

HELPFUL INFORMATION FOR HOMICIDE SURVIVORS

(provided by the National Center of Victims of Crime)

Introduction

Losing a loved one through homicide is one of the most traumatic experiences that an individual can face; it is an event for which no one can adequately prepare, but which leaves in its wake tremendous emotional pain and upheaval. For purposes of this article, homicide or murder is defined as the "willful (nonnegligent) killing of one human being by another" (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000).

In 2005, there were roughly 16,700 murders committed in the United States -- crimes which affected many more people than the victim. Homicide grief expert Lu Redmond (1989) has estimated that there are seven to ten close relatives - not counting significant others, friends, neighbors and co-workers - for each victim. Those left behind to mourn are called "homicide survivors" and no amount of justice, restitution, prayer or compassion will bring their loved one back.

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.

Aftermath of Homicide

There is usually a period of grief following any loss. Although the notion of "stages" is no longer accepted, grief reactions and the tasks of grieving have been identified. Homicide survivors may also experience symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (Rynearson, 1984; Redmond, 1989). Indeed, it has been stated (Rando, 1993) that factors such as the violence, suddenness, unexpectedness and randomness of the death and the anger, self-blame and guilt which result from it may place family members at risk for what has been termed "complicated mourning."

Grief Reactions

Redmond (1989) described many factors which may affect the course of the grieving process for homicide survivors. These factors include: the ages of the survivor and the victim at the time of the homicide; the survivors' physical and/or emotional state before the murder; their prior history of trauma; the way in which their loved one died; and whether or not the survivor has, and can make use of, social support systems. In addition, social and cultural factors may have great impact on the grieving process.

When homicide survivors first learn about the murder, they may experience shock and disbelief, numbness, changes in appetite or sleeping patterns, difficulty concentrating, confusion, anger, fear and anxiety (Redmond, 1989). One survivor described her initial reactions after hearing of the murder of a family member in this way: "I felt a scream coming out and I thought, No!" I closed my mouth. My legs turned rubbery, and I started falling, and I still wanted to scream, but I couldn't scream." (Asaro, 1992, p. 34.)

In cases where homicide survivors have not been able to view their loved one's body -- either because it was not permitted or they felt unable to do so -- it is often difficult for them to accept the reality of the death. It is for this reason that Redmond urges that family members be permitted to go through this viewing process, as painful as it may be at the time.

Homicide survivors sometimes describe a feeling that "the world has stopped"; they cannot understand how everyone else is able to go on about their daily routine. For them, the world as it was has come to an end, causing feelings of confusion and anger.

Later reactions often include feelings of isolation, helplessness, fear and vulnerability, guilt or self-blame, nightmares and a desire for revenge (Redmond, 1989). One survivor described her reaction in this way: "I was empty -- hollow -- and, you know, you don't think . . . you can't concentrate, and you can't see what's in front of your eyes." (Asaro, 1992, p.35.)

Homicide survivors may experience heightened anxiety or phobic reactions; the anguish may seem intense and, sometimes, overwhelming. Sometimes survivors speak of a physical pain -- such as a "pain in my heart" or a "lump in my throat" -- which they could feel for several years after the murder. A survivor spoke of her reactions in this way:

"I'd cry more around my husband and what I called it was 'wailing' . . . when I did cry, I would cry from my soul because it hurt so bad." (Asaro, 1992, p. 35.)

It is not uncommon for homicide survivors to have tremendous feelings of rage toward the person(s) responsible for the murder, but they may also experience anger toward the victim for "being in the wrong place at the wrong time" or for living a lifestyle which placed them at greater risk for victimization.

Feelings of depression and hopelessness may be present; survivors often report that they cannot imagine that they will ever be happy again. It is very important to get professional help if thoughts of self-harm or suicide are present. One survivor described her feelings in this way:

"I've thought maybe it would be just as well that I end it, you know? Some days were so depressing." (Asaro, 1992, p. 36.)

Even many years after the murder, survivors may find themselves suddenly crying over their loss. These feelings have been called "grief spasms" (Lord, 1988) or "memory embraces" (Wolfelt, 1992), and reflect the depth of the pain of the loss. Many survivors have said that they know they are doing better when they begin to have more good days than bad days.

Tasks of Grieving

Worden (1991) described four "tasks" of grieving. These included: accepting the reality of the loss; feeling the grief; adjusting to a life in which the deceased is no longer present; and emotionally relocating the deceased so that life can go on.

