



AFTER

THE

STORM

Navigating Grief and Justice Following Homicide

2026



Ohio Victim
Witness
ASSOCIATION

Who This Guide is Designed For

Immediate Family Members:

Parents, spouses/partners, siblings, children, and grandparents of the person who was murdered.

Extended Family and Close

Friends: Individuals who were significantly close to the victim but may feel marginalized in the formal process.

Legal Next of Kin: The person responsible for making final arrangements and dealing with official paperwork.

A Word on Language

In this publication, we will be referring to anyone who has been affected by the death of a loved one by homicide as “co-victims.”

A homicide victim’s family or next of kin may not be biological family members. A co-victim can include a parent/legal guardian or adoptive parent, child(ren), spouse/partner, siblings, friends, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and others who knew the victim. Community members can also be impacted by homicide and be considered co-victims.

We recognize that there are other valid terms such as “co-survivor” or “homicide survivor” — however, by using the term “co-victim” we recognize that in the State of Ohio these individuals have rights afforded to them through the Ohio Revised Code, may participate in the criminal justice system on behalf of their loved one, and require resources available for victims of crime due to their loss. Specifically, Marsy’s Law defines a victim as “the person against whom the criminal act is committed or the person directly and proximately harmed by the criminal offense.”

Accessibility Statement

The authors and partners of this publication believe in accessibility for all individuals. This document is available in alternative formats upon request to OVWA. Contact information for OVWA can be found on the last page of this guide. Please allow for sufficient time to arrange such accommodations.

Electronic Access



This guide can be downloaded from OVWA’s website at ovwa.org/homicide/.

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Disclaimer

This guide provides general information for co-victims of homicide in Ohio. It is intended to offer practical support and resources but is not a substitute for professional legal advice, medical consultation, or mental health counseling.

Images via Canva.

Special Thanks

A very special thank you to the dedicated service professionals and co-victims of the Collaboration Board who contributed their time, expertise, authenticity, and compassion to develop a best-practice guide for the State of Ohio. In addition to our collaboration board members, we extend deep gratitude to the following individuals for assistance in the development of this guide: **k. Neycha Herford, Anita Prude OVWA MSW Intern, Crystal Turner, Lori King.**

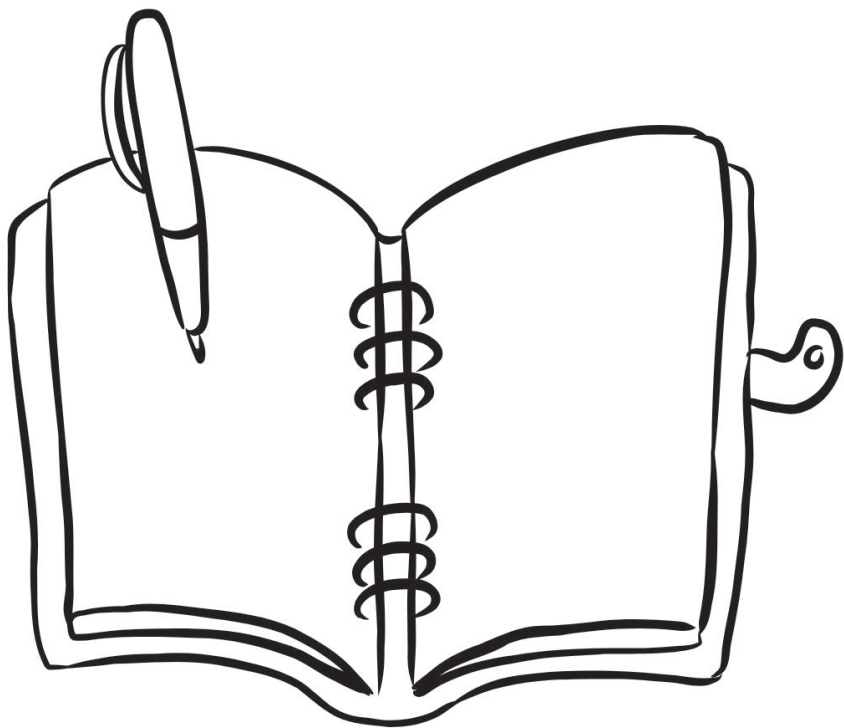


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Foreword

If you're holding this guide, it's likely you've encountered a profound loss, one that words can hardly capture. My heart aches for you, acknowledging the deep sorrow such a loss brings.

Like you, I too have known the heart-wrenching pain of such a devastating tragedy. I lost my partner of ten years to homicide. The aftershocks of his death collapsed my entire life, and for a while, I felt as if a part of me had died too. You may be struggling with similar feelings, and it's okay.

Embarking on the journey of grief following the murder of a loved one is a horrifying experience marked by complexity and unrelenting emotional turmoil. This unique form of sorrow carries with it not only the pain of an untimely loss, but also the heavy burden of knowing the loss was the result of a deliberate act.

