



VCART Training – General Victims Crisis Assistance and Response Team

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Knowing your WHY

MICHAEL 

What is VCART

- A team within the Victims Services Team at Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS)
- A team made up of 3 staff members and a diverse group of about 150 volunteers
- A resource that localities can request for assisting victims of crime when overwhelmed by an incident



Relevant Virginia Law

§ 44-146.18 § 23.1-804
§ 44-146.19 §22.1-279.8
§ 32.1-
111.3



Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund (VVF) shall be contacted immediately to deploy assistance in the event of an emergency as defined in the emergency response plan when there are victims as defined in §19.2-11.01.

Victims defined in §19.2-11.01 include “a person who has suffered physical, psychological, or economic harm as a direct result of the commission of a felony or of assault and battery...”

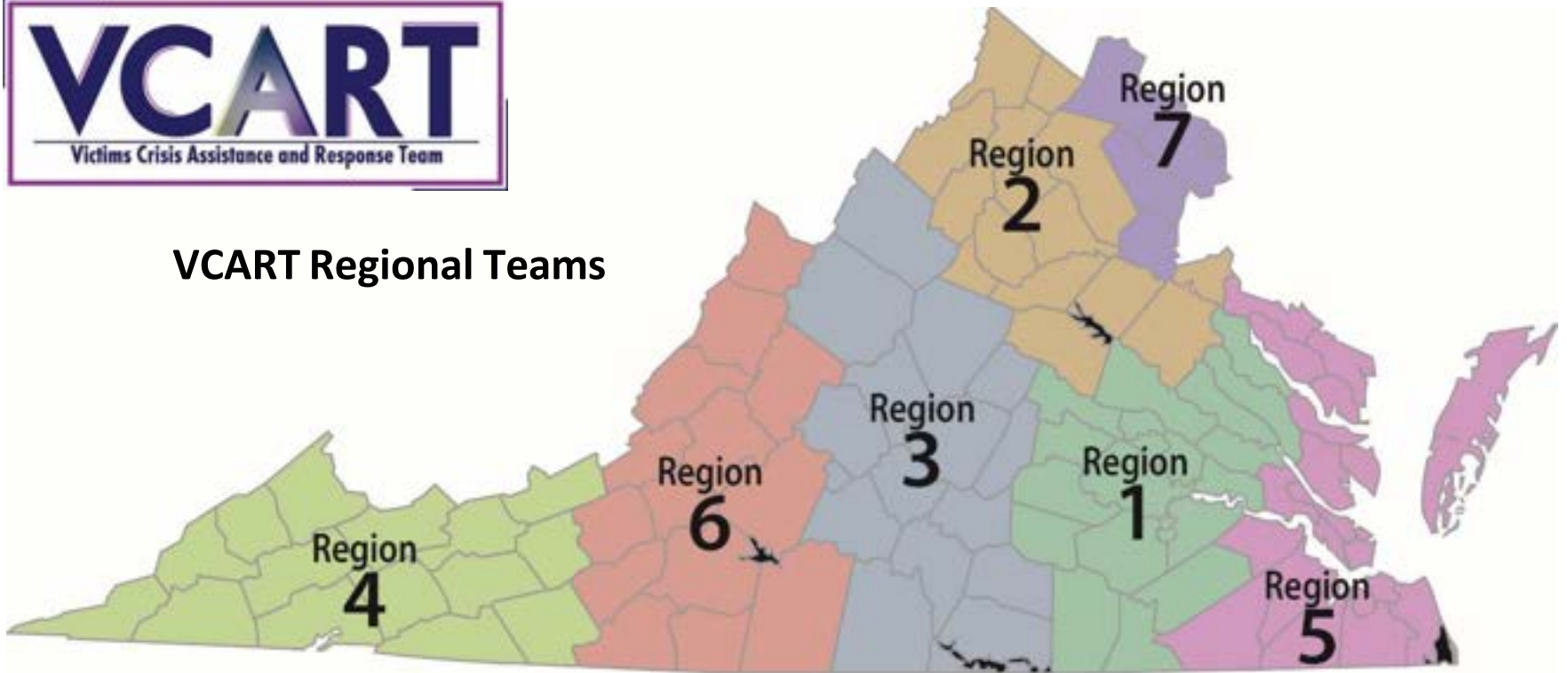
VCART & Emergency Management



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VCART Regional Teams



Note: Map modeled from the service areas of VDEM Regional Field Offices

What does VCART do?

