

VOD Alternatives

When Face-to-Face Dialogue Isn't Possible

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This workshop sponsored by the US DOJ Office for Victims of Crime (OVC)

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Objectives

- ▶ Reasons face-to-face VOD may not be an option for some victims of crime.
- ▶ VOD alternatives
 - ▶ “Shuttle Dialogue”
 - ▶ When offenders refuse to meet
 - ▶ When the victim/survivor wants communication, but no meeting
- ▶ Collaborating between states
 - ▶ Use of technology
 - ▶ Program options for survivors from another state



Sometimes, you don't know what you prefer until someone shows you your options.

Discuss: reasons for alternatives to VOD

Review: Common reasons

How did we do?

- ▶ Victim/Survivor does not want to see the offender, but wants to communicate.
- ▶ Offender refuses to meet.
- ▶ Offender is not appropriate.
- ▶ Victim/Survivor prefers to start VOD process with letter writing first - test the waters.
- ▶ Practical obstacles: distance or physical challenges
- ▶ Facility/institution obstacles: long-term shut down, offender placement in DD long-term

Case Example: Jenna*

“Shuttle Dialogue”

- ▶ 1994 - Jenna is kidnapped and sexually assaulted by David*
- ▶ 2009 - 15 years later, Jenna requests assistance - has questions, but does not want to meet in person
- ▶ David answers first set of questions
- ▶ 2010 - Jenna requests VOD
- ▶ David refuses - willing to answer more questions
- ▶ 2011 - Jenna has more questions - asks if David will meet again
- ▶ David refuses - answers more questions

*Fictitious names

Things to consider with “Shuttle” Dialogue

- ▶ Time frame - may not be just one meeting with each party.
- ▶ Establishing positive relationship with offender - critical for honest and open responses.
- ▶ Precise note-taking.
- ▶ Audio and/or Video recording?
- ▶ Travel - need trained staff at institution? Or, volunteers?
- ▶ Coordination with your institutions.

Case Example: Debbie* and Allie*

Offender Refusal

- ▶ 1996 - Matthew murders Debbie's ex-husband and Allie's father, Paul.
- ▶ 2012 - Debbie requests VOD - Allie requests answers to list of questions.
- ▶ Matthew refuses.
- ▶ Debbie and Allie given the option of writing a letter.
- ▶ Letter presented to Matthew in prison.
- ▶ Matthew's only response, "I don't care."
- ▶ Follow-up meeting with Debbie and Allie.

*Fictitious names

What to consider when offender refuses VOD

- ▶ How to approach offender?
 - ▶ Set meeting without explanation of purpose?
 - ▶ Fully inform offender prior to meeting?
- ▶ Still voluntary for offender to listen to letter. Prepare offender to hear difficult message.
- ▶ Voluntary for offender to respond.

Suggested guidelines

- ▶ Read letter with little inflection or emotion; be prepared to process afterwards.
- ▶ Be clear about what is confidential, and what will be shared with the victim.
- ▶ Taking precise notes - review with offender.
- ▶ Requires preparation of victim and offender similar to actual VOD:
 - ▶ Expectations
 - ▶ Confidentiality
 - ▶ Benefits/Risks

Case Example: Sherry*

Victim requests presentation of Letter
No interest in VOD

- ▶ 2009 - Sherry's daughter, Tia* murdered by estranged husband Robby*
- ▶ 2012 - Robby sentenced to 3 Life terms for kidnapping, sexual assault and murder
- ▶ 2016 - Sherry calls the DOC's Victim & RJ Programs Office
- ▶ Preparation/Intake meeting
- ▶ Discussion of options
- ▶ Sherry writes letter - decides against VOD face-to-face
- ▶ Letter presented to Robby in prison
- ▶ Feedback provided to Sherry

*Fictitious Name

Additional considerations

- ▶ Offender requests continued communication.
- ▶ Victim/survivor requests continued communication - options?
- ▶ Check status of No Contact Orders
 - ▶ Can request modification
 - ▶ Have information prepared to share with Court about program
- ▶ Institution or Department policies
- ▶ Confidentiality
- ▶ Other thoughts?

Review:

Common Situations for VOD Alternatives

- ▶ Victim request for communication - does not want VOD
- ▶ Offender refusal
- ▶ Victim inability to travel
- ▶ Out of state
- ▶ Institution will not allow
- ▶ Other safety concerns

Justifications for offering facilitated alternatives

- ▶ Victim-Centered - meet the needs of victims in the way they request or prefer.
- ▶ “Shuttle” Dialogue and letter writing may be safer for victim.
- ▶ Importance of processing questions/letter with offender to achieve better outcomes for victim/survivors.
- ▶ Other thoughts?

How to inform victims of alternatives

Consider the importance or emphasis you give to alternative forms of facilitated communication with the following:

- ▶ Website
- ▶ Brochures
- ▶ Presentations

Iowa Example: Victim Offender Intervention Services (VOIS)

BROCHURE:

Often, survivors of crime are left with unanswered questions, or want to communicate with the offender in their case, but are not sure how to do so. VOIS provides opportunities for victims to communicate with an offender either directly or indirectly through a safe process. These services involve careful planning and preparation, and are facilitated by a trained professional.

VOIS OPTIONS

- Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD): preparing for and eventually meeting with an offender in person with a trained facilitator.
- “Shuttle Dialogue”: communication through a facilitator that does not involve an “in person” meeting with an offender.
- Letter writing: overseen by our office. Letters can be sent to our office or via email.

Questions/Concerns

Open Discussion

Please talk - or we can watch this 1.50 minute video instead depicting reciprocal communication