The first task (Worden, 1991) is that of acknowledging and accepting the reality of the loss -- that the loved one is dead. Survivors often report a sense that their loved one will come up the driveway as usual at the end of the workday. Others have reported that they felt impelled to follow someone who looked just like their deceased loved one. It is often difficult for homicide survivors who have not had a chance to see their loved one's body to know, finally, that it was not some terrible mistake and that their loved one is really dead.

The second task identified by Worden (1991) is that mourners must acknowledge and experience the pain associated with losing their loved one, whether it be physical and/or emotional pain. This is one of the most difficult tasks a mourner faces, even under the most supportive of circumstances. Homicide survivors often find that they must put their feelings on hold as they follow court hearings, trials and numerous appeals. However, no matter how the pain of the loss is held back or "put aside," Worden stated that the mourner must experience these feelings or they may carry the pain of the loss for the rest of their lives.

The third task described by Worden (1991) is to adjust to a life in which their loved one is no longer present. At this point, family members begin to make personal or lifestyle changes which might take them in a very different direction than that planned while their loved one was still alive. Often family members may feel some guilt around these new decisions, wondering whether they are being disloyal to their relationship with the deceased. It is important for survivors to recognize and come to terms with these reactions and feelings.

The last task Worden described (1991) is that the mourner must somehow find a place for their loved one within their emotional life which can, at the same time, permit them to go on in the world. Survivors will not forget their loved one, but eventually will realize that their lives can and do go on.

Posttraumatic Stress Reactions

Studies of families of homicide victims suggest that they may be particularly at risk for developing Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (Redmond, 1989; Amick-McMullan, Kilpatrick & Resnick, 1991). When a family member is murdered, the survivors often react with intense feelings of helplessness, fear and horror. The diagnosis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) is made when symptoms (listed below) last for at

least one month; the disturbance adversely affects an important area of functioning, such as work or family relations; and criteria are met in the following three categories:

1. Recurrent and intrusive re-experiencing of the traumatic event, such as dreams or "flashbacks";
2. Avoidance of places or events which serve as reminders of the murder; and
3. Ongoing feelings of increased arousal such as constant vigilance or an exaggerated startled reaction.

One survivor described a recurrent dream she had after several family members were murdered:

" . . . I'd go to bed at night, and I'd dream about saving their lives." (Asaro, 1992, p. 35.)

Some events -- such as news coverage or the approach of birthdays, holidays or the anniversary of the murder -- may trigger the sensation in homicide survivors that they are re-experiencing earlier stress reactions (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). One homicide survivor described her experience in this way:

" . . . nobody prepared me for the year anniversary . . . it just blew me away." (Asaro, 1992, p. 38.)

Impact on Family Unit

It is important to recognize that, although emotional support may have been shared among family members prior to the murder, each individual may grieve the loss in unique ways which might well put them at odds or in conflict with other family members. Some family members may feel that others should not "dwell" on the murder -- that they should "give it up" or "put it behind them." Others may feel that they must learn everything that they can about the murder and fight for the victim's rights through the criminal justice system.

Survivors might also find themselves emotionally withdrawing from each other after the murder -- especially when issues of protectiveness, guilt, anger, or blame are present. One homicide survivor described the way her relationship with her father changed after the murder:

" . . . I can't stand to see him like that, and I feel like I'm the cause of him being upset if I wanted to ask him questions or bring it up, so I don't." (Asaro, 1992, p. 37.)

After the murder, surviving family members may have to assume other roles within the family. For example, the father may have to assume the duties of child-rearing, in addition to being the wage earner in the family; older brothers and sisters may have to assume care for younger siblings; or grandparents may find themselves caring for young children once again after the parents have been killed.

While survivors may need to deal with new situations or learn new coping skills, they may also need to redefine who they are -- for example, if a woman had been a wife, she must adjust to being a widow. If a woman thought of herself as a caretaker and her child is murdered, then what role does she now fill? These new roles may be thrust upon other family members just

when they feel least psychologically, emotionally or financially prepared to adjust to them because of the cataclysm of feelings and reactions they are experiencing after the murder.

If the victim was murdered by another family member -- for example a spouse or brother -- surviving family members may feel additional confusion, guilt, anger, blame and betrayal, and may take sides for or against the victim. This serves to further split family ties and may ultimately result in the family being torn apart.

It sometimes happens that more than one family member is lost through violence, either at the same or different times. This can easily magnify the "sensational" aspects of the crime as far as community and media response, but also can increase the enormity of the loss for those who survive. If so, this will certainly have a great impact on the family's need for, and ability to seek and make use of, outside resources to cope with their losses.