Coordinates and deploys the State Victims Crisis Assistance and Response Team to assist localities after mass casualty criminal incidents

Provides training and technical assistance on providing victim-centered services to victims after a mass casualty event to localities and organizations

Conducts crisis response team training and maintains database of credentialed responders

Can assist localities with creation of Emergency Plans

Types of VCART Deployments

“Statutory” deployment

Agency/locality contacts DCJS/VVF as a part of their emergency response plan after an incident. DCJS/VVF assist in coordinating victim response.

Requested deployment

Agency/locality familiar with the services of the VCART contact DCJS/VVF and request team

National team deployment

NOVA may request staffing for incidents out-of-state requiring large-scale response or subject matter expertise. They may request specific team members or put out a call for volunteers.

After any criminal event that overwhelms local resources

- Incident can be on a large or small scale

After any incident that may have direct effect on your office

- We never want traumatized people helping other traumatized people

When your local emergency plan is activated

When there are large numbers of people within the community that have been effected

When
Should
VCART be
Contacted?

How is VCART Activated?

- ❖ A request is made by a community or organizational leader with decision making authority by contacting DCJS
- ❖ The request will be given to the VCART staff; after assessing the needs of the locality VCART will coordinate and activate a response team.
- ❖ The request may be for a one time only service or ongoing sporadic efforts based on the needs of the locality





How Prepared Are You?

- Do you know / are you familiar with local Victim Witness?
- Do you have designated staff in the event of an emergency that people can report to?
- Has your staff been trained?
 - Active shooter
 - Active event
 - Other forms of emergencies

VCART Resources and Services

Assistance with emergency plans

Coordination of victim advocate response- meeting victim and witness needs

Provide group and/or individual crisis intervention services (GCI's are typically a few weeks after the incident)

Assist at the Family Assistance Center

DCJS Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services

Assist local law enforcement with providing death notifications, returning personal property, or companionship families

Ensure victims understand the services and resources that they are eligible for at the FAC

VCART Resources and Services

Assist with after-action reports and lessons learned

Provide training on victim-centered responses and best practices

Work with schools to ensure policies and procedures are victim-centered

Request federal funding through the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), if applicable

DCJS Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services

Work with federal consultants (OVC) to assess community and victim needs

Anniversary/Memorial planning
Other victim-centered services requested by the locality

Supporting victims by explaining the criminal justice process

What is a Group Crisis Intervention(GCI)?

