

Losses After Homicide

Loss of A Loved One

When someone is murdered, the death is sudden, violent, final and incomprehensible. The loved one is no longer there -- the shared plans and dreams are no longer possible. The loss of the relationship will be grieved in different ways by all those who felt close to the victim because their relationships with the victim were all different.

Grief reactions may be manifested long after the physical loss of a loved one. For example, parents may find that they re-experience feelings of loss many years later, such as when they see friends of their murdered child graduate from high school or college, get a job or start a family.

Parents may have believed that, in the natural order of life, the older generation should die first; if so, they may have great difficulty with the fact that their young or grown children were killed while they themselves still live, thus violating this expectation.

Siblings may feel guilt in moving on with their lives -- for example, getting married or having a family. This may be especially true if these plans were not already in existence when the victim died or if the murder occurred at a time when the victim had similar plans. When the victim was also the survivor's confidant or best friend, then the love and support which normally might have been available to help the survivor in the aftermath of the murder may be especially missed. The survivor may feel even more alone than ever.

Family members may have had a conflicted relationship with the victim. The fact that their loved one has died means that these issues or bad feelings will remain unresolved, leaving the survivor with the additional loss of hope that things could have been worked out while the victim lived.

Financial Losses

Homicide survivors may lose much more than their loved one following the murder. There may be a significant loss of income in the family, especially if the victim was the primary "breadwinner." Other family members may find they are unable to go to work because they cannot concentrate or because they need to be present at court hearings and may subsequently lose their jobs. There may be loss of the family home if mortgage payments cannot be made. Plans for school may have to be postponed because of financial difficulties or because survivors cannot concentrate on work or studies. If the victim survived briefly before dying, extraordinary medical bills may have been incurred for which the family may not have had sufficient insurance coverage.

Other Losses

Homicide survivors may experience many other kinds of loss after the murder. Because of the suddenness of the death and the stigma of the murder itself, family members may find drastic changes in their lifestyle afterwards. Some of these other kinds of losses may include:

- Loss of self, a sense of having been "changed" from the person they used to be;
- Loss of a sense of control over their lives;

- Loss of independence or a greater need for dependence on other individuals and/or institutions to address the wrong that was done to them and their loved one;
- Loss of social support or social standing, with increased feelings of isolation and loneliness;
- Loss of a sense of safety and security;
- Loss or questioning of faith or religion. Very often, homicide survivors may question how God could let something like this happen to someone they love. If survivors believe that good things are a reward for a good life and their loved one was a good person, then the question of how this could happen can be very difficult for survivors; and
- Loss of community or physical environment. After the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City left 168 men, women and children dead, the surviving residents had to adapt, not only to the physical alteration of their city by the blast, but also the loss of relatives and friends. The same can be said of the aftermath of attacks on September 11, 2001.