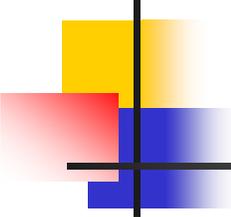


# Communicating With Victims

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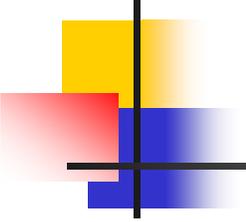
PRESENTED BY:  
ANNE SEYMOUR  
NATIONAL CRIME VICTIM ADVOCATE



# Learning Objectives

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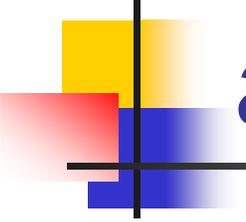
- Describe three words in the “language of trauma and victimization” that may be hurtful to victims.
- Identify three reasons why good communication skills can enhance victim interviews.
- Describe good things to say to victims, and bad things to avoid saying to victims, that can make a difference in their overall treatment and willingness to access services.



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“Victims remember  
TWO things: those  
who *help*, and those  
who *hurt*.”

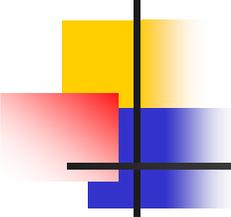
-- Cheryl Ward Kaiser



# Individual Responses to Crime and Victimization

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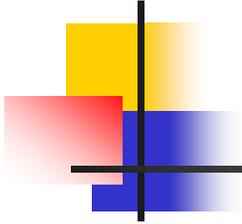
- Often at the hands of family members, friends, faith community members, and even helping professionals:
  - “It’s time to get on with your life.”
  - “When is she ever going to ‘get over it,’ ‘get a grip,’ or ‘get back to normal.’”
- Support and guidance must be provided to victims’/survivors’ support networks



# The Words We Use.....

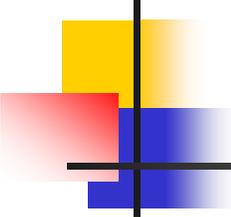
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- Often imply judgments or expectations of victims and survivors
- The language of trauma and victimization has *different connotations* for *different people*
- When they cannot achieve what the words imply, they may feel “worthless,” “damaged,” and “like a freak.”



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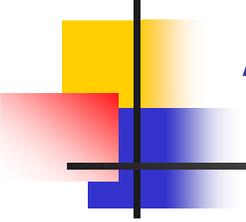
What are some  
**WORDS**  
that victims might find  
hurtful or offensive?



# The Language of Victimization

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- “Stages of grief”
- Closure
- Healing
- Forgiveness

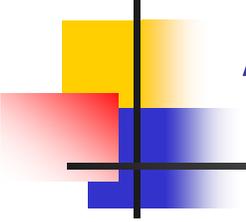


## “Stages” of Grief

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“The language of healing and closure revealed a need to systematize and regulate mourning, particularly after mass violent death. In the days following the bombing, the Daily Oklahoman showered readers with the ‘stages of grief,’ telling them to look for signs of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ behavior.”

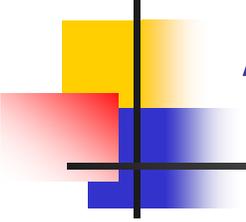
- *Marsha Kight*



## “Stages” of Grief

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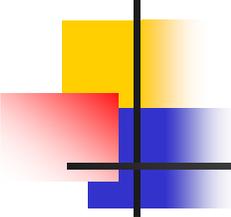
- Based on a linear model, which reconstruction of one’s life following trauma is *NOT*
- Put unrealistic time limits on people
- May have serious implications for issues such as return to work
- “If you are not over it, you are not grieving intensely; you are ill.” (*Kight*)



## “Stages” of Grief” (cont.)

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- Fail to recognize:
  - “Trauma triggers”
  - The need for possible “refresher counseling” at any time in a survivor’s life
  - Individuals’ coping strategies
  - The impact of justice proceedings

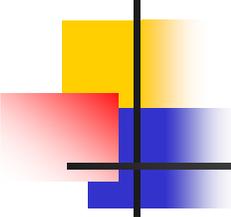


# Closure

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“You close on a house; you don’t close on your son’s life.”