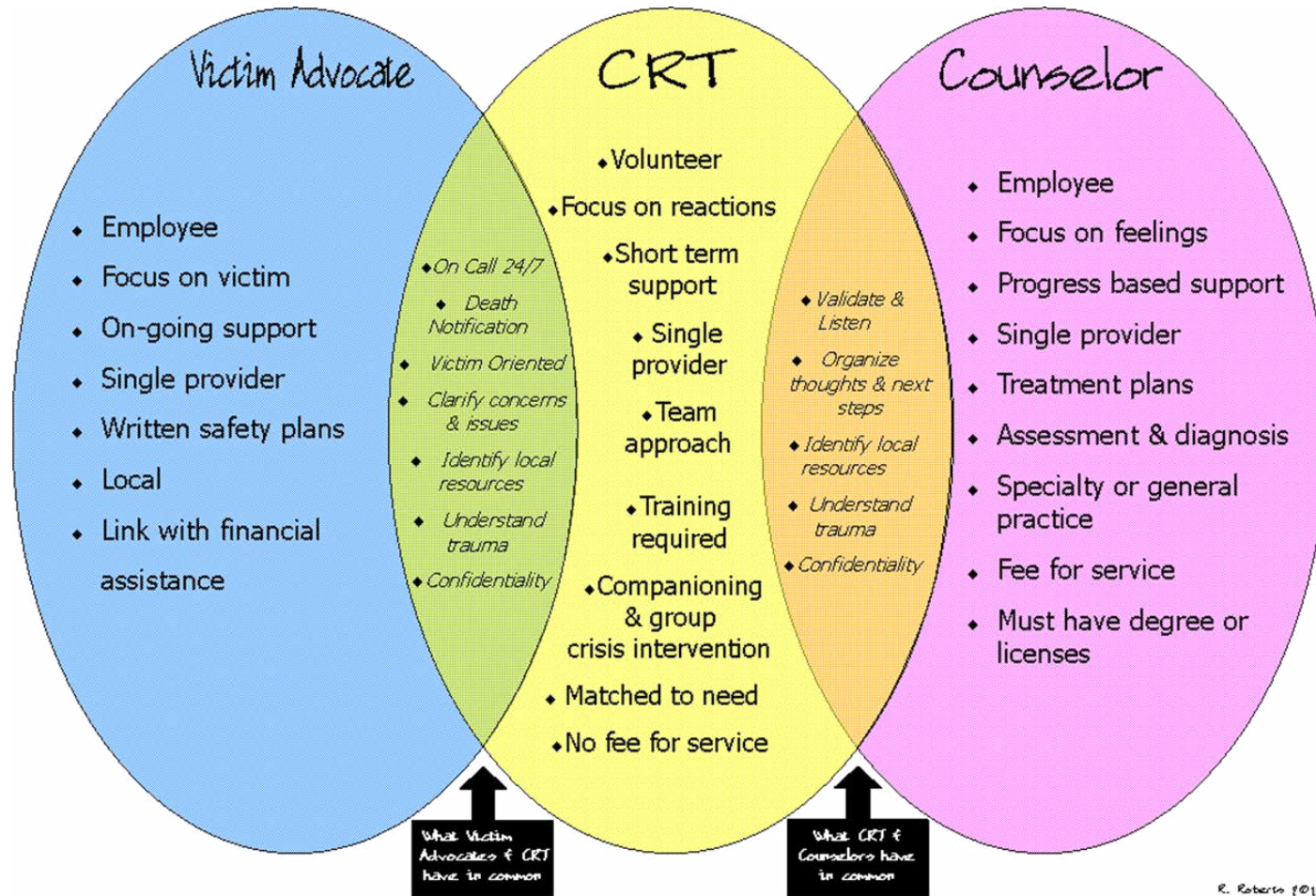
- ❖ They are facilitated conversations to assist victims in processing the trauma they have experienced and start to build resilience
- ❖ Groups are divided into peer groups based on experiences
- ❖ They are voluntary; participants do not have to speak, and anything said in group is confidential
- ❖ Lasts an average of 90 minutes



VCART vs. Mental Health Professionals

- ❖ VCART is composed of volunteers throughout the Commonwealth from many different professions, backgrounds and experiences
- ❖ VCART does not respond with clinical services
- ❖ VCART responds for a short-term response to offer whatever victim-centered services are needed by the community





What is the Victims Crisis Assistance and Response Team (VCART)?

VCART Response or Internal Response?

Internal

- Emergency Plan is *NOT* Activated
- Non-Criminal events
- Incidents where “crisis” staff (Counselors, administration staff) are *NOT* affected
- Incidents that require that confidentiality and privacy are paramount
- Long term assistance and resources

VCART

- Emergency Plan *IS* activated
- In criminal incidents where large populations are affected
- When staff experiences an event that overwhelms their resources
- When outside help is more appropriate (victims feel more comfortable speaking to outside agency)
- For short term assistance



