

TN

Department of  
Correction

# Victims' Voice

Newsletter For Those Impacted By Crime



## Fall Edition

Vicarious trauma is the process of change that happens because you care about other people who have been hurt, and feel committed or responsible to help them. Over time this process can lead to changes in your psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being. Vicarious trauma is not a sign of weakness. It's a natural and normal process whereby the helper's emotional experience and relationships are disrupted or transformed by exposure to and empathic engagement with the painful traumatic experiences of others. When we open our hearts to hear someone's story of torture, loss, devastation, or betrayal, our cherished beliefs are challenged and we are changed.

Self-care is an essential survival skill for service providers working in this field. Self-care refers to activities and practices that we can engage in on a regular basis to reduce stress and maintain and enhance our short- and long-term health and well-being. Engage in activities that make you feel good such as exercising, sleeping, eating a well balanced meal, traveling etc. Take care of those emotional and spiritual needs as well by spending time with family and friends.

"Just like you do on a plane, you need to put on your own oxygen mask first before trying to help others."-Dean Nancy Smyth

Take Care!

*Tamika Dobbins*



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### Victim Services Mission

To support victims, their families, and the laws that protect their rights, while utilizing recognized principles of offender behavioral change to help reduce the risk of repeat criminal behavior.

#### Victim Services Provides:

- Information regarding the status of offenders in prison with felony convictions
- Registration for victim notification
- Assistance with threats, unwanted calls/correspondence from an offender

#### Victim Services Activities:

- Community education programs
- Coordination with the Board of Parole, Attorney General's Office, and the Tennessee District Attorney General's Office to respond to victims' concerns
- Education to TDOC staff to increase awareness of victims' issues
- Collaboration with other victim advocates

# Suicide Prevention & Awareness Month

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. We use this month to reach out to those affected by suicide, raise awareness, and connect individuals with suicidal ideation to treatment services. Suicidal thoughts, much like mental health conditions, can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, or background. In fact, suicide is often the result of an untreated mental health condition. Suicidal thoughts, although common, should not be considered normal and often indicate more serious issues. Each year, more than 41,000 individuals die by suicide, leaving behind their friends and family members to navigate the tragedy of loss. In many cases, friends and families affected by suicide are left in the dark. Too often the feelings of shame and stigma prevent them from talking openly.

There's no single cause for suicide. Suicide most often occurs when stressors and health issues converge to create an experience of hopelessness and despair. Depression is the most common condition associated with suicide, and it is often undiagnosed or untreated. Conditions like depression, anxiety and substance problems, especially when unaddressed, increase risk for suicide. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), suicide rates have increased by 30% since 1999. Nearly 45,000 lives were lost to suicide alone in 2016. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people.

There may be several warning signs when someone is suicidal such as:

- Threats or comments about killing themselves (suicidal ideation)
- Increased alcohol and drug use
- Aggressive behavior
- Social withdrawal from friends, family and the community
- Dramatic mood swings
- Talking, writing, or thinking about death
- Impulsive or reckless behavior

Understanding the issues concerning suicide and mental health is an important way to take part in suicide prevention, help others in crisis, and change the conversation around suicide. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 150 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The toll-free number is 1-800-273-TALK (8255).



## Victim Impact

Victim Impact classes are taught in our institutions as well as in community supervision offices across the state. The goal of victim impact classes include:

- Teach offenders about short- and long-term trauma of victimization.
- Increase offenders' awareness of the negative impact of their crime on their victims and others.
- Encourage offenders to accept responsibility for their past criminal actions.
- Provide victims and victim service providers with a forum to educate offenders about the consequences of their criminal behaviors, with the hope that it will help prevent future offending.

TDOC uses the Office of Victims of Crime (OVC) Curriculum. It consists of 13 units and it is built around 10 core crime areas, property crime, assault, robbery, hate and bias, gang violence, sexual assault, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, drunk and impaired driving and homicide. In addition, there are two introductory units and a final unit, Making Amends. Offenders are given exercises from the participant workbook for individual reading, response to questions, and note taking.

Facilitators are trained prior to facilitating victim impact classes by the Victim Services Coordinator.



Victim Impact training at RMSI on August 17, 2018 for CMS staff and counselors from SCCF, TCIX, and TTCC. There was a total of 16 staff members trained. #victimimpact #publicsafety



## New Sentence Credit Effective July 1, 2018

Sentence credits can be complex and difficult to explain to crime victims and concerned citizens. Across the department, we receive infinite inquiries regarding sentence credits. Our Sentence Management Division processes all time for TDOC offenders. Tennessee Code Annotated 41-31-236 states that, persons committed to the custody of the department of correction shall be assigned to work, educational and/or vocational training programs, when positions in those programs are available.

Each inmate who exhibits good institutional behavior or who exhibits satisfactory performance within a program may be awarded time credits toward the sentence imposed, varying between one (1) day and sixteen (16) days for each month served, with not more than eight (8) days for each month served for good institutional behavior and not more than eight (8) days for each month served for satisfactory program performance in accordance with the criteria established by the department.

In addition to the time program performance credit awarded, the department shall provide an educational good time credit of sixty (60) days to any qualifying prisoner who successfully receives a graduate equivalency diploma (GED) or a high school diploma, a two-year or four-year college degree, or a two-year or four-year certification in applied sciences, or who receives a vocational education. A qualifying prisoner may receive no more than one (1) education credit of sixty (60) days, regardless of the number of programs completed. **Effective July 1, 2018, offenders can also earn a one time 60 day credit for the completion of an intensive residential substance use disorder treatment therapeutic community program of at least nine (9) months while incarcerated. In total, offenders can earn 120 days of sentence credits if they complete a GED and residential substance use program.**

TDOC Sentence Management certifies eligibility for parole. In addition, they certify release to probation, parole, and expiration of sentence. Sentence Management conducts a thorough review of the credits earned and the judgement orders received from the courts to ensure that sentences are calculated properly.

### Sentence Credit Scenario

Sentence of 10 years at 30%

Offender John Doe is sentenced to 10 years at 30%. This percentage is set by the court and determines the date that an offender is eligible for parole consideration; it is not the date the offender is going to be released. It is also known as the release eligibility date (RED). The parole board determines if offenders can be paroled.

If offender John Doe is not paroled, he is responsible for his 10 year sentence; however, this sentence can be reduced as sentence credits are earned.

Offender Doe's sentence was imposed on 7/1/2016, also known as sentence imposed date (SID). This is the date that the court sentenced offender Doe to 10 years.

He received 30 days of pre-trial jail credit (PTJC). Offender Doe was incarcerated 30 days before 7/1/2016 which results in an sentence effective date (SED) of 6/1/2016. This is the date the 10 years actually starts running.

By statute, offenders that are in pre-trial confinement, for every 30 days, they can receive 8 days of pre-trial behavior credit which reduces their eligibility date and expiration date automatically.

Doe's RED is initially calculated as 6/1/2019 based on 30% of 10 years (3 years) and expiration is initially calculated as 6/1/2026. After applying 8 days of pretrial behavior credit to offender Doe's RED and EXP, RED is now 5/24/19 and expiration is 5/24/2026. This is the calculation when the judgement order is received from the court. However, both the RED of 5/24/2019 and the 5/24/2026 expiration date can be reduced as additional sentence credits are earned as set forth in statute 41-21-236.



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## Victim Offender Dialogue

Victim Offender Dialogue is a program offered by the Victim Services Division. Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD) provides an opportunity for victims of violent crimes to have a structured, safe, one-on-one meeting with their offender. Victims are able to ask important questions that only the offender can answer. The focus is on the deep harms done to the victim, the offender's personal responsibility for those harms, and on ways the offender can help reduce the effects of those harms.

All dialogues are victim initiated; offenders cannot initiate dialogue. Offenders voluntarily agree to participate in the process. Dialogue preparation can take anywhere from several months to years before an actual meeting takes place. The VOD process does not in any way affect the offender's sentence, classification, or release date. Because VOD is not for everyone, each case is thoroughly reviewed by the Victim Services Coordinator who will make the final decision.

Victims/survivors interested in participating in VOD may contact the Victim Services Division.

**VICTIMS FIRST**

Care | Empower | Recover

Tennessee Department of Correction

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