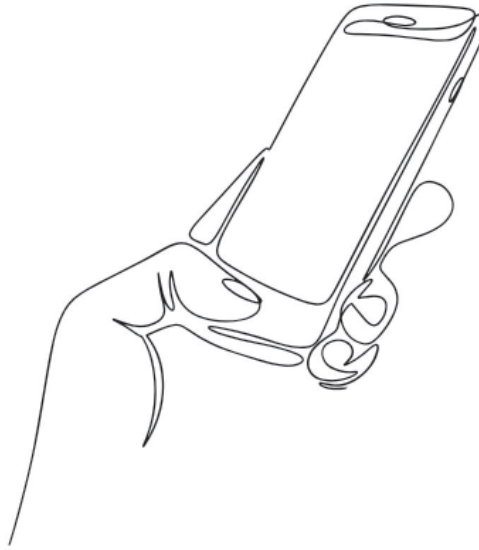
Homicide loss shakes up our sense of what's right and fair. The pursuit of justice often mirrors the stormy nature of grief itself - unpredictable

and varying in intensity. One minute you might feel okay, and the next, you won't. The path through this kind of traumatic grief is the type of experience no one would want to endure. It's messy and super hard, but also, surprisingly, it can open a deep opportunity for healing when you least expect it.

This guide is created with you in mind, with the intention to be a source of comfort, as well as a gentle guide, and a practical companion in your moments of need. Beyond insights on self-care, how to cope with loss, the criminal justice system and navigating practical concerns, we've included spaces for your reflections - a safe space for your unspoken words and deepest thoughts.

On behalf of the Ohio Victim Witness Association, we extend our deepest sympathies and hope this booklet serves as a lighthouse in the dark; a companion through this challenging time.

— k. Neycha Herford



Introducing the Ohio Homicide Co Victim Helpline

In moments of profound loss, navigating grief, fear, and uncertainty can feel overwhelming and isolating. The Ohio Victim Witness Association created the **Ohio Homicide Co Victim Helpline** to ensure that individuals and families impacted by homicide have immediate access to compassionate support and meaningful connection.

The Ohio Co Victim Helpline mission is to provide trauma informed, culturally responsive, and emotionally supportive assistance to homicide survivors and co victims by offering compassionate listening, crisis and trauma informed response, and connection to local resources. We are committed to honoring each person's unique experience, promoting healing and safety, and ensuring that no one faces the impact of homicide alone.

Whether your loss is recent or occurred years ago, the Helpline offers a confidential space to be heard and supported. Advocates are available to listen without judgment, help you understand your options, and connect you to advocacy services, counseling, and resources within your community. You do not have to navigate this experience by yourself.



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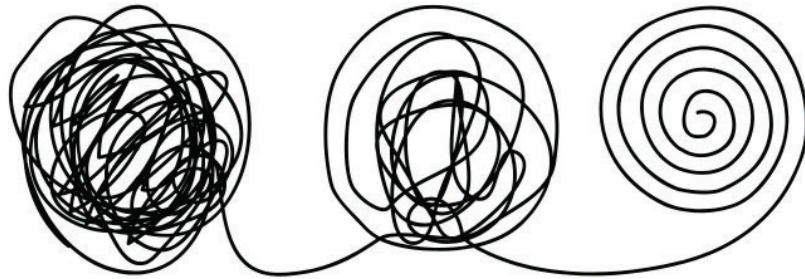


Monday–Friday, 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.



<https://ovwa.org/helpline/>

If you are reading this guide and feel unsure where to begin, reaching out to the Helpline can be a first step toward support, understanding, and connection. You are not alone, and help is available.



Chapter 1: Managing the Tasks of Surviving Homicide Loss

There are so many things to do in the wake of losing a loved one to homicide. Managing the mountain of tasks can be incredibly challenging as many variables compete for your attention.

There's the deeply personal act of commemorating the life of your loved one. And then, the more logistical yet overwhelming duties creep in; gathering their personal items, securing your own safety, and dealing with the necessary paperwork, like obtaining the death certificate.

Separately, you may also face decisions about how to publicly respond to your loss, especially if your loved one's passing has attracted public attention. Each step, while heavy, is a part of this journey of honoring their legacy and moving forward with care and love.

Before diving into the various demands, if you feel that you are not emotionally prepared for such daunting tasks, consider enlisting a trusted friend or family member to help you navigate through the days and weeks ahead. Sharing the responsibility can alleviate some of the stress and allow you to process your emotions without becoming consumed by logistics.

And to be clear, there are many logistical tasks that need to be addressed immediately.

They include:

Communication

Navigating the aftermath of a homicide is overwhelming and knowing who to contact can make a significant difference. The following steps are essential for staying informed, supported, and connected during this difficult time.

Law Enforcement Communication

Keep communication open with your assigned officer or detective. This ensures you receive timely updates about the investigation and have a direct point of contact for questions.

Victim Advocate Support

If criminal charges are filed, you will likely be assigned a **victim advocate**, and these professionals are incredibly valuable. They can serve as your main point of contact, ensure your safety needs are met, explain the criminal justice process and help you exercise your constitutional rights as a victim of crime, provide emotional support and guide you toward resources such as:

- Trauma-informed counseling referrals
- Assistance with filing for crime victim compensation
- Connections to peer support groups

Coroner's Office

Depending on your situation, law enforcement or medical professionals may need your assistance in formally identifying your loved one. This can be done through visual confirmation, photographs, or personal belongings. You may also need to contact the coroner's office for information about the autopsy, obtaining official reports, or understanding the timeline for releasing your loved one's remains.