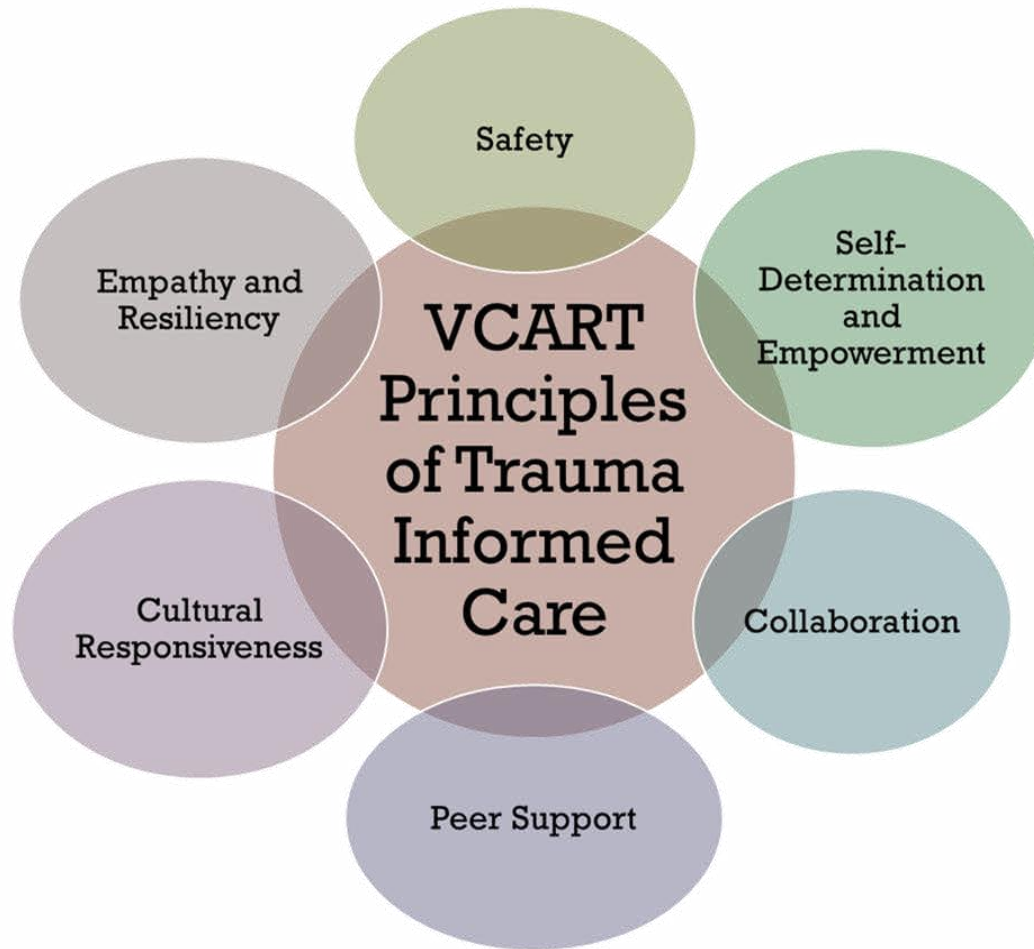
Recovery

Immediate Needs of Victims

- Re-establishing a sense of safety
- Information
- Questions answered
- Support- individual and community
- Expectations for healing
- Empathy
- Time to grieve
- Community resources
- Regaining a sense of control and calm
- A self-determined plan
- Coping strategies



Trauma-Informed Care



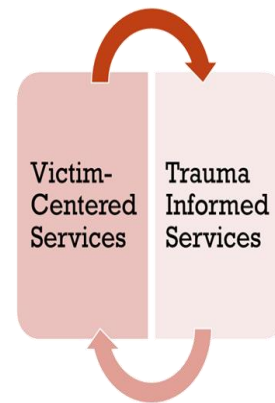
VCART and Trauma-Informed Services:

- ❖ Trauma-informed services identifies and responds to the signs, symptoms, and risks of trauma to better support the needs of the individual and/or community.
- ❖ A Trauma-informed framework involves: Understanding how trauma effects an individual and/or community and its impact on health, behavior, connection, and resilience; Training our leaders, providers, and staff on responding to victims in a trauma-informed manner;
- ❖ This approach is defined as the systematic focus on the needs and concerns of a victim to ensure the compassionate delivery of services in a nonjudgmental manner.



Victim-Centered & Trauma-Informed

- Translating what we know about trauma into our policies, procedures, planning, and practices
- Decrease re-traumatization by supporting victims in a non-judgmental way.
- Understanding that the victim's perspective is the only one that matters for him/her/them and allowing them to decide what is best for them.



