



## What is the Witness Assistance Service (WAS)?

There has been growing recognition by all agencies in the criminal justice system of the rights and needs of victims of crime.

The Witness Assistance Service (WAS) is an established and essential part of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) and works closely with other organisations to assist victims and witnesses involved in the prosecution of criminal offences conducted by the ODPP.

The Service is staffed by social workers, psychologists and counsellors based in our Head Office and at our regional offices. The Service assists victims and witnesses of crimes prosecuted by the ODPP.

WAS was permanently established in 1995 and has developed a range of services to meet the broader needs of victims and witnesses of crime. These include the provision of information about the criminal justice process, victim's rights, crisis counselling, assessment and referral to other agencies, the preparation of witnesses including children for testifying in court, arranging support and debriefing for victims who testify in court and assisting victims and witnesses to liaise with prosecution lawyers.

The WAS recognise that victims have not only been traumatised by crimes committed against them, but also sometimes by the prolonged nature of criminal proceedings. Reliving these events in court can also be a stressful experience, provision of support, preparation and information can alleviate the stressful impact. The aim of the Service is to reduce trauma to the crime victims.

## Getting in touch

### Witness Assistance Service

The Witness Assistance Service can be contacted via the details below:

 **Sydney** (02) 9285 8606  
**Toll Free** 1800 814 534

 **TTY** (02) 9285 8646  
**Telephone Interpreter Service** 13 14 50

 [odpp.nsw.gov.au](http://odpp.nsw.gov.au)

Please call about similar services in other States and Territories.

## Other Useful Contacts

### Homicide Victims

#### Support Group

(02) 8833 8400

1800 191 777 (toll free 24hrs)

### Victims Services

[lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs](http://lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs)

### Victims Access Line (24hrs)

(02) 8688 5511

1800 633 063 (toll free)

### Corrective Services

#### Victims Register

(02) 8346 1374

### Visit NSW Health Sexual

#### Assault Services for your

#### nearest Sexual Assault

#### Counselling Service

[health.nsw.gov.au/kidsfamilies/protection/Pages/health-sas-services.aspx](http://health.nsw.gov.au/kidsfamilies/protection/Pages/health-sas-services.aspx)



## What we do

### ***Source of information***

WAS Officers are available to respond to inquiries from victims/witnesses about the progress of a case. They may liaise with the lawyer handling the case to ensure the relevant information is made available. They can facilitate meetings and conferences with lawyers when necessary. They can provide witnesses and victims with information about relevant community support services. They can advise victims of their rights. They can provide information and advice about Victim Impact Statements.

### ***Counselling and referral***

Victims of crime may benefit greatly from involvement with counsellors and support groups. Our staff are trained counsellors and we offer support throughout the court process. For ongoing counselling and therapy, we are able to make referrals to the various organisations and professionals set up for such purposes.

### ***Court preparation and support***

Lawyers in the ODPP seek to ensure that witnesses of crime are adequately prepared for the experience of testifying in court. WAS provides such preparation directly where necessary or will refer to a Sexual Assault Service or other service where such assistance is available.

Court preparation is essential where children are involved and in many other circumstances. It is important that witnesses and victims understand their role in the court and the legal process. Such knowledge and preparation helps reduce the stress associated with testifying.

Victims of crime are invited to meet with the lawyer handling the case or the WAS Officer prior to the hearing to discuss any issues of concern and to receive updated information about the progress of the case.

WAS Officers will provide or arrange for a support person to be present at court with the victim/witness where necessary.

### ***The emotional impact of crime***

Many victims and their families are emotionally affected by the crime. Although everyone reacts differently, victims report some common side effects:

- Increased concern for personal safety
- Trouble concentrating
- Trouble sleeping
- Depression/moodiness
- Going over in your mind again and again the events of the crime and thinking about what might have gone differently
- Difficulties from financial loss

All of these behaviours are normal and may decrease with time. Contact with support services and counsellors may help in overcoming some of these behaviours.

In the District Court and Supreme Court, in cases involving actual or threatened violence, if the defendant either pleads guilty or is found guilty, a victim has the right before sentencing, to submit a "victim impact statement". This details the personal harm suffered by the victim as a direct result of the offence - or in the case of a family victim, the impact of the death of the primary victim on the members of their immediate family.