

HELP FOR SURVIVORS

- If someone asks how you are, be honest with them
- Find a safe way to release your anger
- Admit that you may need help
- Allow yourself to cry
- Allow yourself the amount of time you need to recover
- Do not compare your "grief" to someone else's - everyone must grieve in their own unique way
- Allow yourself to feel sorry for yourself (for awhile)
- Surround yourself with supportive people
- Be patient and tolerant with yourself. You will not recover overnight
- If writing down or recording your feelings helps, do that

When someone you love dies, it is a devastating experience, no matter what the cause of death. But those who have lost someone due to a homicide report a different kind of experience. The only people truly capable of understanding it are the ones who have been through it.

Victims must remember that there is no right way to experience the loss of a loved one. Everyone must get through it the only way they can. Let yourself feel whatever it is you are feeling and do not feel guilty about it. Although it may be hard to believe, you will get through this, but it will take time. Give yourself as much time as you need. The main objective is to do what is right for you to be able to survive.

BOOKS

"The Impact of Homicide on Surviving Family Members" Dr. Dean Kilpatrick

"Surviving: When Someone You Love Was Murdered" Lula Redmond

"Coping With Murder in the Family" Gary Rosenfeldt, Robert Glushek

"Broken Bonds: A Sibling's Grief" Janet Vergo

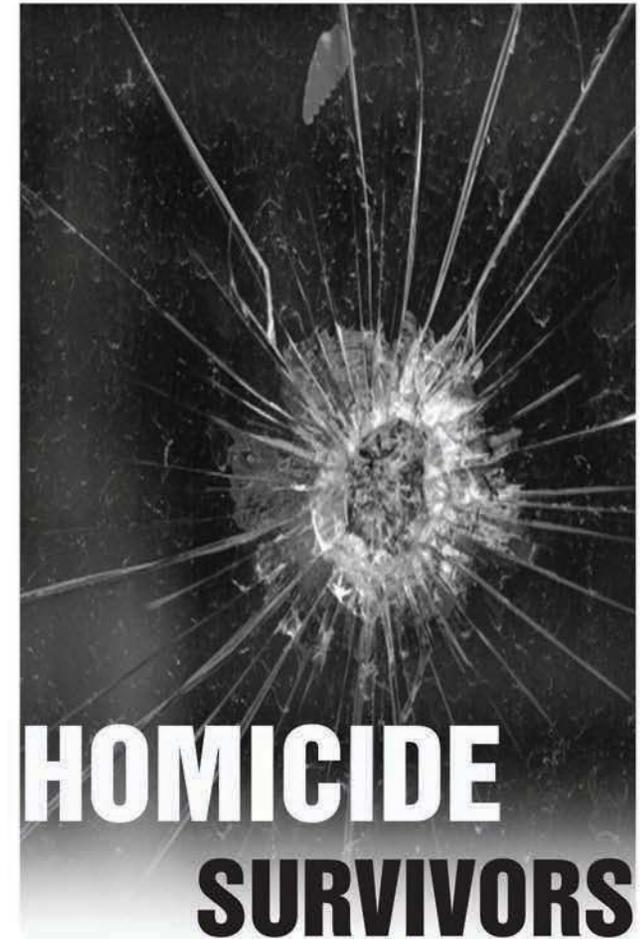
"Helping Yourself Heal When Someone Loved Dies" Dr Alan D. Wolfelt



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The hardest thing for someone to hear is that a loved one is dead. It is even harder to hear that your loved one was murdered. The death of a loved one is an experience that will alter a life forever. The effects are beyond words.



SUPPORT

For those who have lost a loved one because of the intentional act of another human being, the pain of that loss may be intensified and more complicated. Several factors will affect the way a person experiences this loss, such as the circumstances of the death, their experience with the criminal justice system and the support available.

Experiencing Loss

The loss of a loved one can have a devastating impact on a person's life. Parents are not supposed to outlive their children. Husbands and wives are supposed to grow old together. Friendships should last forever. However, most of us have experienced the death of someone we have cared about. There never is an easy way of dealing with it. It usually takes the average person 18-24 months to recover from the death of someone close to them. This may take longer if the death was a violent one. Some families of murder victims say the pain is still with them constantly.

Mourning

No two people mourn the same way. It is essential to realize that people experience the loss of a loved one and must deal with it in their own way. There is no "right" way to mourn, and one way is not better than any other way. The homicide survivor experiences the loss in a way that differs from those who lose someone through an accident or illness. It is difficult to accept the fact that your loved one has died at the hands of another by an intentional, violent act. Trying to comprehend the motivations of the murderer adds to the pain.

Adding To The Pain

The fact of the criminal justice system is often a hardship that homicide survivors have to deal with.

If the offender is caught, it could take years before a resolution is reached, considering the numerous delays that have become embedded in the system. If the offender is not caught, there may never be a resolution for the survivors.

The loss of privacy due to the media is another source of pain for many survivors. Having pictures of a loved one splashed across a newspaper or a television can be very painful. The media has been accused by victims as being less than understanding and sympathetic.

Homicide survivors need support and understanding for a long time after the murder of a loved one. While they may be surrounded by loving people right after the murder, those people often leave shortly after the death. Victims need to talk about what happened to their loved one and what is going on within the criminal justice system.

The Criminal Justice System

Dealing with the criminal justice system is an aspect of losing of a loved one that only homicide survivors experience.

Some feel the accused person receives better treatment than the victim's family does. It can sometimes seem that their loved one is forgotten and that all the concern now is for the rehabilitation of the accused.

Many cases are plea bargained down to a lesser charge to avoid the cost and time of a trial or to help ensure a conviction. If the offender is never identified or convicted, the survivor may never really learn to cope with it.



Factors That Influence The Ability To Cope

There are many things that will have an impact on how a homicide survivor copes with the loss of a loved one.

- The circumstances of the death
- Who the murderer was
- Why the victim was killed
- Whether the offender is ever identified
- Whether the offender is ever convicted
- Contact with police, crown attorneys
- Being surrounded by a network of caring people

Helping Children Grieve

Children deal with the death of a loved one in different ways, depending on their age. They may not understand the concept of death and they may blame themselves.

They may become very angry and seek outlets for this anger. They may withdraw from family and friends.

It is important to be honest with children. Encourage them to talk about their feelings and share your feelings with them.

Helping Men Grieve

Men grieve in different ways, due to the way they were raised and socialized. They may believe they have to be strong for everyone or that they have to take control of things.

Some men feel inadequate when they want to cry or share their feelings and emotions. Others may get very angry or explode for no apparent reason. Others may turn to work or alcohol to relieve their suffering.

Men should be encouraged to discuss their feelings and share their pain. No one but the man himself expects that he won't feel or show his pain after a loss.