The release of remains often depends on several factors, including completion of the autopsy, any required laboratory testing, and the needs of the investigation. In some cases, this process may take only a few days; in others, it may take longer if additional examinations are necessary. Once the remains are cleared for release, the coroner's office will coordinate with the funeral home or service provider you choose. If you have not yet selected a funeral home, the coroner's staff can provide information and answer questions about next steps.

If you feel uncertain about timing or procedures, reaching out to the coroner's office is always appropriate—they are there to help clarify and support you during this difficult time.

Addressing Where the Violence Happened – Crime Scene Cleaning Services

In the aftermath of this tragedy, you may need to face the difficult task of revisiting the place or navigating the site where the homicide occurred. This could be your home, a vehicle, or another place where you need to retrieve belongings. We understand that this can be an incredibly challenging and an emotionally overwhelming experience.

The process of cleaning and restoring the area is not something you should have to handle alone. If the location is insured (such as your home or vehicle), your insurance policy may cover the cost of professional biohazard cleaning services. These specialists are trained to handle such sensitive situations with care and respect.

The Ohio Crime Victim Compensation Program may be able to help with some of the expenses related to this process. However, it's important to be aware that these services can be costly, especially without insurance coverage.

If the financial burden feels overwhelming, please don't hesitate to reach out to those who have offered their support. Remember, it's okay to ask for help during this difficult time. Your well-being and emotional safety are the priority, and there are people and resources available to assist you through this process.



Ensuring Your Personal Safety

Your safety is the priority.

Here's how this might look:

- **Investigate:** Take a moment to assess your surroundings and follow any guidance from law enforcement to ensure your safety.
- **Consider relocation if needed:** If you feel unsafe or notice increasing concerns, consider temporarily staying in a secure and undisclosed location—such as with a trusted friend, family member, or at a hotel.
- **Protect Your Address with the Safe at Home Program:** Discuss your safety concerns with law enforcement, the prosecutor, or your victim advocate, and keep them updated if you have a new address. If you need to relocate permanently due to an ongoing safety threat, you may be eligible to protect your new address from public records through the **Ohio Secretary of State's Safe at Home program**.

For this program to be effective, you must not share your new location with anyone—including social media. The program works best when you have just moved or are about to move to a new, undisclosed location.

To begin the process, visit the Ohio Secretary of State's Safe at Home website and connect with a **certified Application Assistant** who can guide you through enrollment.

Protection Orders

You may be able to request a protection order against the individual posing the threat. Law enforcement, a victim advocate or the prosecutor may be able to provide additional information on requesting protection orders. Some protection orders are issued during a criminal court case, and others can be requested at any time (criminal charges do not have to be pending against the offender).

You can find official forms and information on the Supreme Court of Ohio website, and there may be specific guidance and instructions found on your local county courts webpage. If you already have legal representation, they too can assist with this process. To learn more about this legal protective measure, visit <https://www.ohiolegalhelp.org/topic/protection-orders-ohio>.

Ohio Supreme Court Protection Order Information

- **FORM 10.01-A:** General Information about Domestic Violence Protection Orders
- **FORM 10.05-A:** Information About Filing a Juvenile Civil Protection Order or a Juvenile Domestic Violence Civil Protection Order Petition
- **FORM 10.03-G:** Instructions for Obtaining Civil Stalking Protection Order or Civil Sexually Oriented Offense Protection Order (SSOPO)

Protect Your Living Space

Double-check all doors and windows in your home to ensure they are locked. Change the locks if there are legitimate concerns about security breaches, such as missing keys. Installing inexpensive security systems can provide an added layer of security, helping you feel safe during this difficult time.

Gathering Personal Belongings

You may have an opportunity to receive your loved one's personal belongings after formal identification and when the investigation allows. Some items—such as clothing, jewelry, mobile phones or computers—may need to remain in custody as evidence, which can delay their return. It's understandable to want these items back quickly, as they often hold deep meaning or may hold important information. Staying in close contact with the assigned detective or officer can help you understand when and how belongings can be released.

Gathering Important Records

It is important to request and keep a copy of your loved one's official death certificate, despite how unsettling it is to have in your possession. You will want to hold on to this official document, as it is vital for various administrative tasks, such as accessing accounts, informing employers, among other tasks. (Death certificates are usually obtained through the local health department, or the funeral home/cremation service you work with). As you navigate necessary legal and administrative tasks, please know you will need multiple copies of the death certificate. The original should be kept in a safe, personal file for your long-term record.

Communication with Employers, Schools, and Other Relevant Parties

Employers

If your loved one was employed, it's crucial to notify their employer of the tragic event. They will need to manage administrative tasks like final salary, benefits, and any other entitlements. If you're employed and require time off, discuss your needs with your employer; they may have policies in place for bereavement leave. The Ohio Crime Victim Compensation Program may be able to reimburse you for lost wages and other financial losses.

Schools

If your loved one was a student, or if you have children who need time away from school, contact the educational institution. They can help manage absences and provide any necessary academic support during this challenging time.

