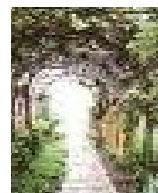




Duke University Health System

Bereavement

Coping After a Homicide



Homicide includes deaths caused by murder or manslaughter. Survivors of homicide may experience trauma and complicated grieving such as intense and prolonged feelings of anger, guilt, desperation and emptiness. The following describes grief reactions common to all types of losses, and reactions specific to homicide survivors.

Common Grief Reactions

Feelings, thoughts and emotions that may seem overwhelming at times:

<i>Denial</i>	<i>Restlessness</i>	<i>Isolation</i>	<i>Resentment</i>
<i>Anger</i>	<i>Sense of failure</i>	<i>Loneliness</i>	<i>Depression</i>
<i>Guilt</i>	<i>Mood swings</i>	<i>Hopelessness</i>	<i>Disbelief</i>
<i>Confusion</i>	<i>Forgetfulness</i>	<i>Crying</i>	<i>Deep sadness</i>
<i>Irritability</i>	<i>Short attention span</i>	<i>Inability to make decisions</i>	

Physical reactions:

<i>Lack of energy</i>	<i>Weakness</i>	<i>Sleep problems</i>
<i>Heart palpitations</i>	<i>Fatigue</i>	<i>Blurred vision</i>
<i>Dry mouth</i>	<i>Body aches</i>	<i>Shortness of breath</i>
<i>Appetite changes</i>	<i>Muscle weakness</i>	

Behavioral changes:

<i>Missing days at work/school</i>	<i>New/increased use of alcohol or substances</i>
<i>Conflicts occurring more often</i>	<i>Keeping busy to avoid feelings</i>
<i>Pulling away from family and friends</i>	

Reactions Experienced by Homicide Survivors

Shock and disbelief - Physical and emotional shock may be prolonged. It may be difficult to believe the person is really gone.

Anger - Anger towards the perpetrator may include feelings of revenge or may be directed at law enforcement and the legal system.

Fear - Safety issues arise if the perpetrator is not apprehended, if they are not convicted, or when they are released from prison. Many homicide survivors also fear their own anger.

Guilt - Survivors may feel they should have been able to protect their loved one, especially if they witnessed or were involved in the crime. Survivors may have regrets about the past, over things done or not done, over not being able to say "good bye."

Anxiety - Family members may relive the murder over and over again when court proceedings begin.

Isolation - Survivor grief may be minimized or overlooked if circumstances occur in marginalized populations and includes drug or gang-related activities.



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Coping with Homicide Loss

- Set boundaries. The grief that follows homicide is compounded by calls/visits from police, news reporters, friends and family.
- Maintain contact with other people during the sad, stressful and confusing months after a loved one's homicide.
- Keep in mind that each person grieves in his or her own unique way, at his or her own pace - there is no timeline for grief.
- Anniversaries, birthdays and holidays may be especially difficult, so you might want to think about whether to continue old traditions or create some new ones.
- Create a ritual or other way to say "good-bye" to the person who has died.
- Write down your thoughts and feelings; keep a journal, write a letter, compose a poem.
- Take care of your physical well-being, maintain adequate nutrition, sleep and exercise.
- Be kind to yourself. When you feel ready, begin to go on with your life. Eventually starting to enjoy life again is not a betrayal of your loved one, but rather a sign that you've begun to heal.

What Can You Do if You Need Help?

Some people find it helpful to explore feelings and thoughts with someone outside the family who is not directly involved and who will listen (a minister, counselor, or support group). **Know that you are not alone. There are people available to you who understand and care.**

Support group – A safe place where survivors can share their experiences and support each other.

Religious/ Spiritual community - People who can help identify spiritual resources that may be comforting for you.

Bereavement counselors - Specialists who help people adjust to the death of a loved one. Try to find a therapist who has experience working with victims of homicide.

Duke Hospital Bereavement Services – Bereavement Services provides a clearinghouse for information, resources and support about grief, loss, dying and death, 877-460-7969.

Local mental health associations - To get more information and referrals.

North Carolina Victims Assistance Network (NC VAN) – To get legal assistance, 800-348-5068.

North Carolina Crime Victims Compensation Commission - 800-826-6200 or 919-733-7974.

Call Your Doctor if You

- Are unable to take care of yourself or your family.
- Have thoughts about harming yourself.
- Become very depressed.