In cases where a relationship between a significant other and the victim was not known or accepted by the victim's family members, this can be the source of additional feelings of confusion, anger or blame. For example, a murder victim may have been in a same-sex relationship and had not "come out" to the family before the murder. Not only must the family then come to terms with their loved one's death, but they must also confront issues surrounding his or her lifestyle which may be at great odds with their personal values or beliefs.

Contextual Factors Which May Impact the Grieving Process

In addition to dealing with the loss of their loved one, family members are constantly bombarded with additional factors which result from the violent nature of the death. These may include reactions to the murder -- both their own and those of others -- or a feeling of having been "re-victimized" by their involvement with the media and the criminal justice system.

Reactions to the Murder

One of the most troublesome aspects of a murder for homicide survivors is that the homicide makes no sense to them. Janoff-Bulman (1992) stated that people, either consciously or unconsciously, often operate on the basis of underlying assumptions about the way the world is and why things happen. These assumptions help explain or attribute blame for situations or events and may serve as a protective mechanism against the extremely uncomfortable notion that "we are not in complete control." Having lost the framework that helps them to feel safe and make sense of the world, homicide survivors often feel as though they have been cast adrift and that they are trying to understand the incomprehensible.

It is for this reason that safety issues are often of primary concern for homicide survivors. They now know that bad things not only can, but do, happen. This brings home the reality that no one is completely safe -- no one is immortal. Survivors may become fearful and anxious when another loved one comes home late or does not call when expected. One homicide survivor described becoming fearful whenever her husband had to be away overnight on business:

"I found that I was taking a sleeping bag and sleeping by the door because I was so nervous." (Asaro, 1992, p. 40.)

Another survivor described her fears in this way:

". . . when you are pregnant, at least with my first pregnancy . . . [you feel] that you are a main target. . . I thought they were out to get me. I felt like there was this big 'X' on me saying, Get me." (Asaro, 1992, p. 40.)

When the assailant is not known, the family will very often try to pursue any avenue to obtain information or insights about what happened -- not only to bring the guilty party to justice, but also to feel safe and to protect their remaining loved ones from an unknown threat. For example, some surviving family members have reported that they hired a psychic to try to come up with new information; others have reported that they keep a police scanner on at home all day, listening for anything that might help with the investigation.

Homicide survivors must also deal with their reactions to the violent nature of the death. They often think about the extent to which their loved one suffered; the fact that the violence was intentional and, therefore, preventable is very troublesome. One survivor spoke of her distress over the way in which two of her loved ones were murdered:

"Both had suffered terribly and suffered for hours . . . it was a very slow and painful death for both of them." (Asaro, 1992, p. 42.)

It is very difficult for many people to accept the notion that "bad things happen to good people." For them, it seems that there must be a cause and effect when unforeseen events occur. In their need to determine where the "blame" for the homicide should be assigned, they may consciously or unconsciously blame the victim. In the aftermath of a murder, they may feel especially confused, angry and isolated if their loved one was murdered while engaged in activities that were not legal or perceived to be socially unacceptable.

Homicide survivors must also deal with other's misguided attempts at helpfulness, including such comments as, "It's been a year -- you should be over this by now" or "It's God's will." Surviving parents may be told, "At least you still have two other children" or "At least you can have other children."

Oftentimes, well-meaning friends may inadvertently overlook the pain and trauma experienced by brothers and sisters of the victim. Lack of acknowledgment of the nature or extent of their pain, or denial of their right to feel the pain and anger associated with their loss, may cause siblings to feel silently resentful and even more alone.

When homicide survivors go to their pastor, priest, rabbi or other religious leader for support, too often they are told that the "murder was somehow part of God's plan" or that "they must forgive the murderer." These statements can be very distressing to people already struggling with feelings of rage and thoughts of revenge, and may give them an additional burden of guilt to bear.

Other factors which may complicate the grieving process for homicide survivors have to do with the ongoing exposure they have to homicide-related material -- such as autopsy reports, crime scene photos, repairing or cleaning up the crime scene, trying to obtain the victim's personal effects (which may have been held as evidence), and other potentially trauma-inducing events.

Media Intrusion

After a loved one is murdered, homicide survivors have little privacy. Their identities and the circumstances of the murder often become public knowledge. Tragically, some survivors may learn about the murder while watching television or listening to the radio. In this day and age, it is not uncommon for survivors to find a microphone thrust in their faces after a court hearing. They may learn about developments in their case for the first time on the evening news or, suddenly and unexpectedly, see their loved one's body placed on a gurney and wheeled to an ambulance during a "Year in Review" news special.

The media may also report inaccurate or inappropriate information about their loved one's case or may portray the offender as a victim in the case, without also acknowledging the impact the murder had on the victim's surviving loved ones.

