

# Victims Have Rights, Too!

It has been almost a year since that day. But Lucy M.'s eyes still fill with tears when she describes what three criminals did to her home. A friend had called her at her aunt's house to tell her there had been a break-in. She rushed home to find overturned furniture, emptied drawers, broken picture frames, and her VCR, bicycle, and camera gone. The burglars had even used the microwave oven as a toilet. Lucy told police she felt as if she had been raped. The only thing not ruined were the clothes on her back.



CHECK vocabulary words in bold.  
LOOK UP word meanings in the glossary beginning on page 92.



### CRITICAL THINKING

Some people think it is a good idea to have criminals pay back the victim. People who are against this idea say that many criminals are too poor to pay. What do you think?

Lucy could not sleep for days. Her emotions went from guilt and fear to anger. She closed herself off from the world and stayed home for weeks. Her bills became too high to handle, she lost her job, and she had to move in with her parents. Perhaps the worst thing is that Lucy is now afraid to leave her parents' home for fear that it will be broken into. She also has terrible nightmares. The one lucky thing is that the crime brought out the best in her friends and in her community. They raised \$5,000 to help her replace the things in her life.

In this chapter, you will find out about the feelings many crime victims have. You will learn about what family and friends can do to help. You will also find out about a victim's rights.

### Victims' Feelings

A crime victim feels many different feelings. These feelings can last for months or years after the crime. For example, the victim sometimes thinks that the crime was his or her fault. The victim might think, "I should have left my house earlier and not walked down that street," or "I should have run faster or fought back." The victim can feel this way even if there was nothing he could have done to prevent the crime.

If the victim's house was broken into, the victim, like Lucy, will likely feel afraid that the burglar might come back. The victim might also feel angry at having felt so helpless. Some of the victim's feelings will not be unlike the person returning home after being in a war zone.



Offender Jane H., says: "I shot a friend dead in a fight. I am behind bars for twenty years. I know that the victim's mother has become an advocate for victims' rights. She misses her son every day and is filled with hate when thinking of me. In just three seconds, I ruined my whole life and the lives of many others. I feel strongly that victims have rights, too."

## Help for Victims

How can family and friends help a victim? Friends and family can help a victim a lot. They can stay with the victim when he or she is afraid to be alone. They can listen while the victim talks about feelings and about the crime.

Can victims get paid back what they have lost? The answer is sometimes. There are four different ways victims can get paid back, or get **restitution**, for what has been taken from them.

1. Being paid back for damage, loss, or injury: The criminal must sometimes pay money to the victim for damage or injury. For example, if someone is convicted of stealing \$30, part of the person's sentence will be to pay back the \$30 to the victim.

The judge may sentence a person to pay something to the community. For example, if some people are found guilty of vandalism or damaging property in a park, the judge might sentence them to clean up the park every Saturday for a year.

2. Getting money from the government for damage, loss, or injury: Some states have an office or board that pays **compensation**, or money for medical expenses, to victims of violent crimes. Other states also pay for loss of property. Still other states give money to help people who are hurt as a result of coming to the aid of a victim.

To get this kind of help, a victim needs to fill out a form and give the following information: details of the crime, names and addresses of any witness(es), the number of the police department complaint report, copies of medical bills, and the name and badge number of the police officer who wrote the crime report.

o Victims may have to report the crime within a certain amount of time. It may be a month. It may be only two days. Check what the laws are in your state.

3. Taking the criminal to a special court called the small claims court: Victims do not always need a lawyer for this kind of court.

4. Taking someone to court who, in some way, helped make it possible for the crime to happen: A victim may be able to sue someone else for damages.

For example, Kim Y.'s apartment was robbed, but the thief was not caught. Kim Y. sued his landlord in court because the lock on his door was not safe. He had complained about it many times, but his landlord had not fixed it. The landlord had not done his job. In this way, the landlord was responsible for the break-in. Kim Y. won the case, and the landlord had to fix the door as well as pay the all of the damages.

What do Victim/Witness Assistance Programs do to help? Many victims need help in dealing with their feelings about the crime.

Counseling can be the best remedy. A social worker or a person who is trained in mental health can counsel or help victims and witnesses to feel better by listening to them. This listening helps people to understand their feelings better.



### CRITICAL THINKING

In the story at the beginning of this chapter, Lucy M. felt that victims have to live with the feeling of being a victim for the rest of their lives. Why do you think this is so?

HAVE YOU SEEN  
THIS CHILD?



REPORT ANY INFORMATION  
TO OUR HOTLINE

DID YOU KNOW? John Walsh is the host of a television show about crime in America. His own six-year-old son, Adam, was murdered in 1981. The murderer was never caught. Walsh found that the police had no system for keeping track of missing-children reports. He worked to have Congress pass the Missing Children's Assistance Act. Today, handbills like the above advertised the search for missing children.

**EYE OPENER** By giving information about criminals not yet caught, the TV show hosted by John Walsh has caused 243 criminals to be captured in five years! John Walsh also helped to make television movies about Adam and about missing children. As a result of one show, 65 missing children were found.

1. What did Lucy M. find when she rushed home? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What were the only things not ruined? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What emotions did Lucy M. feel? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Why did Lucy have to move in with her parents? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What did her friends and the community do? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What will you learn about in this chapter? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How long can feelings about being a victim last? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What does the victim sometimes think? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What do victims sometimes feel if their house was broken into? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Some victims feel like they have returned from where? \_\_\_\_\_
11. How can family and friends help a victim? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. What is restitution? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Criminals must sometimes pay money to the victim for what? \_\_\_\_\_
14. What might a judge do to someone convicted of vandalism? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. What is compensation? \_\_\_\_\_
16. To get compensation you may have to report the crime within what? \_\_\_\_\_
17. Where do victims no always need a lawyer? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Who might a victim be able to sue? \_\_\_\_\_
19. Why did Kim Y sue his landlord? \_\_\_\_\_
20. What can be the best remedy? \_\_\_\_\_

## Critical Thinking

(pages: 66 & 67)

1. Would it be a good idea for criminals to pay back victims for their loss? Why or why not?
2. What rights should victims have?
3. Why do you think victims sometimes blame themselves?
4. Sometimes victims live with the feeling of being a victim for a long time. What might contribute to that feeling of victimhood?

5. Why is the "Missing Children's Act" important? Why?

6. Can TV shows about missing children help? How?

7. How may counseling help victims?