

## Judicial System

For many, this may be their first involvement with law enforcement or the judicial system. It is very common for people to expect what they have seen on television or movies to apply to their current circumstances. Unfortunately, these expectations are, more than often, a distorted and unrealistic snapshot of how things truly operate.

Arizona has laws and regulations in place to protect victims. For cases involving prosecution, a court advocate can provide information, education, and support that will help reduce fears and uncertainties.

Another consideration that is often practiced is that of resolution by plea agreement. By negotiation and agreement, this approach to resolution can prevent the need for testifying in court.

As with any situation, education and information about how the judicial system operates, can assist the victim and their family in the reduction of trauma.

Remember, involvement in a traumatic event can produce upsetting responses such as disturbed sleep, diminished appetite, difficulty concentrating, and intrusive thoughts of the deceased. These responses will likely subside with time. However, if reactions are especially long lasting or troubling, you may need to turn to a professional for assistance.

## Benefits of Counseling

Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Reviewing the incident and processing the event can help victims clarify what actually occurred and that the terms sexual assault do apply.
- Legal and judicial decisions can be discussed and utilized as part of the promotion of healing and resolution.
- The disruption due to trauma can make daily functioning difficult. Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies, allowing for the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network helps to decrease the negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from the traumatic experience.

Survivors can utilize the experience as an opportunity to build and practice assertiveness, confidence, and protective instinct skills.

## Who can help?

The mortuary handling the funeral arrangements is a source for assistance. They can provide copies of the death certificate, literature on bereavement, and may even have support groups and grief counseling available. They may also assist with identifying “business” tasks that you may need to address during the upcoming weeks and months.

There are a variety of community resources that may be available to you, ranging from information support to emotional assistance (individual and group bereavement counseling, support groups, etc.)

The Mesa Police Department Victim Services Unit can assist with information regarding Victims’ Rights, Victim Compensation, case status, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to other appropriate helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.

## Resources

**Community Information and Referral** .....  
..... (602) 263-8856

**EMPACT Crisis Hotline** .....  
..... (480) 784-1500

**Arizona Criminal Justice Commission**  
1110 W Washington Ste#230, Phoenix, AZ 85007  
..... (602) 364-1146  
acjc@azcjc.gov

**National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)**  
P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20849-6000  
..... 1-800-851-3420

**Office for Victims of Crime, U.S. Department of Justice**  
810 Seventh Street NW., Eighth Floor, Washington, DC 20531  
..... (202) 307-5983  
www.ovc.gov

**Compassionate Friends**..... (480) 752-1832

**New Song, Center for Grieving Children  
& Those Who Love Them** ..... (480) 951-8985

# Victim Services Unit

## Death Investigation



Mesa Police Department  
Victim Services Unit  
130 N Robson  
Mesa, AZ 85201  
(480) 644-4075

**This brochure provides information for you and your family on dealing with the death of a loved one.**

Some of this information may provide more detail than you are comfortable with at this time. If so, we suggest asking a trusted friend or family member to read this for you so the immediate decisions you need to make will be informed ones. This pamphlet can then be put away until such time as you feel ready to review it.

## **What Do I Need to Do Immediately?**

**Get Support...**If you have not already done so, contact a support person to be with you immediately. The emotional and physical assistance of family members, trusted friends, and/or clergy is crucial during this painful time.

**Contact the Office of the Medical Examiner (OME)...**Your loved one will be (or has been) transported to the OME. If you wish to have a specific mortuary handle the funeral arrangements, the OME must be notified of your preference. Due to space limitations, you (or the funeral home you have selected) must call the **OME at (602) 506-1138** by 5PM on the day of (or in some cases, the day following) your loved one's arrival at the OME. If timely contact (within 24 to 48 hours) with the OME is not made, your loved one will be released to the next available mortuary on the OME rotation list.

