

Chapter 7

Law Enforcement

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ABSTRACT

Child life specialists working with law enforcement are valuable in providing direct support and timely intervention in the community. This chapter discusses the implementation of a child life specialist in the role of a victim services provider including practical applications of interventions and opportunities for further consideration. With additional training on law enforcement basics and criminal justice processes, child life specialists have the expertise necessary to bridge the gap between law enforcement and victims of crime. This chapter also introduces the positive impact of employing Certified Child Life Specialists in the police athletic league setting. It illustrates the importance of the role of child life working in the urban community setting with youth and police officers to help normalize the environment, encourage positive coping techniques, and support and advocate for youth and families' psychosocial needs.

INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement officers serve to ensure safety in the community through preventing and investigating crimes, community policing, and countless other obligations. The presence of law enforcement in the community enables officers to build rapport and establish the agency as a trusted source of support. Similar to law enforcement officers, child life specialists are uniquely trained to support the community through knowledge of trauma-informed care, development, and family systems. Child life specialists have used their competencies and integrated into law enforcement settings for years. The following chapter will describe two different roles Certified Child Life Specialists (CCLS) have taken on within law enforcement to support the officers and the community they serve. The first as a victim services provider and the second as a CCLS in a Police Athletic League.

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CHILD LIFE AS A VICTIM SERVICES PROVIDER

Most often, when an individual encounters the police it is due to involvement in a crime as either a suspect or a victim. A crime may involve a traffic violation that leads to a car accident where a victim sustains injuries that involve hospitalization and rehabilitation. A crime may occur as an armed robbery, a domestic or sexual assault, a burglary, reckless endangerment, rape, or murder. While law defines crimes based on various classifications, a crime, regardless of the severity, can affect a victim's well-being in several ways. Crime has the potential to impact physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and financial aspects of a victim's life. To assist victims of crime, a victim services provider serves as an additional resource to expand community support. A Certified Child Life Specialist in the role of a victim services provider has the ability to evaluate a victim's needs, create and implement a plan of care to address those needs, and guide a victim to additional resources and support as appropriate.

History

In the late 1960's, a report authored by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice brought national attention to the study of crime. More significantly, the report highlighted the fact that studies neglected to address the victims of crime. The recognition of crime victims spurred conversations that subsequently revealed several challenges within the criminal justice system. Though little was known about the significance of the role of crime victims at the time, further surveys that stemmed from the President's Commission report indicated that victims were underreporting crime. Research showed that success rates of prosecutions were low as a direct result of victims and witnesses not cooperating in the criminal justice process. Underreporting and the lack of cooperation was due to the lack of support for victims of crime. With national attention on the needs of crime victims, the United States experienced a shift in the early 1970's when the Department of Justice prioritized research on the needs of crime victims and funding for victim-witness programs. As a result, the role of the victim services provider was established in the criminal justice system.

Until the early 2000's, victim services programs within police departments were uncommon (Parker, 2001). The growth of crime victim support beyond the investigation was slow to gain momentum. In support of expansion, the Austin Police Department shared several benefits of direct victim services support based on their experience. Advocates found that victim services support provided a substantial tool to improve relationships with the community, increase conviction rates to hold offenders accountable, and serve as a natural gateway for victims of crime to seek and receive necessary mental health support (Parker, 2001). Law enforcement officers in departments across the country wear several hats, often due to a lack of resources. Realistically, the role of counselor or victim advocate should not be the responsibility of an officer, but rather a victim services provider who works in collaboration with law enforcement to serve the community (Anonymous, personal communication, March 17, 2022).

The Role of Victim Services

The role of a victim services provider is to make certain that victims of crime have the necessary support after a traumatic event, during an investigation, or after an arrest of a suspect. Victim services providers work to ensure victims of crime are aware of their rights as a victim established by law, to provide support for victims and/or family members or friends that are present at the scene of a crime, and to refer

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