

Problems of Survivors

Professionals and volunteers who work with victims must be aware of the specific problems that homicide survivors encounter in the aftermath of sudden, violent, death. Survivors experience a wide range of emotional responses that continually resurface, delaying and often preventing recovery. Many survivors report that there is no recovery for what they experience in the wake of homicide -- they develop instead the ability to survive the waves of emotional pain.

Primary problem areas for survivors of homicide:

1. *Financial considerations*: Funeral and medical expenses, psychiatric care for family members and various costs are all part of the aftermath experienced by survivors. These considerations are grave and contribute in a major way to the continuing distress survivors must endure.
2. *The criminal justice system*: Survivors find themselves suddenly thrust into a complex system of legal players and jargon, where they believe that overwhelming consideration is given to the rights of the accused. They must become acquainted with a world of body bags, crime scenes, evidence, motives and autopsies. There is much to learn and understand about elements of the process, and survivors have a vested interest in obtaining as much information as possible.

The single most important issue for survivors after losing a love one to murder is being able to obtain information from those within the system, prosecutors, detectives and other professionals.

- They want to know exactly how, where, when and why their loved one was murdered and who committed the murder.
 - The most overriding cry -- "Did my loved one suffer?"
 - They expect to learn the truth about the events of the death and elements of the case.
 - They seek closure through arrest and prosecution.
3. *Impact on work*: Surviving homicide often affects one's ability to function and perform on the job. Motivation is sometimes altered. Survivors often experience emotional outbursts of crying or shouting. Some survivors use work as an escape to avoid working through their grief.
 4. *Relationships are affected*: It is not uncommon for marriages to end after the partners have experienced a death due to homicide, particularly the death of a child. Each partner grieves in a different way and may blame the other for the loss. They may each wish to turn away from the memories that the other partner evokes. They are sometimes unable to help each other because they cannot help themselves.

5. *Children in the family:* Children are sometime ignored by parents preoccupied with their own issues. The children fear adding to their parents' pain and simply withdraw.
6. *Religious faith is often shaken by the death:* Survivors often question their beliefs. How could a loving God allow it to happen?
7. *The media:* Homicide survivors are subjected to the intrusion of an often insensitive media. The quest for sensational, fast breaking news items far overrides the anguish that a family may be experiencing by prolonged scrutiny, inaccurate reporting, and gruesome reminders of the violence associated with the death.
8. *Professionals who do not understand:* Survivors report that professionals -- police, hospital personnel, funeral directors, clergy, school personnel, psychologists and psychiatrists -- demonstrate by their comments and actions that they do not fully understand the impact of death by homicide upon the remaining family members.