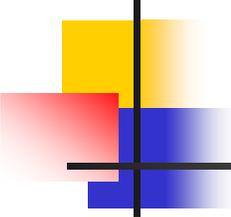
*- Mother of a man killed in the bombing of the Murrah Building*



# Closure

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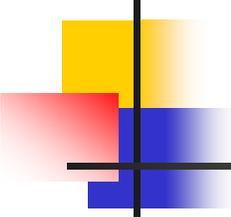
- A word that is bandied about after both individual and mass victimizations
- Refers realistically to what?"
  - **The *end* of trauma?**
  - **No more suffering?**
- "Closure" implies a finality that, for many victims, is just *not* possible – victimization can produce life-altering changes.



# Healing

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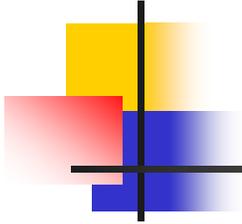
- Is a highly personal word that, for some victims, is also highly charged
- Often included in victimization literature and trauma responses
- When a victim doesn't feel "healed," he or she often feels like a failure
  - The "expectation" of healing contributes to this



# Forgiveness

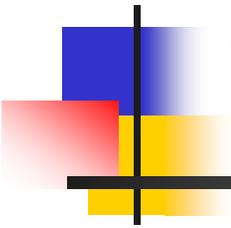
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- Steeped in longstanding religious and spiritual traditions
  - Traditions which may not match those of the victim/survivor
- Fails to address the concept of “earned redemption”
- Forgiveness should never be *expected* nor *encouraged*.
- It is a highly personal concept.



“Kind words can be short  
and easy to speak, but  
their echoes are  
truly endless.”

- Mother Theresa



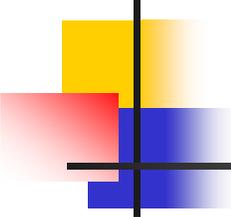
# Communicating with Victims

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“Listen to my Story”

FREE DVD

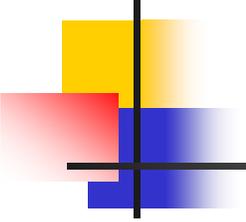
([www.ovc.gov](http://www.ovc.gov))



# Establishing Goals of Communications With Victims

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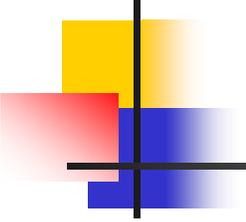
- Identify victims' needs.
- Explaining justice processes and their role.
- Implement the rights of victims
- Protect the safety of victims
- Provide information requested.
- Obtain information needed.
- Sensitivity to special needs or concerns.



# Effect of Victim Reactions on Communications

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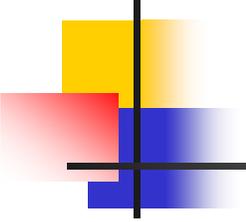
- Difficult interviews with victims:
  - Victims who are angry, confused or highly traumatized.
- Limited information:
  - Cannot always answer victims' important questions.
- Stressful to the helping professional:
  - Vicarious trauma.



# You Can Discourage Communication by:

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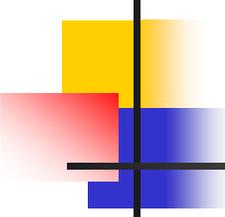
- Talking too much
- Talking too little
- Using jargon
- Lack of attention to affect of the victim
- Behaving in a defensive or judgmental manner
- Speaking in an aggressive manner



# You Can Encourage Communication By:

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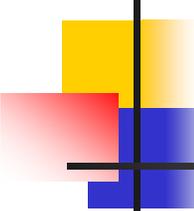
- Body language
- Explaining the process/reason for your communications to the victim
- Setting guidelines for the interview
- Sensitivity to cultural issues
- Sensitivity to victims with special needs or concerns.
- Addressing confidentiality.



# Some **Do's** of Communicating with Victims

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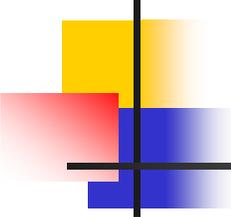
- **Attempt foremost to communicate trust, support & confidence.**
- **Calm & comfort victims. Ask “How are you doing?”**
- **Allow victims time to tell what happened & describe how they are feeling in their own words.**
- **Give victims back the control the offender took away by letting them decide when & where to talk.**



# Some **Do's** of Communicating with Victims

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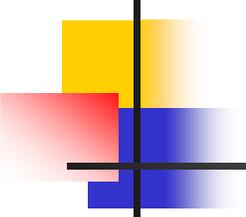
- Reassure them that their feelings are quite normal & natural, even though they may seem unusual at the moment.
- Let the victim know that any feelings of anger, distress, frustration, fear, etc. are ***not*** uncommon & are perfectly justifiable.
- Be willing to ***listen*** to the victim share his/her experience if he/she wants to talk about the crime and its effects, and ***validate*** that experience with empathy & support.