Involvement in the Criminal Justice System

Most of the people who work within the criminal justice system are well-trained and have demonstrated tremendous sensitivity assisting family members after a murder. However, re-victimization of family members might easily result from the way in which family members are notified of the murder, whether their loved one's body can be released by the coroner in a timely manner, how they are given information from the autopsy report, whether or not a suspect is caught, and the manner in which the investigation and/or prosecution are conducted.

Law Enforcement:

When someone has been murdered, law enforcement is usually the first on the scene and, therefore, the first part of the criminal justice system with which the surviving family comes into contact. Generally, the family is frantic for information -- anything that will help them to comprehend what has happened. In murders where little is known or in cases where family members have not been ruled out as suspects, information cannot be forthcoming to the rest of the family. When family members have always perceived themselves to be law-abiding and good citizens, this might not only cause them to feel frustrated and embarrassed, but might also cause them to experience a "secondary victimization" by the very system that they expected would be there to help them find justice.

Coroner:

In a murder investigation, the victim's body is considered to be the primary "evidence" and there may be a delay in releasing his or her body to the funeral home. For this reason, funeral or memorial arrangements may be delayed, causing further distress to the surviving family. Autopsy reports may later be given to family members with no explanation of the forensic or medical terms used.

Judiciary System:

If there is sufficient evidence to bring charges against the alleged killer, the case may be brought to trial. As described earlier, homicide survivors quickly learn that there is a great deal of difference between their expectations and the reality of how the criminal justice system works. What they see on "Matlock" and other television shows or read in murder mysteries is often grossly inaccurate and merely fiction. In addition -- depending upon whether the assailant is an adult or a juvenile -- there is a great deal of difference in the extent of survivors' rights in the criminal process. During prosecution, the surviving family members often find themselves drawn into a world of legal technicalities which often leave them wondering, "Where are our rights?"

Survivors often find that arrests do not always result in prosecution; prosecutions do not always result in convictions, and convictions do not consistently result in stiff sentences. In the criminal justice system, family members find that the crime has been committed "against the state" and not against them or their loved one. Perceptions of injustice and lack of respect for their loved one often cause further distress for homicide survivors. Their loved one becomes "the body," "the victim" or "the deceased" and is rarely referred to by name, which can seem dehumanizing to the victim's family. Sometimes the victim's character might be called into question during the trial, causing dismay for loved ones who are present.

Homicide survivors are usually told to show little or no emotion in the courtroom so that they will not unduly "influence the jury." This is especially difficult as they face the alleged killer and hear the painful details of their loved one's death. One survivor related her experience in this way:

"You're holding your breath. You don't want to make a peep, or a sound, or anything that would harm that trial at all because you want the guy to get the max." (Asaro, 1992, p. 40.)

If homicide survivors are called as material witnesses by either the prosecution or defense, they may not be able to stay in the courtroom for part or all of the trial. On the other hand, it is not uncommon for survivors to be listed as witnesses by the defense in order to keep them out of the courtroom and away from the curious or sympathetic gaze of the jury.

The trauma may not end once the convicted murderer is sentenced; survivors are often surprised to learn that the criminal sentences imposed and ordered are frequently not the sentences served. Ongoing appeals and parole hearings may easily trigger later stress reactions for the surviving family members, friends and loved ones of the victim.

If a "not guilty" verdict is returned, or if the sentence is the minimum or for a reduced amount of time, the family may feel betrayed and enraged. If the assailant was not caught or is unknown, survivors must go on without a sense of closure. In a case where the killer was never identified, the survivor stated:

"Well, I think my bitterness is because it's never been solved and I thought it was handled . . . it's like nobody gives a damn." (Asaro, 1992, p. 36.)

Coping with the Aftermath of Homicide

Working with the Media

As described earlier, homicide survivors may have positive or negative experiences with the news media and may feel uncertain about the extent of their rights. A sensitive reporter can be an ally to the family in trying to get their story told; however, it is important for the surviving family to remember that you are never required to talk with the media and that there are no guarantees that the information you give them will be presented as you expect or want it to be presented. The goal of printed and electronic journalism is to "sell papers" -- not necessarily to see that "justice is done."

Working Within the Criminal Justice System

The victim/witness assistance program, located in the office of the district or prosecuting attorney, can provide information about the way the criminal justice system works and what rights and provisions your particular state has legislated for victims of crime and homicide survivors. It is important to remember that, while there may not always be answers, you are entitled to ask as many questions as you feel necessary.