**Consider organ donation...**When a death occurs in the jurisdiction of Maricopa County OME, any organ donation must be authorized by a Medical Examiner. If your loved one is an organ donor (or if organ donation is something you or a lawful representative would consider), and organ donation is possible, contact Donor Network of Arizona at (602) 222-2200. The Network will then contact the OME for authorization if your loved one is a viable donor.

## **Where is My Loved One Now?**

In the following, your loved one is referred to as the "deceased". This terminology is not intended to reflect any insensitivity to your grief or loss.

Upon being removed from the site where death occurred, the deceased is transported to the Maricopa OME by the OME transportation service. It is not the policy of the OME to request or allow visual identification of the deceased by anyone once the deceased arrives at their facility. As required by law, a Medical Examiner will perform an examination (which may include an autopsy), usually within 24 hours.

You have the right to select the mortuary of your choice to handle all funeral arrangements. The funeral home will provide transportation of the deceased from the OME.

## **What is the Mesa Police Department Doing?**

The Mesa Police Department (MPD) Homicide Unit investigates deaths in which a physician will not sign a death certificate. A doctor may be unwilling to sign a death certificate because the physician has not seen the decedent for a long period of time and/or has no idea what caused the death. Sometimes the doctor is willing to sign a death certificate but is not allowed to by law. Detectives in the Homicide Unit investigate all non-vehicular, non physician-attended deaths occurring within the Mesa city limits including homicides, suicides, accidental deaths, and unexplained infant deaths. Thus, the Homicide Unit's involvement in this death investigation, in and of itself, should not be construed as an indication that a homicide or other criminal action has occurred. Many deaths investigated by the MPD are not crimes. The final determination of the cause and manner of death is made by the Medical Examiner.

It is important to keep in mind the investigator's first priority, as mandated by state law, is to determine what occurred. Understandably, this can be very difficult for you. Discussing your feelings with the Victim Services Unit or the Assigned Detective may help you.

As part of any death investigation, detectives must gather information to assist the Medical Examiner in making the determination of the cause and manner of death. This includes asking questions which may be painful and upsetting to family members and friends. It may also include collecting evidentiary items such as documents, clothing, bedding, etc. As painful and upsetting as these questions and procedures may be, please keep in mind they are necessary and required in a death investigation. If there is something the detective can do for you to minimize the pain of this process, please let him/her know.

## **Who Notifies the Next of Kin?**

MPD makes every effort to contact next-of-kin as quickly and compassionately as possible. Speedy notification is not always possible due to a variety of factors. Detectives will not notify a next-of-kin until the identity has been confirmed, and this may take time.

If you have any questions regarding the official notification of the loss of your loved one, please contact the Assigned Detective or the Victim Services Unit.

## **Who does Necessary Cleaning?**

Scene cleanup is the responsibility of the property owner and may be covered by insurance. In some situations Victim Compensation funds may be available. It is important to keep in mind that such cleanup may require specialized cleaning services found in the phone book under topics such as Hazardous Waste Cleanup & Disposal, Sanitation Services, or Industrial Chemical Cleaning, Janitorial Services.

## **What about the media?**

MPD has no control over what the media reports and takes no position on whether or not a family member should contact or communicate with the media. This decision is entirely yours.

Under the provisions of Arizona Public Records Law, any interested party may request a copy of the departmental report (DR) related to any police investigated incident (including the death of your loved one). While it can be disturbing for families to find out the media can obtain a copy of the police report once a written request is completed, this is the current law.

## **What About My Loved Ones Belongings?**

MPD will make every effort to promptly return your loved one's personal effects, provided these items are not considered evidence.

**Impounded Property...**All evidence, will be impounded by the MPD. Once a non-criminal investigation is completed, all impounded items may be returned or, if you prefer, destroyed. Evidence in criminal investigations will remain impounded until the final disposition of the case.

The Assigned Detective or the Victim Services Unit can provide you with the specific details on the condition of property that is available for release and how to obtain this property or authorize its destruction.