

To the Reader

Someone you know or love has been murdered. The information you are about to read is intended to give you an idea of what to expect after the homicide of a family member or a friend. **It may take all the courage you have to pick up this booklet and read it.** You did not ask for this tragic event to take place in your life. You may be saying to yourself, “I don’t want to read anything that will remind me even more of this pain I’m going through.”

This booklet was written to help you understand some of what you are going through and to guide you through the homicide investigation. It is not intended to tell you how to feel or to tell you what to do. It is offered as a way to give you some information that may be helpful to your understanding of some of the important issues you will likely be facing. Many people find that they cannot read this booklet all at once. Just read what you can when you can. We have laid out the information in this booklet in an approximate chronological sequence: the first few days followed by the first few weeks, then the first few months, the first year and beyond.

Death by homicide has more elements attached to it than any other type of unnatural death. The subject matter in this booklet comes from direct experience and observation. We are sorry that this tragedy has occurred in your life. We hope that this booklet will be informational and helpful as you travel through the maze of both your bereavement journey and the criminal justice system. To give you a greater understanding of what you may experience, we have included throughout this booklet the personal experiences of co-author Lew Cox following the 1987 murder of his daughter, Carmon. So, at various points throughout the booklet we have placed Lew’s story in italics.

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understand that this not only can be dangerous, but, as noted earlier, also has the potential to disrupt the ongoing investigation and perhaps alter the collection of evidence, which could be used at a future trial.

(Re)Visiting the Scene

Some people have no desire to visit or revisit the place where their loved one died. Other people have some fear about visiting the scene, while others have decided that they are definitely going. If you are considering a visit, answer the following questions for yourself first:

1. "What are my present emotional reactions when I think about going there?"
2. "Who should I take with me for support?"
3. "What do I expect to happen once I get there?"
4. "Who in the police department can I contact to prepare or assist me in some way?"
5. "How can I take care of myself once I visit the scene so that I will be OK?"

Some people who visit the scene consider trying to find a way that the place can be preserved or commemorated in memory of their loved one. Be aware that whatever you do may not be permanent. For example, you may leave something at the scene only to later find it has been removed. Therefore, try to think through any plans you have in this regard.

If the murder scene was your home or work, do whatever you feel is best for you. Some people report that they never can return to the scene. Others do so immediately, while others do so gradually after a period of time. Find someone who can help you make the best decision for your particular situation.

Flashbacks

It was noted earlier that a common reaction following a tragic death is a replaying of the event—or the event as you imagined it—over and over in your head. This may or may not feel under your control. It can interfere with your ability to concentrate and carry out daily activities. Needless to say, it can be very disruptive. One of the most frequent recurring thoughts is, "What was my loved one thinking and feeling during the injury (or injuries) and at the moment of death?" We typically replay what we imagine was the scene in the last few moments of our loved one's life. Our reactions to this scene may include: worry over how much pain our loved one was in, regret that we were not able to save them or to say "Good-bye," and fear that our loved one's final moments were anything but peaceful. If these thoughts continue to be a problem, contact a counselor who can work with you.

The View of the World Has Changed

When a tragedy occurs in our life, our view of the world changes suddenly and permanently. It looks gray and cold. Yet, the world continues to act as if nothing has happened. If you are like many bereaved people, you have lost friends because they could not handle your loss and grief. In addition, you realize how unfair life can be and that your life has been changed forever. Many people report an increase in family problems during this time. Family issues that existed prior to the murder become amplified. Conflicts between siblings, spouses, parents and children are common. If things feel like they have gotten out of hand, consider counseling with a therapist trained in grief and homicide-related issues.

Reactions of Other People

The reality of the death begins to sink in some time after the funeral period. What we're going to say to you next is not pleasant; but we feel it is necessary to give you this information to prepare you for what may lie ahead: