



Notification Checklist

NC SAKI: Victim Notification Toolkit

“Being treated with kindness, respect, and empathy can be a corrective experience for survivors.”
– Joyful Heart Foundation

Thank you for taking the time to plan and think through the most trauma-informed and victim/survivor-centered way to do notification. Below is a checklist to help guide your process:

- It is very important that your notification syncs up with the amount of case information you have. You should **not** notify a V/S until you have done the following:
 - a. Determined the investigator and community-based advocate for the case.
 - b. Reviewed the case with the DA.
 - c. Know the general whereabouts of the suspect.
 - d. Have a clear ask for the V/S: i.e. to participate in an investigation, or to testify in another case.
 - e. If applicable, determined a clear reason you are not moving forward with the case.

- Do a **background check** on the victim/survivor (V/S) to help you understand what has happened in their life since they had their kit collected. This information can be very helpful as you plan your notification. Things to consider:
 - History of alcohol or other drug addiction?
 - If yes, be sure to research and provide related resources to the V/S as a notification can activate this type of addiction.
 - History of suicidal thoughts or attempts?
 - If yes, be sure to research and provide related resources to the V/S as a notification can activate suicidal thoughts or attempts.
 - History of or current domestic violence?
 - If yes, be sure to research and provide related resources to the V/S as, depending on the suspect and the V/S's current partner, a notification can put the V/S in significant danger.
 - If you will **not** be moving forward with an investigation, the potential danger to the V/S caused by the notification may not be worth the benefit of the notification. While other factors may be involved in this determination, these questions should be your guide: Does the V/S live with the suspect? Has the V/S filed a police report against the suspect within the past year? Have previous police reports against the suspect included high levels of physical injury to the V/S? If the answer to these questions is yes, it is recommended that you do not notify the V/S as this could be placing them in danger.
 - If you are moving forward with an investigation, ensure that you can make the notification without putting the V/S at risk of an assault from the suspect. Perhaps a notification is necessary, but given the safety concerns, it would be better to notify the V/S when they are in the safest situation, i.e. the suspect is out of town. Doing this may delay notification, however it is the right thing to do if it keeps the V/S safer.
 - What is their gender identity? Male, female, non-binary, or other?

- It is important for you to use the term they identify with. If you are unable to make this determination, refer to them by their name, doing your best to stay away from pronouns, such as “she/her” or “him/hers”.
- ☐ Have they been raped or sexually assaulted since this report was made?
 - If yes, be sure to research and provide related resources to the V/S as a notification can activate previous traumas.
- ☐ Have they experienced any additional traumas in their life? E.g. health-related, loss of family member, etc.
 - If yes, consider how these may impact your notification. i.e do not notify the day of a funeral or major surgery, etc.
- ☐ Have they had any arrests or interactions with law enforcement.
 - If yes, review the case details. Is it possible that the V/S could have trauma resulting from their previous interaction with LE? i.e. is the V/S undocumented or African American? The current climate around LE and these communities is complicated and can be traumatic and scary for some Vs/Ss. Knowing this ahead of your notification can give you a greater understanding of how the V/S may respond to you. If you sense there was significant trauma in the previous interaction, consider having the advocate do the first notification and bring law enforcement into the follow-up meeting.
- ☐ What was the **age of the V/S** at the time the kit was collected? Depending on their age, they may have little or no memory of what happened, and/or, they were never told about it. All underage cases should be MDT decisions.
- ☐ If the V/S is **under 18**, you will need to notify their parent/care-giver. However, be sure this person is not the suspect in their case.
- ☐ Research **important dates** – make sure the day you reach out for notification is not their birthday, anniversary of the assault, a holiday, or other important date that would make your notification more traumatic.
- ☐ If in your review of the case, you notice the V/S **requested to close the case**, determine the reason why. i.e. potential threats from suspect, unkind treatment from LE, overwhelmed by the process, etc.
- ☐ Based on the above, and the overall initial experience of the survivor, plan out a thoughtful and sincere **apology**.
- ☐ Determine the V/S’s primary **language** of communication. If they speak a language other than English, including American Sign Language, make arrangements for including interpreters (and make sure the interpreter signs a confidentiality agreement – they may know each other).
- ☐ If it comes up, be sure to clarify to the V/S that NC does **not** provide **victim compensation** to victims of cold cases.
- ☐ If the first notification is made over the phone (recommended), ask them how you can get them the packet of **Survivor Tools and Resources** (Should be done within 24 hours). Meeting? Email? Drop off?
- ☐ If the first notification must be in-person, come prepared with a **fake reason** you are there in case there are family/friends in or around the home. E.g. “They were a witness to a hit and run.”
- ☐ Whether initial notification is made by mail, phone or in person, there should be the intent to have **follow-up contact** in the way the survivor feels most comfortable. If over the phone, an in-person

meeting is recommended within 48 hours. It is not best practice to attempt initial contact with a survivor unless there's availability to connect with the survivor the following day.

- Be prepared to discuss the parameters of **confidentiality** surrounding information the survivor shares, including any limitations on confidentiality. Inform the survivor of their rights as a crime victim, including the right to receive notice as the case progresses, the right to referrals and assistance, and other statutory rights.
- Are you **taking care of yourself**? Remember to take breaks between notifications, take time to debrief each notification with someone, and set healthy limits on how many notifications you will do in a day or week.

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