Victim Offender Dialogue

Helping Victims Heal

What is a Victim-Offender Dialogue (VOD)?

The Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) assists adult victims who wish to meet face-to-face with their offenders 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 the offender?

Victims often have questions only the offender 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 tell the offender 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 with their offenders find that the process moves them forward in their healing journeys.

Why would an offender agree to participate in a dialogue?

Many offenders are sincerely remorseful for their crimes and want an opportunity to apologize to their victims.

Answering the victim's questions and providing information about the crime is one way offenders can demonstrate personal accountability and attempt to make amends.

Who can participate in a victim-offender dialogue?

Victims of adult felony offenders under DOC supervision may request to participate in a dialogue by calling or emailing DOC Victim Services. A victim can also ask a family member, counselor, victim advocate or other trusted person to make the initial phone call.

Offenders are not allowed to initiate a victim-offender dialogue. An offender may decline the request to participate, but most accept. Offenders receive no tangible benefits, such as early parole consideration, for participating.

How does a victim-offender dialogue work?

Once a victim requests a victim-offender dialogue and the offender agrees, preparation begins. The victim services bureau chief consults with the offender's case manager and treatment staff to determine if a dialogue is appropriate and unlikely to cause the victim more harm.

Next, one or two volunteer facilitators meet several times separately with the victim and offender. Preparation takes months because facilitators sometimes travel long distances to meet with the parties.

How do I know if a victim-offender dialogue is right for me?

The victim services bureau chief and facilitators can help to answer this question. DOC usually does not allow dialogues in domestic violence or stalking cases due to the additional risk and possible trauma it poses to the victim.

Parents or legal guardians may participate in a victim-offender dialogue on behalf of child victims.

The victim services bureau chief may decide that a dialogue is not appropriate due to risk of physical or emotional harm to anyone involved.

Where does a victim-offender dialogue take place?

If the offender is in prison or a locked community treatment program, the dialogue must occur there.

If the offender is on probation or parole, the victim-offender dialogue might take place at a probation and parole office.

What if I change my mind?

Any of the parties may decide at any time to discontinue the victim-offender dialogue process.

Offenders rarely discontinue the process once they have agreed to participate. Victims sometimes process their feelings during the preparation phase and discover that they do not need to go forward with the dialogue.

To discuss a victim-offender dialogue, please contact:

Montana Department of Corrections Victim Services
Email: CORVictimLiaison@mt.gov
For more information please visit cor.mt.gov/Victims.

Another program available to victims:

Offender Accountability Letter Program

Offenders who have sincere remorse for the harm they caused their victims sometimes submit accountability letters to the Montana Department of Corrections Accountability Letter Bank.

If DOC Victim Services has your current contact information, you will be notified if your offender submits a letter. You decide whether to receive the correspondence. 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.

You may also download a free mobile app for your smart phone at itunes.apple.com/us/app/vinemobile/id625472495?mt=8 or 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.

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