



Texas Department of Criminal Justice  
**victim services**  
division  
**Victim Impact Panel Program**

8712 Shoal Creek Blvd.  
Suite 265  
Austin, TX 78757-6899

P. O. Box 13401  
Austin, TX 78711-3401

**800-848-4284**

Monday through Friday  
7:30am - 5:30pm

e-mail:  
[victim.svc@tdcj.state.tx.us](mailto:victim.svc@tdcj.state.tx.us)

Agency Website:  
[www.tdcj.state.tx.us](http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us)

a light in the darkness



# Frequently Asked Questions

## **PROGRAM MISSION STATEMENT**

*To provide an opportunity for Texas victims and survivors of crime to express and share their thoughts and feelings about their experience with audiences of criminal justice professionals and offenders in a safe, appropriate setting, furthering their journey of personal healing, and offering the opportunity to speak out and make a positive difference.*

## **HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS**

*A victim impact panel typically consists of three to four victims/survivors of crime and/or their family members. Participants must be at least 17 years of age and have no past criminal convictions. During the one to two hour panel, each panelist speaks for approximately 15 to 20 minutes, after which the session is generally opened for questions and comments from the audience. This allows for more personal interaction between panel and audience, and usually develops into a discussion type forum, which a program staff member moderates. Following the allotted time period, the panelists and program staff retreat to a private location in order to debrief. The panelists are contacted within several days following the panel to offer additional support or referrals.*

## **How are the participants contacted?**

*Potential panelists are contacted in various ways. Program staff complete periodic mail outs to victims/survivors who are on the confidential TDCJ-Victim Services Division notification database. The mail out includes a general information questionnaire and a letter of invitation briefly explaining the program. Individuals interested in learning more about the program are encouraged to return the completed questionnaire by mail, and upon receipt they will be contacted by program staff. They may also call the toll free number (800-848-4284) to speak with a staff member.*

## **Where are the victim impact panels held?**

*Panels are conducted statewide. Victims typically are scheduled to speak on a panel in their geographic area, and are not expected to travel long distances in order to participate. Interested individuals are encouraged to come and view a panel prior to their own participation, although this is not mandatory. With consideration of the needs of the victims as well as the audience, potential panelists are contacted the next time a panel is scheduled in their area.*

## **What can I expect to gain from my participation?**

*The purpose of this program is to provide a safe, appropriate outlet for victims/survivors to express their feelings about their victimization, thereby promoting personal healing. Participants on panels have reported that speaking on a panel is empowering, validating, and affirming. Another common expression from past panelists is the feeling that they have helped someone else and are making a difference by sharing their own experiences.*

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **What type of audience will I address if I speak on a panel?**

*Panels are conducted for audiences of criminal justice professionals (law enforcement officers, probation and parole officers, counselors, prosecutors, and other victim advocates) as well as for juvenile and adult offenders; pre, during, and post-incarceration.*

## **What does the audience gain from a victim impact panel?**

*Panels for professionals are conducted in conjunction with the TDCJ-Victim Services Division's Training Section and are presented as a component of a training workshop. After listening to the panelists, professionals who work with victims/survivors gain knowledge and a better understanding of what victims need and want, and how they may assist victims more efficiently. Offenders typically gain invaluable insight into the effects of crime, not only on the victim but also on the victim's friends, family, and community. Upon witnessing a panel, they hopefully will begin to empathize with and consider the effects of their own crime upon their victim.*

## **My experience with the criminal justice system was very negative. Can I still speak on a panel?**

*Whether your personal experience with the system was negative or positive, the audience can still learn from you provided that you are able to talk about your victimization without accusing or blaming anyone in the audience. We want this experience to be positive for you as well as for them; therefore, a program staff member will talk with you about your victimization and help you determine what you would like to share with the audience.*

*We do not schedule anyone to speak to an audience they are uncomfortable addressing. This issue is generally explored during the initial contact between the program staff member and the victim/survivor. Panelists are always encouraged to bring along supportive friends and family members when speaking to any type of audience.*

## **My victimization occurred a very long time ago. Can I still participate?**

*This certainly would not exclude you from participation in this program. If you feel you would benefit from this service, we want to talk with you about this opportunity.*

## **What if my offender was never caught and my case never solved, or is not yet adjudicated?**

*You can still participate even if your offender was never apprehended. If the case is still pending in the court system, we will ask you to wait to speak on a panel until post-adjudication and sentencing in order to prevent hinderance of the court process.*

## **If I participate, will I be monetarily reimbursed for my time and efforts?**

*Victims who speak on panels are not reimbursed for their expenses or time. The Victim Impact Panel Program is a victim-assistance program and is a **service offered** to crime victims in Texas. Participation is voluntary and is an opportunity for each panelist to be heard and to address their own personal issues regarding the short- and long-term effects of crime. A victim may notify us at any time if he or she wishes to discontinue participation.*

**“We all talk about the impact of crime on our society, but who better to relate the personal loss, tragedy, and pain than the victims who live with crime’s aftermath every day.**

*At the urging of victims, the TDCJ-Victim Services Division developed and implemented the Victim Impact Panel Program (VIPP), a direct victim service for Texas crime victims and their families. The program has proven to be effective in addressing victims’ needs that have been historically ignored. It gives victims a voice in the criminal justice system, provides them an opportunity to make a positive difference, promotes their personal healing, and validates their feelings by providing a forum in which to speak openly about their victimization.*”

Raven Kazen  
Director, TDCJ-Victim Services Division

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#### **QUOTES FROM PAST PARTICIPANTS**

*“I feel that I can make a difference by sharing my experience and hopefully bring about a better understand[ing] of what it feels like to be a victim.”*

*“Anytime a victim can tell their story, it hopefully will assist someone else, [and] it will definitely help the victim in the ongoing healing process.”*

*“It helps me to know my trauma can help others.”*

*“Participating on a victim impact panel has blessed me with healing I never thought was possible.”*

*“Serving on a victim impact panel has helped me to emphasize to everyone the long-term ramifications of violent crime, and not only do I talk about the senseless murder, but I also get to relive all the joys*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS INNOVATIVE, PROGRESSIVE PROGRAM, CONTACT THE TDCJ-VICTIM SERVICES DIVISION, VICTIM IMPACT PANEL PROGRAM AT 800-848-4284.**

*CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND VICTIM ADVOCATE ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS TEXAS ARE ALSO ENCOURAGED TO CONTACT THE TDCJ – VICTIM SERVICES DIVISION, VICTIM IMPACT PANEL PROGRAM IN ORDER TO REQUEST THAT A VICTIM IMPACT PANEL BE CONDUCTED FOR THEIR STAFF OR CLIENTELE.*

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#### **OTHER PROGRAMS WITHIN TDCJ-VICTIM SERVICES DIVISION**

*The TDCJ-Victim Services Division offers additional programs and services that are also designed to assist Texas victims/survivors of crime with promoting their healing process, as well as gaining information and access to the criminal justice system. If you would like more information about these programs as follows, please contact us using the toll free number.*

- Victim Notification*
- Training & Education*
- Victim-Offender Mediation/Dialogue Program*
- Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse & Annual Statewide Conference*
- Execution Viewing and Prison Tours*
- Bridges To Life Victim-Offender Encounter Program*