Information & Notification Center

- ❖ Formerly known as the Reunification Center
- ❖ Pop-up locations where victims, survivors, and family and friends gather
- ❖ May be several locations (churches, schools, hotels, civil centers)
- ❖ Open no more than 72 hours after the event
- ❖ Place to receive:
 - Information
 - Location of loved ones
 - Death notifications



Family and Survivor Assistance Center

- ❖ Formerly called the Family Assistance Center

- ❖ Resources include:
 - Victim advocacy
 - Public health
 - Population-specific support/services
 - Food
 - Faith-based services
 - Behavioral health
 - Child care



Normal Trauma Responses

- Crying /Emotional
- Tired
- Absent/ tardy for work/school
- Questioning Everything
- Nervous / feeling unsafe at work/school
- “Zoned Out” /hard to focus on job/school work
- Performance issues / not as efficient as normal
- Anxiety
- Changes in Eating



What is Resilience?



Resilience is the ability to cope with a crisis using mental and emotional strategies such as relationship building, self-efficacy and healthy thinking among others.

de Terte & Stephens (2014), Tubb, Wilson & Hoag (2010)

www.hq.com | CC BY - Management Skills for Success



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Building Resilience



Do you change your environment or does your environment change you?



Potential Challenges



Resources

- Do you have a list of local resources
- Do you have community partnerships
- Do you have ways to provide the information(flyers, phone numbers)

Media Control



- Is there a staging area for the media
- How is the information being provided to them
- Helping your Victims understand and navigate the media issues

Social Media Challenges



- Rapid information release (some true, some not)
- Family Notification
- Retraumatizing Victims
- Questions answered by assumption rather than professionals

Volunteers / Donations



- Have they been invited and by who
- Are they in the appropriate places
- Are they trained for the services being provided
- Too many /Wrong place
Uninvited/not helpful

Challenges to Recovery

Differing laws and ideas about who is a victim or survivor

Local leaders are not trauma informed

Conflict resolution is difficult

Differing ideas about “recovery” and “resilience”

Hate motivated crimes create unique challenges

National Mass Violence Victimization Resource Center. (2022) <https://www.nmvrc.org/media/00tbo4n/tip-sheet-unexpected-challenges-for-communities-in-recovery-phase.pdf>

Challenges to Recovery

Survivors have unique responses to trauma

Historical or layered trauma impacts healing and accessing services

Survivors' ability to access services varies

Individuals and/or communities may feel overlooked

Differing definitions of “mass violence”

National Mass Violence Victimization Resource Center. (2022) <https://www.nmvrc.org/media/00tbio4n/tip-sheet-unexpected-challenges-for-communities-in-recovery-phase.pdf>

Responder Awareness



- It's OK to NOT be OK
- Be Mindful
- Relax & Release
- Be mindful of trauma dumping

Do you know your own personal limits, hard lines, weaknesses, biases, and emotional activators?

Trauma-Informed Practice for Responders

- Self-awareness
- Self-care
- Limiting exposure (cycles of assistance)
- De-brief for responders
- After Action Report

SELF CARE
means giving
THE WORLD
the best
OF YOU INSTEAD OF
WHAT IS LEFT
OF YOU.

KATIE REED | @AMOTHERTHING



Key Concepts

- Immediate response defines the event for victims & public
- Understand that the needs of crime victims are different from individuals that survive other types of disasters
- Rely on outside experts in the field for short-term, larger scale assistance
- “Victims taking care of victims” is never a good model

Lessons Learned

- **Early intervention** can help to promote a positive recovery environment by promoting safety, calm, self-efficacy, social support, and hope. This may include: psychological first aid, advocacy, crisis counselling, referrals and public health messaging.
- **Promoting a positive recovery environment** may also involve protecting survivors from punitive or blaming others, or an intrusive press.
- **Immediate intervention or crisis counseling** can be especially useful for those with risk factors which include experiencing death of a loved one or personal injury, witnessing violence, or being a lone survivor.
- **Community connections** are crucial for victim's resilience in the aftermath of mass violence and that they have ongoing support available to them.
- **Memorial events**—particularly those that are student and community initiated and led—are most helpful to survivors in terms of recovering after a mass violence event

Questions?



Please ask; if you are thinking about it chances are someone else is too!

Contact Information

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