

# **Professional Psychosocial Support of victims of violence in Criminal Trials:**

**A method for stress reduction and prevention of  
retraumatisation**

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Hearing Pro Victims Justice

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**Trainings and publications**

**Public relations and net-working**

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**Violetta** 

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**Psychosocial Support in Criminal Trials**

**Consulting hours in crisis events**

# Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Concept of Professional Psychosocial Support in Criminal Trials
3. Procedure of Psychosocial Support in Criminal Trials
4. Clients & Supporters
5. Conclusion and Outlook

A typical courtroom in Hannover: Please think of a traumatized child or adolescent as victim-witness in the stand..



...sitting next to the defendant and his defense lawyer.  
This situation can bring on fear and stress.

## **Stress experience and retraumatisation in childhood and adolescent victim witnesses**

### ***Concomitant stress within criminal proceedings***

- Giving detailed report on stressful or even traumatic experience as victim can cause considerable stress.
- This applies even more, if intimate experiences have to be reported.

### ***Long-term impairment induced by criminal proceedings***

- Impairment or deterioration of psychological stability beyond the trial.

(Volbert, R. 2017, pp. 241f)

At this point the concept of the

## **Psychosocial Support in Criminal Trials**

of childhood and adolescent victim witnesses in violent and sexual crimes gets effectual.

## ***Intention & goals of the psychosocial support***

- (1) consultation, which allows backing and support of especially vulnerable victims before, within and after proceedings.
- (2) reduce individual stress and avoid secondary victimisation of the victims.

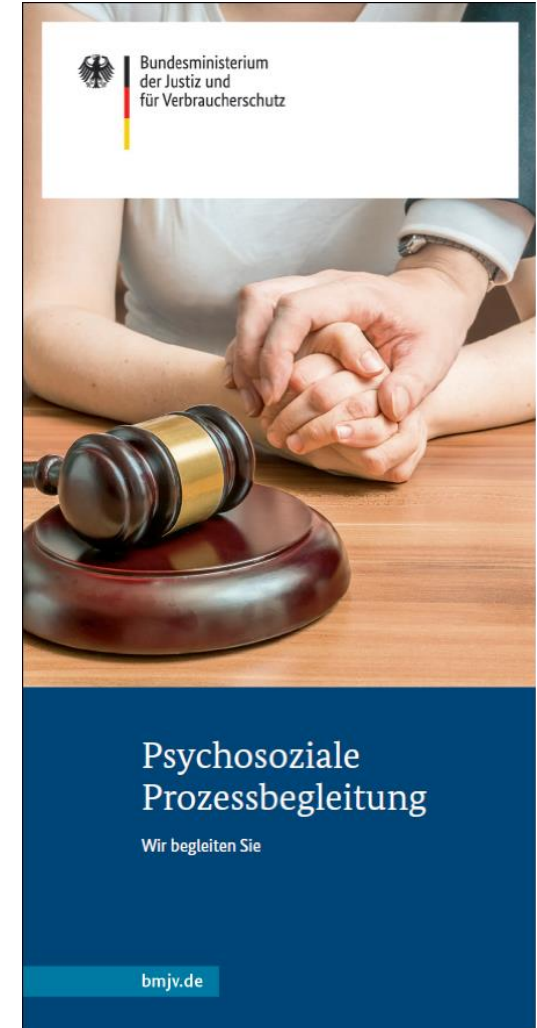
## ***Principles & role of the psychosocial support***

- (3) Neutrality; influence on the witness testimony is permitted, no talking concerning the crime
- (4) Transparency; assistants missing right to refuse testimony

## In focus are children and adolescents as especially vulnerable victims:

It exists a legitimate articulated entitlement for **children and adolescents** that became victim in a severe act of violence or sexual crime *or* for adults, who are impaired to express there own interests, (§ 397a paragraph 1, no. 4 & 5 StPO), **to be prescribed a Psychosocial Support in Criminal Trials.**

(Broschüre des Bundesministeriums der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz 2017)





## ***Conditions & qualifications of Supporters***

- (1) academic degree: social education, social work, education, psychology or a completed vocational training in one of the named field
- (2) graduation in a certificated further education for Psychosocial Supporters in Trials, accepted by the responsible central organisation in the federal state where the supporter will work
- (3) advisory skills, communication and cooperation skills, conflict management skills, organisational competences
- (4) target group-related knowledge in medicine, psychology, victimology, criminology and jurisprudence

# Psychological basic knowledge and methods taught in the further education courses

- Trauma and potential retraumatisation in trials
- Basic knowledge and methods of credibility assessment
- Age-appropriate communication with victims (suggestion risk)
- Psychosocial Support in Criminal Trials as empowerment

## Procedure of Psychosocial Support in Criminal Trials

1. Appointment by court  
Application is necessary. If the supporter is not appointed, assistance from a helpdesk is possible (not paid by the administration or the senate) or the client pays.
2. First contact: victim protection institutions (police, social organisations)
3. First Contact with Supporter in the helpdesk
4. Assistance before, within and after the proceeding
  - General age-based informations about the trial and the participants in a criminal case as well as their roles
  - Psychological methods to reduce stress

# Psychological methods used in the Psychosocial Support in Criminal Trials

- Stabilisation and ressource orientation
  - *Using intrapersonal and social ressources*
- Imagination excercises for stabilisation
  - „*The safe place*“, „*Inner helper*“  
(see also; Reddemann, L., 2017)
- Biography as source of ressources
  - „*Biographic fairy tale*“

## Conclusion

- Testifying at court as harmed witness, can cause psychological stress and retraumatisation to children and adolescents, who had been affected by violence.
- The concept of Psychosocial Assistance in Criminal Trials can reduce stress by giving age-based informations about the trial and by using certain psychological methods for stabilization without suggestion.

# Material (PräventSozial gemeinnützige GmbH)



## Material (Violetta e.V.)



**Thank you  
for your attention!**