The victim/witness coordinator can also be very helpful in letting you know about changes in scheduled hearings and often can assist in making arrangements for overnight stays for family members who travel from other locations in order to attend judicial proceedings. Be aware, however, that frequently the times and dates of proceedings, hearings and trials may be changed or postponed, even at the last moment. This often causes family members to feel as though they are living on "pins and needles" and leads to a great deal of frustration and anger with the criminal justice system.

Sometimes family members are not allowed to be present in the courtroom during hearings or the trial itself; reasons for this might be that family members themselves have been called as witnesses or because the offenders are underage. If this occurs, transcripts of the proceedings may be available to family members; however, be aware that there is usually a per-page charge by the court reporter for this service, and it may take a while to get the actual transcript.

If the defendant is found guilty, a victim impact statement can be presented by the family as part of the sentencing procedure. For many homicide survivors, this may be the only opportunity they will have to speak on behalf of their loved one or to describe the impact the murder has had on themselves and their family.

This statement is a description of how the crime has impacted every area of the survivors' lives. It is a way for the family to describe who the victim was as a person, as well as their pain and anguish resulting from the loss of their loved one and the ongoing ways in which the murder continues to affect them. The impact statement is taken into consideration when the judge -- and in some cases and states, the jury -- is making a determination about the type of sentence to be imposed.

Surviving family members can also ask to be notified and to be present when the convicted felons come up for parole or release. Procedures for requesting notification vary; some states require that this request be put in a letter format, and other states have a specific form which must be completed and returned. Usually family members can request that their addresses not be given to the defendant or his attorney. Additionally, survivors can often request that the parole board include in their parole instructions and conditions that the assailant not contact the family in any way. If contact is made, the felon will then be in violation of parole. If the terms or conditions of parole are violated, the felon may then be forced to return to prison.

Dealing with the Emotional Aftermath

Understand that grieving is a process and not an event. Get as much information as you can about this process. Remember that everyone's grief is unique because everyone's loss is different.

Be patient with yourself and be good to yourself, especially around holidays or on anniversaries of the date of the murder.

Some families find it comforting to keep the same traditions or rituals around the holidays; others find it deeply painful because they serve as a reminder of their loved one who is no longer alive. Family members may also feel they have much less energy than usual. The following are examples of ways in which traditions can be changed in order to respect these feelings:

- Instead of having a family dinner at home, eat at a restaurant or order dinner "to go";
- Limit or change the type of decorations you put up;
- Give gift certificates instead of presents or shop by catalog;
- Limit the number of social gatherings you attend. Choose those that will be most supportive to you and your family;
- Buy something special in honor of your loved one, such as a tree or a plant. Include children in the planning;
- Skip holiday cards or reduce the amount of work involved by instead sending a holiday newsletter;
- Choose a new family holiday activity such as an out-of-town vacation;
- Share the day with other grieving families; or
- Give yourself permission to read, listen to music or simply stay home and do nothing.

What You Can Do If Someone You Know Has Lost a Loved One Through Homicide

Learn what to say and what not to say. Very often, well-meaning friends and neighbors want to help the homicide survivor, but are afraid they will say or do the wrong thing. Remember there is nothing that can be said or done that will bring their loved one back; the process of recovery is a long and slow one. It is very difficult to experience the feelings of helplessness and frustration associated with trying to be a friend to someone who has lost a loved one in

such a violent manner. Be aware that everyone will grieve their loss over different periods of time and in different ways. Here are a few ways in which you can help homicide survivors:

- Be a good listener. Let people in grief be where they are at the moment. Don't try to make "psychological" assessments of where they are or where they should be in this process.
- Be non-judgmental. Many homicide survivors express strong feelings of anger and revenge. Do not react with shock if they express these feelings to you; however, while it is normal to have these feelings, it is important that they not act on these impulses. Be as appropriate as possible in your response.
- People who are in grief seldom have the energy to reach out and find what resources are available in the community. You might ask survivors if it would be helpful for you to search out and attend support group meetings with them. They might not have the energy to drive or even sit through an entire meeting.
- People in grief seldom have the energy to get through the daily tasks of living, and their ability to concentrate may be very poor at times. Examples of ways one might help would be to pack their children's lunches, help make a grocery list, get extra items at the grocery store, or help put the groceries away.
- If you suspect that a friend is having suicidal thoughts or impulses, ask them. Help them to make and keep an appointment with a professional counselor. If possible, make sure that the therapist is trained in trauma counseling.

Summary

The combination of grief reactions and increased vulnerability to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder often results in what Redmond (1989) called "a life sentence" for the rest of the family after a loved one is murdered. Nothing can make this reality disappear; however, there are resources and assistance that can help homicide survivors better understand their reactions and experiences, and learn to cope with and integrate these reactions into the new realities of their lives as individuals and as a family.

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