Financial Institutions

It's advisable to reach out to banks, credit card companies, and any other financial entities to inform them and inquire about next steps.

Utility and Services Providers

Depending on your circumstances, you might need to change accounts listed in the name of your loved one—this could include phone contracts, subscriptions, or household utilities.

Social Networks

If your loved one had social media accounts, you may choose to memorialize them or leave them as they are. If you decide to memorialize your loved one's account, but are hesitant about being exposed to potentially upsetting things said about your loved one or their death on social media, consider asking a trusted friend or family member to take on this task.

Stay Connected

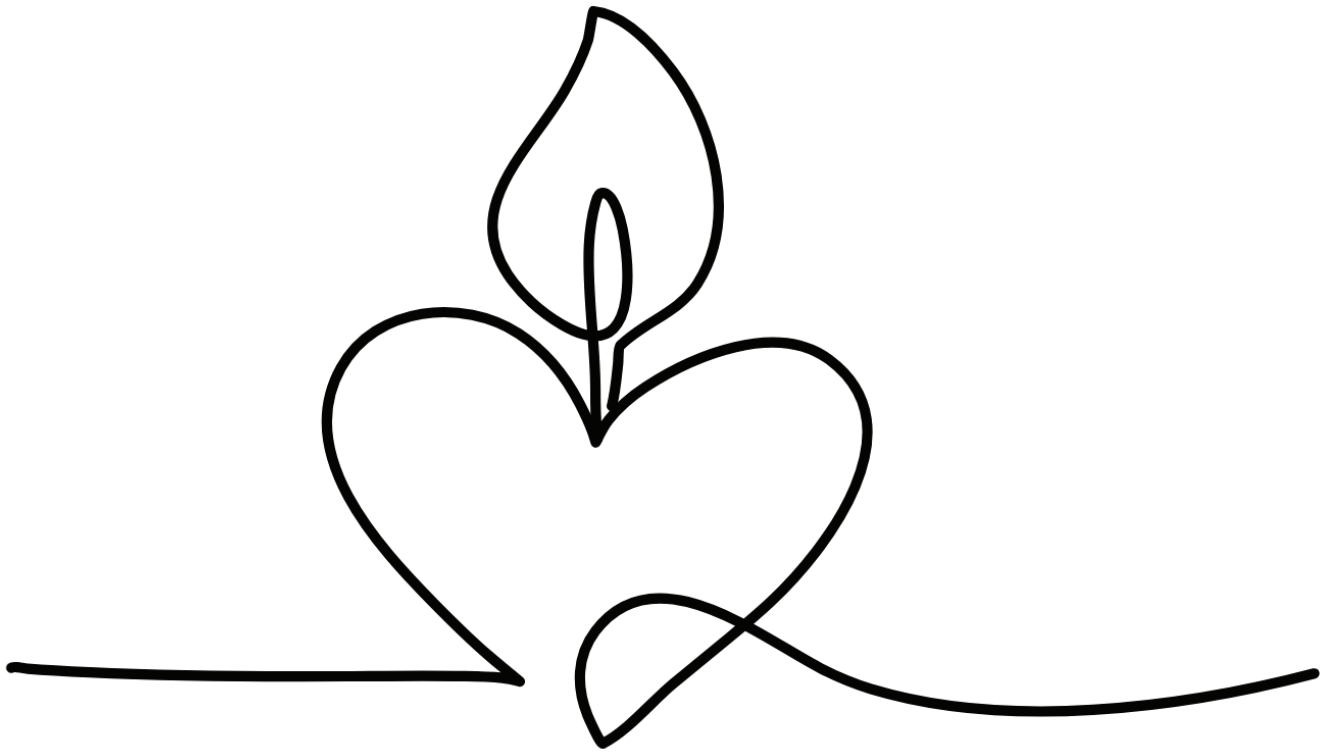
Because the intentional and violent death of a loved one can be so emotionally taxing, it is understandable to get tired of talking to people. However, it is important to keep the lines of communication open with trusted individuals. Inform them of your whereabouts and be sure to check in with them regularly.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Remember, pacing yourself is essential. These early steps can be daunting, with each task becoming increasingly overwhelming given the gravity of emotions. It will be helpful for you to remember that seeking support, be it emotional or practical, is not only acceptable but encouraged.



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Chapter 2: Arranging Memorial and Funeral Services

The act of commemorating the life of someone you love is a deeply personal and sacred act. It's a powerful way to celebrate the memories of love you shared, as well as honor what made your loved one special.

While arranging a memorial or funeral service can feel emotionally draining, it can be a helpful step in the healing process. It offers an opportunity for reflection, shared mourning, and connection.

Yet, it can be very difficult, and it's important to prioritize caring for yourself emotionally and mentally. The support structures around you are there to be leaned on, so don't hesitate to do so.

Below are considerations to help guide you through this important, time-honored ritual:

Seek Support

Engage the help of close friends or family members early on. They can assist in planning, coordinating, and ensuring everything goes as smoothly as possible during the service.

Determine the Type of Service

Decide if you wish to have a burial or cremation. You may also consider whether to have a funeral right away or plan for a memorial service that can take place later. These choices may be influenced by religious beliefs, personal preferences, or financial constraints. Whatever you choose, consider adding personal elements such as your loved one's favorite music, photos, or visuals that reflect the personality and life of your loved one.

