

# 10 Things Every Victim of a Felony Crime Should Know



- 1. Your offender probably won't go to prison.** Sentencing judges initially send only one in five adult felony offenders to prison. They “commit” most offenders to the Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) for placement. Eighty percent are placed in alternatives such as prerelease centers or drug and alcohol treatment programs in the community.
- 2. A prison sentence does not mean your offender will spend all of the time behind bars.** Montana prison inmates are eligible for parole after serving one fourth of the sentence unless the judge restricts parole eligibility. Most offenders sentenced to 20 years in prison are eligible for parole in five years. Your offender will not be paroled automatically at the first hearing, but he or she may be allowed to transfer to a prerelease center in the community.
- 3. To receive information about the offender's whereabouts, you must register to be notified.** DOC wants to inform you about your offender's custody status and location, but we don't know who and where you are unless you tell us. If you are the direct victim of a felony crime, the parent or guardian of a victim under age 18, or a family member of a homicide victim, we urge you to register with VINE (Victim Information & Notification Everyday).
- 4. A district court sentence can be reduced.** Offenders have the right to petition the Montana Sentence Review Commission to determine if their original sentence was fair. Changes to the district court sentence are rare, but can affect parole eligibility and prison release dates  
  
Offenders also may appeal their convictions to the Montana Supreme Court. Sometimes offenders are released from prison while the court decides the case. Tell your county attorney (prosecutor) that you want to know about appeals or changes to the original sentence. You have the right to this information, but you must provide the county attorney your current address and phone number.
- 5. Offenders usually get more than one “second chance.”** Offenders who violate the conditions of supervision are usually placed in sanction and treatment programs. Prison is the last resort, used for violent or sexual offenders who continue to pose a safety risk to the public.
- 6. Offenders can change. The person who committed a crime against you might complete treatment and become an accountable and productive citizen.** Offenders under DOC supervision participate in court-ordered programming to address issues related to anger, drug or alcohol dependency, and criminal thinking. Sex offenders must complete additional specialized treatment.
- 7. Healing from the trauma of crime is a personal journey that takes time.** Well-meaning friends and family might tell you to move on, forgive and forget, or get over it. Crime victims never forget what happened to them although most establish a new “normal” in their own time. Forgiveness is a deeply personal matter. Trust your own feelings. Seek support through counseling and from victim advocates in your community. Ask about DOC programs designed to help victims heal. For more information, please visit [cor.mt.gov/Victims](http://cor.mt.gov/Victims).
- 8. Many offenders eventually return to the area where the crime occurred, even if their victims still live there.** Often the offender's hometown is also the victim's hometown and the location of the crime. If you have safety concerns, ask your county attorney or victim advocate about an order of protection (sometimes called a restraining order). You can find help at the Montana Department of Justice website: [dojmt.gov/victim-services/resource-library/about-orders-of-protection/](http://dojmt.gov/victim-services/resource-library/about-orders-of-protection/).

9. **Public and victim safety is the DOC's number one priority.** Offenders supervised by the DOC are evaluated for their risk to commit more crimes. They are not placed back in the community before their entire sentence is served if they pose a known safety risk. If you fear for your safety, call local law enforcement to discuss your concerns.
10. **Requesting to meet face-to-face with your offender might be the best gift you can give yourself.** Most victims have questions about the crime that only the offender can answer. Meeting with an offender is never easy, but victims tell us the process helps them begin to heal. Victim-offender dialogue is voluntary for all parties and occurs only after intensive preparation with a trained facilitator. See the information below.

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## Additional Opportunities

### Victim-Offender Dialogue (VOD)

As a victim of a felony crime, you may wish to meet with your offender to ask questions about the crime and describe the impacts. If you are interested in this opportunity, please visit [cor.mt.gov/Victims](http://cor.mt.gov/Victims) to learn more about whether a VOD might be right for you. Offenders participate voluntarily.

### Offender Accountability Letters

Offenders who have sincere remorse for the harm they caused their victims sometimes submit accountability letters to the DOC's Accountability Letter Bank. Victim Services will notify you if your offender submits a letter, and you decide whether you want to receive it. While under DOC supervision, offenders are not allowed to send letters directly to their victims.

## Where is my offender?

The Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) closely monitors the location and custody status of offenders under its supervision. Register for our free, confidential, automated VINE (Victim Information & Notification Everyday) service to track your offender's whereabouts.

To register, call VINE at (800) 456-3076 and follow the instructions, or register online at [vinelink.com](http://vinelink.com).



You may also download a free mobile app for your smart phone at [itunes.apple.com/us/app/vinemobile/id625472495?mt=8](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/vinemobile/id625472495?mt=8) or [play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.appriss.vinemobile](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.appriss.vinemobile).

More than 80 percent of all adult offenders supervised by DOC are in the community rather than prison. Alternatives include probation, parole, drug treatment programs and prerelease centers.

*This project was supported by Grant No. 18-V01-92737 awarded by the Montana Board of Crime Control (MBCC) through the Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of policies of the US Department of Justice.*

## Victim Services Program

Victim Services Helpline: (406) 444-0447 | Toll Free: (888) 223-6332

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