

## Victim Offender Dialogue Questions & Answers

### What is a Victim-Offender Dialogue (VOD)?

The Montana Department of Corrections (MDOC) Victim Services assists adult victims who wish to meet face-to-face with the person who committed the criminal offense against them under the guidance of trained facilitators. The dialogue focuses on the harm to the victim and the offender's responsibility. Only a victim can initiate a victim-offender dialogue.

### Why would a victim want to meet with their offender?

Victims often have questions only the person who perpetrated the offense can answer. What happened before and during the crime? Was my loved one in pain? Why did you fire your gun when you knew there were innocent bystanders? What did you do with our property you stole?

Victims may want to talk about how their lives have been affected by the crime and how they feel about what happened.

Victims often want to see for themselves what kind of person the offender has become, and whether he or she is sorry.

Most victims who participate in dialogues find that the dialogue moves them forward in their healing process.

## Accountability Letters Questions & Answers

The Montana Department of Corrections (MDOC) encourages those who have committed a crime to write letters to their victims demonstrating their accountability.

The letters are submitted to MDOC Victim Services and are placed in a locked letter bank. Victim services staff attempt to notify your victim that you have written an accountability letter. Each victim decides whether to receive a letter. Many victims want to see what those who have committed a crime against them have to say.

### How do these letters help victims?

Victims often remain fearful of those that harmed them. They may relive the terror they felt during the crime and the threats of retaliation that are sometimes made at the time of arrest or sentencing.

A sincere letter promising no further harm can lessen a victim's fear. Your victim might like to read, in your own words, how you have changed through programming, treatment and self-reflection.

Reassurances that you intend no further harm can help your victim begin a healing process.

## Victim Impact: Listen & Learn

### Victim Impact Panels Why attend?

#### Montana Department of Corrections

Please speak with your case manager or Probation & Parole Officer for more information.

## Victim Impact Panels: Helping Victims Heal

### Why attend Victim Impact: Listen & Learn (VI)?

People who commit crimes often have remorse for the harm they caused and would like to accept responsibility.

The Montana Department of Corrections (MDOC) offers programming to explain the ripple effect of crime. The program also provides victims of crime a healing opportunity, in a safe venue, to tell their stories and promote healing: Victim Impact Panels.

Individuals who speak on Victim Impact Panels hope that their stories will build understanding of the harm caused by crime and help prevent further crime and new victims.

### What is a Victim Impact Panel?

Victim Impact Panels consist of two to four victims of felony crimes who volunteer to talk with a group of individuals who have committed crimes about how the crime committed against them harmed them, their loved ones and their communities. Each volunteer speaks for a designated amount of time and group participants may then be invited to ask questions.

### Why would a victim want to participate on a VIP?

VIPs provide victims an opportunity to express their feelings about the crimes committed against them. This typically helps victims in the healing process.

Those victims who have participated on VIPs report that they feel empowered by telling their stories to a listening audience. Some appreciate an opportunity to make a difference and are hopeful their story will have an impact and prevent further crime/victims.

### Where do VIPs occur?

VIPs are conducted at community corrections programs, such as prerelease centers, drug and alcohol treatment facilities, and some Montana prisons.

Victim Volunteers do not speak at panels where the person who committed the crime against them is a class participant.

“Best class ever taken.”

Former VI participant

### How would I benefit by attending Victim Impact: Listen & Learn?

Participants are able to identify the personal harm caused to their victims, families, friends and communities.

Some participants view themselves as victims because they were caught. If no one was physically injured during the crime, participants might believe the crime had no victims. Most participants report that the VIP was an important factor in their decisions to take responsibility for their criminal actions, participate in treatment, and change their lives.

In addition, you will be a party in assisting victims in their healing process by providing them a safe space to tell their story.

“I always knew my actions had an impact but I never gave it much thought nor did I realize the magnitude as well as the ripple effect.”

Former VI participant