Determine the Location of Service

Choose a funeral home, sacred place, or any special space you love that matches your budget and specific wishes. Don't hesitate to honor your loved one in a manner that feels authentic to who they were and the love you shared. Also, be sure to ask questions and get a clear understanding of all costs involved.

Sharing Service Details

Inform family, friends, and colleagues about the date, time, and location of the service. Utilize phone calls, social media, or printed announcements.

Considering Legacy

You may want to consider additional options like memorial gardens, online tribute pages, or charity donations in the name of your loved one as a lasting way to honor their memory.

Consider Your Finances and Seek Financial Assistance if Necessary

If affording a memorial or funeral presents challenges, there are a number of options to consider pursuing.

Insurance

First, check if your loved one had any life insurance or prepaid funeral plans. Next, if it is feasible, reach out to local charities, non-profits, or religious institutions that may offer financial assistance. If your loved one did not have a will and did not name a beneficiary on the account, accessing your loved one's assets may take several months.

Raising Money

You may also want to consider using crowdfunding platforms like GoFundMe that will allow friends and community members to support you and your family by making financial contributions. It's important to note that fundraising efforts such as GoFundMe may reduce state victim compensation awards. However, the crime victim compensation fund does not provide immediate financial assistance and has a financial limit per award, so weighing the assistance available to you is important.

Ohio Crime Victim Compensation Fund

Finally, in the state of Ohio, there is the Ohio Victims of Crime Compensation Program - a program designed to offset some of the financial losses you may have suffered due to the loss of your loved one.

With the exception of a few disqualifying conditions, this supplemental program offers up to \$7,500 for funeral expenses and an additional \$750 for crime scene cleanup. The promise of this program is not merely in the money it offers, but in the acknowledgment that your suffering has been seen, and your need to heal is valued.

While the Crime Victim's Compensation Fund may be able to offer assistance with funeral expenses, the maximum they will cover (if claim is approved) will likely not cover your entire expenses. Also, be sure to factor in any financial assistance will be awarded as a reimbursement, not as an upfront cash payment.

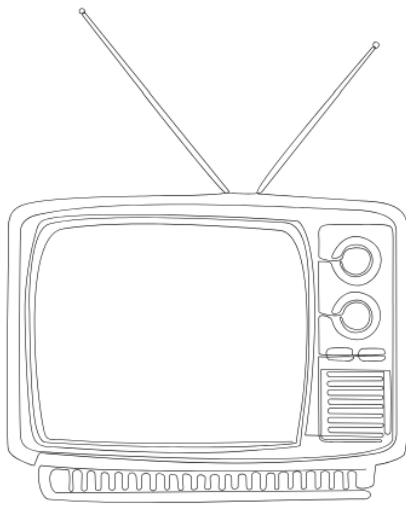
For more detailed information or to apply for Crime Victims Compensation, you can reach out directly to the Ohio Attorney General's Office at 800-582-2877 or visit their website. The Attorney General's Office serves as an advocate of your rights and a provider of essential information to empower you moving forward.

KEY TAKEAWAY

During your planning, always keep at the front of your mind that this service is a personal expression of your admiration for your loved one. There are no right or wrong ways to do it - only the way that feels meaningful to you.



Notes



Chapter 3: Media Considerations

Navigating the media landscape after homicide can be agonizing and utterly exhausting. Without choice, there is the potential for your personal grief to be turned into a public spectacle. Know that there are steps you can take to manage the emotional intrusion of media.

Designate a Spokesperson

Consider appointing a trusted individual to be your spokesperson to handle all media inquiries. This could be a family member, friend, legal counsel, or someone familiar with media relations. This person can act as a buffer and protect your privacy and mental health.

With your permission, they can prepare a formal statement. This can help address the media's questions and ensure your message is being accurately expressed.

Other options for a spokesperson include hiring a professional public relations or crisis management expert, seeking out support groups, or contacting organizations specializing in victim support.

Limit Social Media Exposure

In our digital age, news spreads fast on social media, especially on platforms like X, Facebook, and Instagram. Seriously consider taking a hiatus or setting your profiles to private. You will also want to be extremely cautious about sharing information that could interfere with investigations, or your own privacy should you decide to stay active on social media.

Avoid Spontaneous Interviews

For some, it will feel natural to want to share feelings, especially if there are feelings of injustice and outrage. If this is you, it is perfectly understandable and okay if you take extra precautions to be thoughtful in your responses. This is important because you will want to avoid sharing information you may later regret, always take time to think before agreeing to any interviews.

You may also consider posting a message at your home with a brief statement asking for privacy, and/or providing a phone number for your media representative.



Know Your Rights

If at any time you feel harassed by the media, or if they are trespassing on private property, you have the right to honor your self-defined boundaries and ask them to promptly leave. If they persist, contact law enforcement without hesitation.

Special Considerations for High-Profile Cases

For various reasons, national media may pick up the story of a homicide creating intense public attention and the possibility of exploitation. Homicides that involve celebrities, hate crimes, or those with racial or political implications will no doubt attract intense public attention and media exploitation. If your situation falls into any of the above categories, here are a few important reminders:

1. Be extra vigilant about what information is shared publicly.
2. Reach out to law enforcement to find out if there is information they may not want shared publicly due to the investigation.
3. Seek professional guidance on managing media interactions.
4. Establish a strong support network. If you have an attorney, they may be able to manage media attention, or you could find out if there are crisis management professionals in your area that may be able to help.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Please remember that you remain in control of your situation, even amidst the chaos. You have the absolute right to set your own personal boundaries, and to have them honored. You get to decide if, when, and how you choose to engage with the media. Above all else, prioritize your emotional and mental well-being—that is most important right now.



Notes



Chapter 4: The Voices of Grief

The emotional aftermath of losing a loved one to homicide can present a wide range of thoughts and feelings that may overwhelm and confuse you. It's natural to wrestle with disbelief, shock, and denial as you come to terms with what happened.

Common Reactions

- **Disbelief:** "I can't believe they're gone. This doesn't feel real."
- **Pain:** "There's this constant ache that just won't go away."
- **Confusion:** "I keep replaying that day in my mind, trying to make sense of it all."
- **Questioning:** "Why did this happen? How could something like this occur?"
- **Wishful Thinking:** "If only I had been there, maybe things would have been different."

These reflections are some, but not all possible responses to the trauma of losing someone violently. They show the range of grief you might experience.

Physical and Mental Impact

It's not uncommon for such intense emotional turmoil to disrupt your sleep, concentration, and even your memory. You may experience flashbacks or find it difficult to focus on daily tasks. Physical symptoms like anxiety-induced nausea or digestive problems can also occur, signaling the body's reaction to acute stress. If you had physical or mental health concerns or diagnoses before this happened, those concerns or symptoms can be exacerbated after experiencing this level of trauma.

Navigating Your Feelings

Acknowledging these feelings as natural responses to an unnatural event is essential. This understanding can help you begin to heal. While everyone's process is unique, finding solace in shared experiences can be comforting. Consider joining a support group where you can connect with others who understand the profound nature of your loss. Ohio has local support groups throughout Ohio, and Parents Of Murdered Children (POMC) offers advocacy, emotional support and support groups through their Ohio chapters.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Recognizing the wide range of thoughts and feelings associated with grief is key. There's no right or wrong way to feel. Remember, grief is not linear, and it's okay to seek help. Support groups and professional guidance can offer comfort and a framework to manage your grief, reassuring you that you are not alone.



Notes



Chapter 5: Social Discomfort and The White Noise of Isolation

After a homicide, the isolation felt by survivors can be profound. As k. Neycha Herford discusses in her book, “White Noise: The Underbelly of All That Lingers, Surviving Sudden-Death Grief,” society often amplifies this isolation with what she describes as “white noise.” This term doesn’t just describe silence, but speaks to a pervasive and painful absence of meaningful connection, making survivors feel even more alone.

Herford writes, “The tragically bereaved are often kept at a distance, receiving awkward pleasantries while their grief goes unacknowledged, unexpressed, and unhealed.” The avoidance experienced by homicide survivors often stems from other people’s fears of saying the wrong thing. This tendency of others to shy away from the harsh realities of violent loss can leave you feeling unsupported and misunderstood, which can intensify a sense of loneliness and alienation.

During times like this, seeking out spaces where your experiences are validated and supported is necessary. Support groups, grief counseling, and community networks designed for those affected by homicide provide crucial platforms for connection.

These groups offer more than just solace; they provide a community that affirms your feelings and supports your healing. Engaging with these communities can help break through the “white noise,” allowing your voice and your grief to be heard and respected.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Understanding and navigating the social challenges after a homicide is vital. While everyone’s grief is unique, you don’t have to face it alone. Supportive communities and networks are available to listen, recognize your pain, and provide the necessary support to help you deal with your loss.



Notes



Chapter 6: Trauma's Impact on Grief and Your Coping Mechanisms

Understanding Grief and Trauma

When someone you love is suddenly taken away by another's intentional act, the feelings you experience are more than just sadness. It's also trauma - a penetrating and unsettling energy that changes you in unexpected ways. Recognizing that both sadness and grief are natural parts of your experience is crucial.

What is Trauma?

Trauma is a highly charged emotional reaction to a shocking and painful event, such as the sudden loss of a loved one to violence. Losing someone suddenly can make you feel powerless. You might catch yourself replaying "what if" or "if only" scenarios in your mind, attempting to grasp some sense of control over what happened. This is a common way to try to make sense of an incomprehensible loss.

The intense shock, physical and emotional responses that follow constitute what we call trauma.



What Trauma Looks Like

Trauma manifests in various forms. Emotionally, you might feel intense sadness, anger, or fear. Physically, it might be hard to sleep, eat, or you may feel constantly on edge. Your body might react as if it's in danger, keeping you in a state of heightened alertness, even when there's no immediate threat. This can leave you feeling anxious, hypersensitive, and easily startled.