# Some **Do's** of Communicating with Victims

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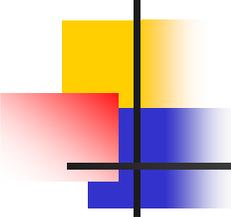
- **Be encouraging, but not unrealistic.**
- **Be alert for opportunities to stress the victim's qualities & strengths (without being patronizing).**
- **Accept the fact that you may never know whether a victim follows through with your recommendations.**



# Some **Do's** of Communicating with Victims

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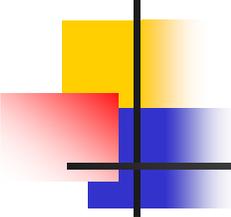
- **Have an information & referral system—with names, addresses, telephone numbers, e-mails, & websites/pages—to be able to provide appropriate referrals.**
- **Offer to make referral calls/contacts for further information & victim support (to ensure that a connection is actually made for the victim).**
- **Ask for assistance from a supervisor if a call appears to be too difficult to handle yourself.**



# Some **Do's** of Communicating with Victims

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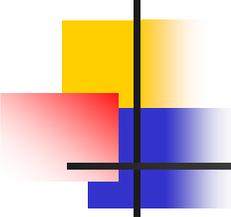
- **Recognize that mistakes will be made, & that increased communication skills come with learning from your mistakes.**
- **Understand that many victims will have extreme difficulty reconstructing their lives after a violent crime, and that some may *never* recover from the tragedy.**



# Some Don'ts of Communicating with Victims

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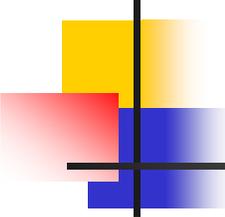
- **Be judgmental or blame the victim for the crime that was committed against him/her.**
- **“Second guess” how the victim reacted to the crime, either at the time it was occurring or in the aftermath of a violent act.**
- **Avoid the victim, or avoid listening about his/her reaction to the crime. Listening about & validating those experiences & emotions are critical to a victim’s reconstruction after a crime.**



# Some Don'ts of Communicating with Victims

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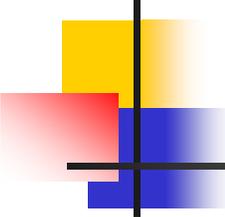
- Try to frame the victim's experience to any possibly similar experiences, even your own. It is *essential* to individualize each victim, each crime & each victim's reaction to that crime.
- Be "over-helpful" by making decisions & choices for victims. Since no victim *chooses* to be victimized or has control over a violent act committed against him/her, the ability for victims to *regain control* over their lives & *make decisions* affecting their lives, becomes vital.



# Some **Don'ts** of Communicating with Victims

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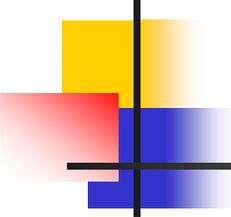
- **Be discouraged if you feel a call or contact has been unsuccessful. You are not expected to “solve” most problems with a single contact.**
- **Be afraid of silence. Use it constructively. Don't talk more than the victim caller.**
- **Become flustered by the victim's anxiety or urgency. One of the most important things is that you must remain calm, even in a crisis. Remember too that your anxiety can easily be transmitted over the telephone.**



# Some Don'ts of Communicating with Victims

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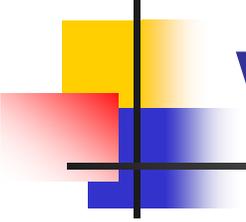
- **“Take sides” with a victim who has had difficult experiences with the justice system or agencies. Work to solve problems & assure the victim that you will do your best to address their identified needs. Avoid “trash talk” about allied professionals at all costs!**
- **Become defensive or arrogant, or get into an argument with a victim.**



# Some Don'ts of Communicating with Victims

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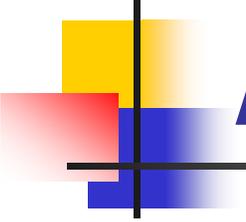
- **Expect to be a psychotherapist, nor to know all the “right” answers. Your job is to listen and assist the victim— to the degree possible—in handling his or her immediate issues.**



# *Good and Bad Things to Say to Victims*

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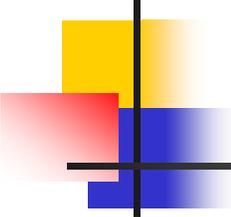
*Please see participant handout.*



# Be Aware of How Trauma Affects Victims'.....

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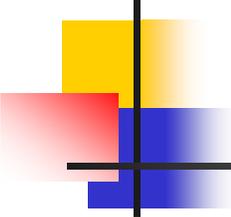
- Capacity to engage with you
- Ability to concentrate
- Avoidance behaviors
- Emotions such as anger.....



# Effective Listening

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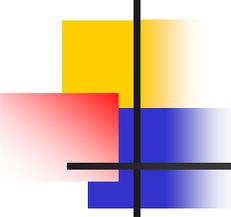
- No matter how effective your questions are, if you aren't listening, you won't get the information.
- Listening is a mental process.
- There is a difference between **hearing** and **listening**.



# Active Listening Techniques

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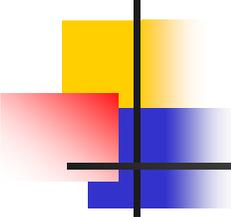
- **Selective Listening**
  - **Focusing on the words that reveal the victim's needs & problems.**
  - **Goes beyond the spoken word and "hears" the underlying motivation.**
  - **Give victim your complete attention.**
    - **Don't take other calls.**
    - **Don't do peripheral work.**
    - **Don't be distracted by activity around you.**



# Active Listening Techniques

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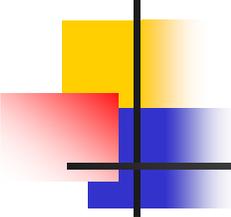
- **Responsive/Reactive Listening**
  - ***Verbal feedback.*** Demonstrates to victim that you're paying attention. Merely saying "I see" or "Uh-huh" as the victim talks can build rapport, demonstrate your interest, & encourage victim to keep on.
  - ***Take notes.*** Demonstrates your professionalism and concern, as well as preserves essential information.



# Active Listening Techniques

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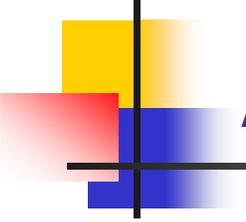
- **Responsive/Reactive Listening (cont.)**
  - ***Verify thoughts & feelings.*** “Put yourself in the victim’s shoes.” Summarize aloud what the victim has said to you. Demonstrate you’re trying to understand what the victim is feeling.
  - ***Confirm what you hear.*** Paraphrase back to the victim, in your own words, your understanding of his/her position. Avoids misunderstanding down the line.



# Active Listening Techniques

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- **Responsive/Reactive Listening (cont.)**
  - ***Transition.*** Before deciding on a course of action, confirm the victim's statements and go on to build a relationship.
    - "Has anyone given you written info about your rights as a victim and available services?"
    - "Do you have receipts for any of your possessions that were stolen?"

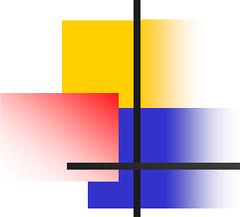


# The Dynamics of Diversity

## *People Vary in the Ways They:*

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- Think.
- Learn.
- Process information.
- Respond to authority.
- Show respect.
- Reach agreements.

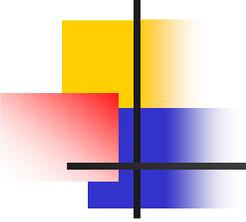


# Basic Cultural Considerations

## Include:

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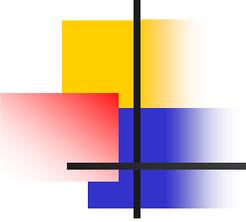
- Gender
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Race
- Sexual orientation
- Educational background
- Religion
- Physical/mental ability
- Military/veteran status
- Lifestyle
- Immigrant status
- Language facility



## Tips for Culturally Competent Services *(National Multicultural Institute)*

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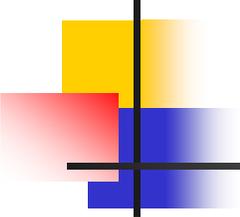
- Listen patiently and show interest and empathy.
- Be aware of confidentiality.
- Validate the victim's explanation of the crime and its repercussions.
- Be flexible and develop action plans to fit the victim's cultural framework.
- Reassure the victim that you will do your best to help him/her.



