault, physical assault, intimate partner/domestic violence, kidnapping, child abuse, elder abuse, gun shots, etc. Only a trained Forensic Nurse Examiner (FNE) can provide a forensic exam, so you will need to go to one of the hospitals in Delaware with a forensic nursing unit (list below).

**TIME-SENSITIVE CONSIDERATIONS** - If you have been sexually assaulted, it is recommended that you go as soon as possible after the assault, and not shower or eat or drink prior to the exam. If time has passed, evidence can still be collected, and other medical treatment may be offered in the days/weeks after an assault. If you are still

wearing the clothing you were wearing during the assault, the hospital may keep it as evidence. Or you can take the clothing you wore at the time of the assault, bedding, or other unwashed items in a brown paper bag (no plastic). You can bring your own change of clothes, or you will be provided with clothing to wear home. A forensic nurse can provide you with Plan B to prevent the likelihood that you could become pregnant from the assault. Plan B can be taken for up to 5 days after an unprotected sexual experience.

If you are unsure whether you wish to report to police, hospitals in Delaware can retain forensic evidence for at least one month, or up to a year if space allows, while you decide whether or not to report to police. Getting evidence collected now may give you peace of mind and time to make a decision later, when you are not so overwhelmed by the immediate impact of trauma.

- If the victim is a child – AI DuPont Hospital for Children (Wilmington) provides a pediatric FNE and houses the Children’s Advocacy Center where the child can be interviewed for a case.
- New Castle County – Christiana Care Medical Center (Newark)
- Kent County – Bayhealth Medical Center (Dover)
- Sussex County – Beebe Medical Center (Lewes) & Nanticoke Health Services (Seaford)

#### ➤ REPORTING

- TO POLICE - If you plan to report a crime to police, it is important that you report to the appropriate agency. You can call 911 and share the type of crime and location where the crime occurred, and the appropriate agency will be sent. For many types of victimization, you may provide a brief account to a responding officer, but you will also be asked to come to the police department for a longer, more in-depth interview with a Detective that will likely be audio or video recorded.
- CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT – To report child abuse of any kind or neglect, call 1-800-292-9582 or via the online form at [www.iseethesigns.org](http://www.iseethesigns.org).
- ELDER ABUSE & NEGLECT – To report abuse of an elder to Delaware’s [Adult Protective Services](#), call 1-800-223-9074.
- DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE – The State of Delaware’s Department of Labor offers a process to report all forms of discrimination and harassment that occur in the workplace. Learn more: <https://dia.delawareworks.com/discrimination/>
- TO YOUR SCHOOL’S CONDUCT PROCESS – If you experienced any form of sex discrimination or sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking) in the context of your school environment, programs, staff, or property, you can report it to the Title IX Coordinator and/or other relevant staff who handle conduct-related matters. K-12 schools, colleges and universities that receive public funds are required to make public the name and contact information for their Title IX Coordinator.

## ➤ EMOTIONAL IMPACT

- Victims of all sorts of crimes can experience a wide range of feelings and reactions, including confusion, denial, anger, shock, numbness, fear, sadness and loss, betrayal, self-blame, shame, embarrassment, sadness, and/or helplessness. You may have had a trauma response, meaning that your brain and body had a physiological response to the situation that you could not control. Remember that you are having a normal response to an abnormal event. Learn more about the [trauma of victimization](#). It can be especially important to surround yourself with safe, trustworthy, supportive people after being victimized. As you consider options, an advocate can be especially helpful. Later on you may benefit from seeking counseling resources to learn coping strategies that are ideal for managing the reactions and emotions you are experiencing.
- Sexual Assault can be a traumatic experience. It is common for survivors of sexual assault or rape to experience anxiety, a heightened state of awareness in certain situations, hypervigilance, difficulty sleeping, nightmares, and for many different kinds of things to be “triggers” that set off anxiety and physiological reactions. A trained advocate can help you understand the responses you are having, while sharing available resources and helping you explore the pros and cons of your next steps. Seeking supportive crisis care or after-care counseling can be helpful to your own understanding of what you are going through and may aid in your ability to cope with these initial, intense feelings. A specialized therapist, counseling group, or survivors’ support group may be beneficial later on in your healing process.
- Survivors of intimate partner violence may struggle with who to turn to for help because many of their friends or family don’t understand and just want them to leave the abusive partner. Seeking the neutral assistance of an advocate may be an easier way to get the information and support you need. Delaware’s Domestic Violence Hotline is staffed 24/7 with advocates who can answer questions and provide connections to resources.
- Adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse and incest often begin to remember their experience or deal with the emotions associated with their childhood experiences years after they occurred. This can be a scary and difficult time and can create turmoil in the survivors’ life, even though the assault(s) happened years before. [More is written about the statute of limitations for reporting past crimes here.]
- Sexual harassment can take many forms, and it can be confusing to figure out whether an experience meets the definition. It is a misdemeanor crime under Delaware law. [Sexual harassment](#) is also prohibited by the State of Delaware’s Department of Labor rules, and can be reported as a form of discrimination, along with many other forms of discrimination. If the harassment was committed by a supervisor or in your work setting, you may wish to seek accountability through the Department of Labor’s [complaint process](#), which offers some protections for those who report. Speaking with an officer, or advocate, may be beneficial to help you decide on a course of action that matches your wishes and needs.

## ➤ SAFETY & HOUSING CONSIDERATIONS

- **SAFETY PLANNING** – If you experienced intimate partner violence or stalking (but may also be relevant for other crimes) it may be important for you to work with a police-based Victim Services professional or with a Victim Advocate to develop a personalized safety plan. While safety planning information can be found online, but it can be more effective to talk it through with someone who is familiar with common considerations. The National DV Hotline explains what is a [safety plan](#) and the National Stalking Resource Center shares considerations in a [stalking safety plan](#). There are also safety plans for teens and college students via [loveisrespect.org](#).
- **HOUSING CHANGES** – If a sexual assault and/or incident of intimate partner violence occurred in the rental home, Delaware's [Landlord-Tenant Code](#) allows victims to break their lease early without financial penalty. In order to do so, the law requires that victims have an advocate or counselor write a letter to the landlord. There are also Domestic Violence Shelters and related services available to survivors of intimate partner violence who need a safe place to go in order to flee the abuser. To learn more about the shelters, call the DV Hotline. If you experienced violence in a college residence hall, your school can assist in making a room change, and may offer temporary emergency housing. Contact your school's advocacy/crisis services, Title IX Coordinator, and/or Residence Life staff for assistance.
- **PROTECTION FROM ABUSE ORDER** – Whether reporting for criminal charges or not, Delaware offers victims the option to pursue a Protection From Abuse Order (PFA) through Family Court. The PFA is a legal, binding order from a judge requiring the abuser not to have contact with the victim or come within a specified distance. Violations of a PFA can lead to arrest. Most PFAs are issued for one year, some for two years, and occasionally a lifetime PFA is ordered. It is recommended that victims seeking a PFA work with the Domestic Violence Advocacy Program at Family Court for assistance in completing forms and preparing for the steps in the process to seek a PFA.

## ➤ FINANCIAL COMPENSATION

- **VICTIMS COMPENSATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (VCAP)**– If you reported the crime to police, you are eligible to apply for financial compensation for many types of costs you may incur as a result of the crime. [VCAP funds](#) can cover costs related to burial of a loved one lost to homicide, mental health counseling, lost wages, and other unique costs which are a direct result of victimization. You will need to have an advocate or counselor sign off on your application for victims' compensation.