The physical and emotional trauma response can last minutes, hours or sometimes days. During this, your brain/body operate on "auto pilot" and your reactions may not make sense to you because of this. You may have a similar response, months and even years after the loss. As the body begins to return to a balanced state after a trauma response, you may experience extreme exhaustion and emotional release. This is a normal response to an abnormal and profound loss.

Mentally, you may relive the traumatic event, seeking out every detail of the horrific loss and replaying it in your mind over and over. You may feel detached from reality, or experience feelings of guilt or shame. Again, these reactions are your mind and body's attempt to cope with an overwhelming situation.

As you confront the fallout of the sudden loss of someone dear, remember that taking care of yourself is vital. There are many resources available to help you manage the impact of this traumatic event, some of which can be found on page 47 of this booklet. The next chapter will delve into essential self-care strategies that can support you in strengthening your resilience and emotional well-being.

Grief following a traumatic and violent death is experienced differently than other forms of grief. The additional layers of trauma as a result of a violent and unexpected death can complicate the grieving process, and you may feel that grief support groups and other forms of support do not address the complications that a violent traumatic loss can create. Traumatic and violent deaths can increase occurrences of PTSD and prolonged grief, but it is important to know that not all persons experiencing traumatic loss will experience this. Please consider locating a trauma and grief counselor in your area, as well as support groups specific to traumatic loss.

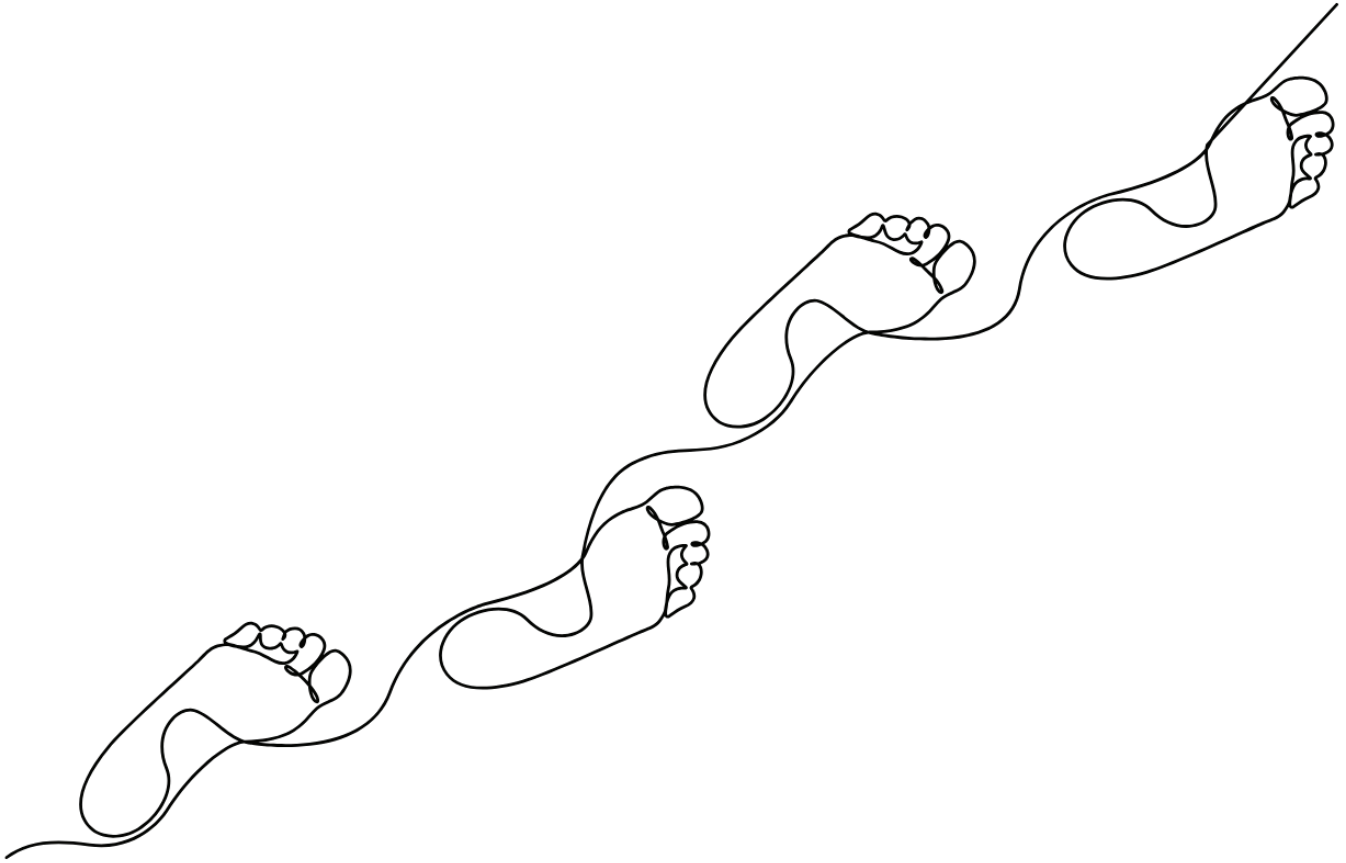
KEY TAKEAWAY

Recognizing and understanding the trauma from the sudden loss of a loved one is essential for your healing process. Embracing self-care is not just beneficial; it's a crucial act of self-preservation. Actively using the resources available to address the emotional, physical, and mental impacts of your trauma is vital. These steps are not just about recovery—they are about sustaining life and fostering resilience in the aftermath of tragedy.