## Tips for Effective Communications *(National Multicultural Institute)*

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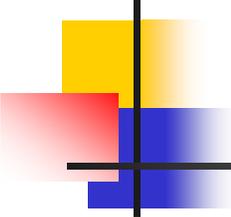
- Awareness and sensitivity to:
  - Non-verbal cues.
  - Body language.
  - Gender roles.
  - Face-saving needs.
- Ask for clarification and check for understanding.
- Keep it simple and jargon-free.



## Tips for Effective Communications/2 *(National Multicultural Institute)*

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- Recognize your own communication style and acknowledge when it may clash with the victim's.
- Know and manage your hot-buttons.

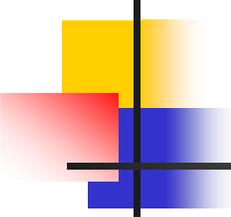


# Time Limits:

## Start at the Beginning.....

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- “It’ll help both of us if we can identify and focus on your major needs/concerns.”
- “Thanks for calling. Let’s see if we can identify ways I can assist you.”
- “I’d like to help you, or figure out who is the best person to help you.”

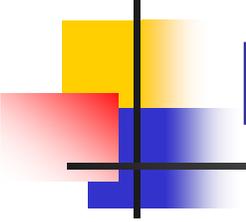


# Time Limits:

## Start at the Beginning.....

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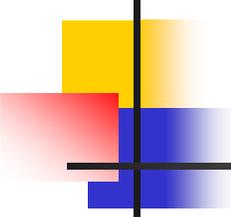
- “I only have # minutes. I wish I had more time, but let’s see what we can do to meet your needs in this timeframe.”
- “I am not a counselor, but can offer you referrals if you need more help.”
- “My job is to \_\_\_\_\_. It sounds like you need to talk to someone with the experience to help you. Can I offer you’re a referral?”



# Time Limits: Ending A Conversation

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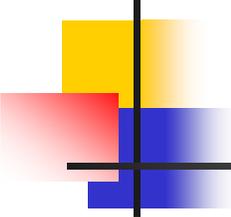
- Search for a “break” in the victim’s conversation with you.
- Express appreciation for their call:
  - “I’m glad you called....”
  - “The information you’ve given me is helpful.”
  - “Thanks for taking time to share your concerns/issues....”



# Time Limits: Ending A Conversation

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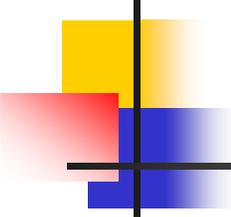
- “As I said earlier, I wish I had more time to speak with you. Since I don’t, is there any final information I should have about.....?”
- Offer “action steps” that you and/or the victim should take.
- If possible, provide a time line for the action steps.
- Thank the victim for calling.



# Dealing With Angry Victims

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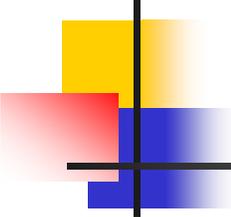
- Remember how *victim trauma* affects victim reactions and interactions!
- Focus not just on *that* the victim is angry, but on *what may be causing the anger*.
- Try not to take it personally – it isn't!



# Dealing With Angry Victims

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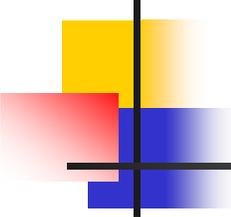
- Validate the victim's anger:
  - "I can tell by your voice that you're pretty upset."
  - "Let's see if we can *identify* and *address* the issues/concerns that are making you upset."
- If you feel you are being verbally abused, seek help from a supervisor.



# ONE FINAL THOUGHT.....

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You may be the *first* person  
the victim has spoken to, or  
you may be *the most*  
*important person* the victim  
needs to talk to!



# Monday Mentoring Missives

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**TO JOIN ANNE'S FREE WEEKLY LISTSERV:**

Send a BLANK email to:

[MondayMissives-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:MondayMissives-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)