

# The Effective Good Samaritan

## Why Train?

Good Samaritans volunteers bring many “tools” to their work with victims. Some of these—hammers, nails, plywood—will be concrete. Many of the most important tools a volunteer brings, however, will be intangible: compassion, empathy.

As a Good Samaritans volunteer, you have already decided that you want to lend a helping hand to crime victims. Having your heart in the right place is the first step, but any job worth doing requires training.

Extra “people skills” are often required to help crime victims overcome their trauma. A Good Samaritans volunteer must know not only how to repair a broken lock or window but also how to help restore the crime victim’s emotional balance after a crime has destroyed his or her sense of security. The exercises that follow will help you hone your skills for dealing with the challenges faced by victim service advocates in emotionally charged crisis situations.

## Walking in Their Shoes

When we enter a crime victim’s life in a time of crisis, we must remain acutely aware of our own biases and belief systems. Just as the original Good Samaritan served the crime victim without discrimination, we modern-day Good Samaritans volunteers should do likewise. It isn’t always easy to see ourselves as others may see us, however, or to relate to a crime victim who may have belief systems, customs, or lifestyles different from our own.

## Examining Our Own Value Systems

The best way to help all crime victims without judging them is to examine our own value systems—the “lens” through which we look at the world.

Ask yourself—

- What are my values?
- Where do they come from?
  - Family
  - Society
  - Peers
  - Religion
- How do they affect me?
  - My thoughts
  - My behavior

- My feelings
- My perceptions of self and others
- Am I willing to change values that are biased or discriminatory?
- Are they situational?
- Can any person be value free?

Even the most fair-minded person cannot put his or her values aside. With training and practice, however, an effective Good Samaritans volunteer will learn how to treat all crime victims with respect and fairness, regardless of their differences. The following topics provide useful subjects for discussion with volunteers:

### **Awareness of self and personal values**

- Why do I want to do this?
- What is important about doing it? Why is it important to me?
- How well can I avoid judging others?
- How much do I “project” myself into what I see in others?

### **Awareness of others’ cultural differences and experiences**

- How do I feel about people with physical or mental disabilities?
- How do I feel about people of other races or ethnic groups?
- How do I feel about people of religions different from mine?
- How do I feel about people who are not religious at all?
- How do I feel about alcoholics or drug abusers?
- How do I feel about people of the opposite sex?
- How do I feel about people based on their age (both elders and young people)?
- How do I feel about people who have sexual orientations or lifestyles different from mine?

### **Ability to manage my own feelings**

- How do I feel about confusion or ambiguity?
- How do I feel about value conflicts?
- How do I feel about power and gratitude?
- Do I have confidence in myself and a strong sense of self-worth?

### **Ability to serve as a model and as one who influences others**

- How credible am I as a model for others?
- Do I practice what I preach?
- How do I feel about possibly being perceived as an expert?

### **Altruism**

- What are my personal needs related to helping others?

### **Strong sense of ethics**

- Can I handle confidential information?
- Can I let the victim “be in charge” of our victim/service provider relationship?

### **Responsibility**

- Can I admit it to myself when I am not providing effective service?
- Can I learn when and how to refer victims to other agencies or organizations for service?
- How well can I stay within the bounds of an appropriate victim/volunteer relationship?
- Can I avoid becoming overinvolved?
- Can other people count on me? Do I show up when I say I will? Do I keep my word?