

Shared Reactions

Someone is murdered every 32 minutes in the United States. That equates to over 45 people every day (FBI Crime Clock, 2003). This becomes a staggering figure when you stop to realize the rippling effect it has on the family and friends of the victim! When someone you love is murdered, the grief and heartache ordinarily associated with death is greatly intensified. Your emotions are thrown into a tailspin. Each of us has our own way of dealing with grief. The feelings you experience are likely to be very difficult and foreign, but they are normal and more than likely similar to those experienced by other victims.

Common reactions shared by many survivors of homicide victims are:

- Shock/Disbelief
- Anger/Outrage
- Sleeplessness or Constant Sleep
- Helplessness/Hopelessness
- Intense Heartache/Sadness
- Anxiety/Fear/Depression
- Thoughts of Suicide
- Loss of appetite or overeating
- Flashbacks/Mood swings/Nightmares
- Guilt/Shame
- Fantasies or revenge

Coping

Your life has changed. Something terrible and senseless has happened to you, and your life may never be the same again. Although there are no time schedules on how long victims will feel “out of control” or as if they are “losing their minds,” **it will get better**. These emotions are normal. Surviving a homicide may be the most traumatic experience of your life. Your grief must not be suppressed. To do so only delays the healing process and can lead to deep depression as well as physical illness.

If you are unable to cope, or even if you feel you are coping as well as can be expected, you may want to talk to a counselor.

Counseling can be extremely helpful. If you need help in choosing a counselor, contact your physician. Your victim service officer in your local district attorney’s office can also provide assistance.

Getting involved with a local support group is another way to begin the healing process. You may simply need to hear someone tell you that your feelings are normal and you are not alone.

Communication

When a homicide happens in a family, you might expect it to pull the family closer together. This is not always the case. Often, counselors encounter families who separate both physically and emotionally. You should express your feelings with family and friends. Some may not want to talk about homicide, others may avoid you, and some are eager to listen and provide support. Continue to share your experience with these understanding listeners.

Searching For Understanding

As you rebuild your life, reach out to other victims. Communicating with other victims about your feelings is particularly significant. When you discuss your feelings with someone who has had a similar experience, you will find an immediate bond of understanding. Helping another victim may give you a sense that “My loved one did not die in vain.”

The following suggestions from *Changing Lives*, Lu Redmond, Editor, can help your family in dealing with the loss of a loved one:

1. Allow each family member to express their own sense of guilt, feelings of shame and stigma. Listen, without saying “You shouldn’t feel that way.” We feel what we feel. There are no rights and wrongs to our feelings.
2. Recognize that you must express your guilt in order to forgive yourselves. It takes repeated discussions to recognize our lack of control over the circumstances.
3. Recognize that the mind is searching for a reason. We have no control over the behaviors of others, no matter how much we wish we did! Our only hope is to incarcerate the murderers and prevent the murder of others.

4. Your sense of personal safety and security has been violated beyond the belief of others. Neighbors, friends and co-workers are also searching for a reason. Their minds can not accommodate the fact that this could also happen to them. They may use emotional distance to protect themselves, or simply do not know what to say or do for you. Tell them what you need — someone to just listen, someone who will not judge your behavior, and someone to just be there.
5. Search out a mutual peer support group. Attend, listen and share. You will find you are **not** crazy, you are not alone, and there are others who truly care. Be there for one another.

You are one of the unfortunate people who must face the trauma of losing a loved one to violence or murder, and you will probably experience a great need to understand why this tragedy happened. You will need time, determination, and the support of caring listeners to work through your tragedy.

Criminal Justice System

If an arrest is made following a homicide, you may find yourself involved with the court system. During this time, you may expect the criminal justice system to work quickly and keep you well informed during the trial process. Be patient. The process can be slow because there are many victims like you and many criminals waiting for prosecution.

The Constitution of the State of Alabama guarantees your rights, to be informed, to be present, and to be heard when authorized during the stages of criminal proceedings. Call your local district attorney and ask what information you need to provide in order to be informed about the progress of your case.

Most victims are new to the workings of the criminal justice system. As you progress through the various stages of a trial, you may become angry and frustrated because you want to see justice done swiftly. However, you may find that justice does not always prevail. Sometimes the criminal is released on procedural grounds, while other cases never go to trial, or take years for a conviction.

If there is conviction, it can be appealed, and some cases go back to court for another trial. Regardless of what happens to your offender, you may not be satisfied. It may seem like **you** are serving the sentence, not the criminal.

You have experienced an ordeal which has changed your life. Your fears have been intensified and your faith in mankind shattered. You will discover that the crime is only the first in a series of victimizations. You may feel victimized by the lack of concern by public officials and hurt by insensitive remarks. Be patient with yourself and others.

Assistance For Victims

The Alabama Crime Victims Compensation Commission was established in 1984 to assist victims of violent crime.

The organization may be able to provide compensation to victims for medical expenses due to personal injuries, lost wages, FEL, or for funerals and counseling services, while serving as a beacon of hope for crime victims. Maximum compensation is \$20,000 with limitations on certain expenses.

In the case of homicide, funeral, counseling and other expenses can be considered. Surviving spouses, children, or parents of victims may apply for compensation. You may contact the **Alabama Crime Victims Compensation Commission** in Montgomery at (334) 290-4420 for more information on applying for compensation. It is our sincerest desire that your case will be quickly resolved and your fears lessened.