Notes

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Chapter 7: Navigating Complicated Losses

The grief that accompanies a homicide is deeply affected by the circumstances surrounding the loss. Each scenario - whether it involves gang violence, hate crimes, excessive force by law enforcement, or domestic violence - brings unique challenges and societal implications that can negatively impact your grief and ability to heal.

There are many kinds of grief that people may judge or not understand. Sometimes this is because of how the person died, the way they lived, or the relationship between the person who died and the person who is grieving. Some examples of these more complicated types of loss include:

Gang Violence

Losing someone to gang violence intensifies grief with the complexities of community dynamics and ongoing conflicts. If you're affected by such a tragedy, you might feel pressure to align with community groups or face threats of further violence. This can add layers of fear to your grief. It is crucial to acknowledge that your pain is valid. Beyond the immediate danger, you might feel deeply isolated because of societal judgements and stigma directed at the circumstances of the loss, not the person you loved.

Hate Crimes

Grieving the loss of someone who was a victim of a hate crime can be very hard. It means facing the painful truth that they were harmed because of hate or unfair beliefs about who they were. This could be related to their race, gender, sexual orientation, culture, or religion. Because of this, you may feel less safe, more hurt, and more alone, and it may be harder to feel connected to others who can support you..

Officer-Involved Homicides and Police Brutality

Deaths resulting from police brutality can evoke an intense sense of betrayal, especially in African American and other communities disproportionately affected by such violence.

These incidents can bring up a range of emotions, including grief, despair, and outright rage. Police-involved deaths often attract public scrutiny and are widely discussed in the news and on social media, which can increase your emotional turmoil. Survivors frequently find themselves thrown into social justice activism, driven not by choice, but by a necessity stemming from a lack of police accountability.

These types of homicides can arise from various circumstances, including police brutality, but also accidental deaths, manslaughter, or situations where the use of deadly force is deemed necessary. When investigations justify these actions, you may be left struggling with unresolved questions and a persistent sense of hopelessness.

Domestic Violence

The murder stemming from domestic violence carries the heavy burden of betrayal and a shattered sense of safety. The dynamics are particularly complicated in cases like murder-suicide, where the perpetrator was a close family member, such as a father who kills a mother and then himself. If children are involved, you may find yourself in custody disputes and/or with the added responsibility of raising and caring for children who have been heavily impacted by the trauma and loss. These situations can leave families fighting with a tangled legacy of love, fear, and sorrow, intensified by the public and private scrutiny such tragedies often attract.

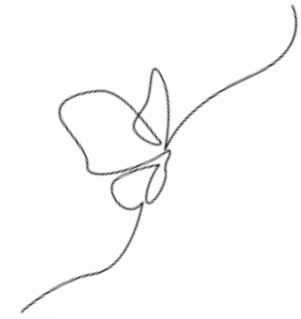
KEY TAKEAWAY

Each type of stigmatized murder significantly shapes the grieving process. It adds layers to the personal pain of homicide, when it involves community issues and deep-rooted societal problems that make managing grief even more challenging. It's vital to connect with support networks that understand these complexities, who can provide grounding and shared strength for you during your healing journey.



Notes

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Chapter 8: Self-Care: An Essential Step in Your Journey

In the immediate aftermath of extreme trauma, the idea of “self-care” might feel impossible or even irritating. You might not have the energy for typical self-care activities. That’s completely understandable.

In this difficult time, self-care isn’t a luxury; it’s about doing the absolute minimum to keep yourself functioning and safe when everything feels like it’s fallen apart. It’s about self-preservation.



Renowned author Audre Lorde famously said, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” This powerful reminder underscores the urgency of self-care, particularly following the traumatic experience of losing a loved one to homicide. Far from a luxury, self-care is a vital practice that sustains your ongoing ability to cope and heal.

Think of self-care as your lifeline, actions that will help you stay afloat.

Essentials of Self-Care: A Lifeline in Times of Crisis

Self-care involves intentional actions to nurture your physical, emotional, and mental health. When you are severely distressed, “self-care” can be as simple as drinking water, eating something easy, and taking a few moments to just sit still.

Here are some foundational strategies to consider:

Kindness and Grace

Recognize that experiencing trauma and grief is a normal response to abnormal events. It’s okay to feel overwhelmed, and it’s okay to need help.

Say Yes to Care

When someone offers to bring food, accept their kindness. Let them know something simple you’d enjoy—even if it’s just the basics. You deserve support.

If someone asks how they can help, give them clear, simple tasks:

- “Can you sit with me?”
- “Can you make sure I drink water?”
- “Can you help me call that number?”

Accept Help with Basic Tasks

Allow trusted people to assist with laundry, groceries, or paperwork. Your focus right now is simply getting through the day.

Professional Support

A counselor or therapist can provide invaluable support. They offer a safe space to express your feelings and begin to process your grief.

Community Connection

Engaging with support groups or community organizations can diminish feelings of isolation by connecting you with others who understand your experience.

Creative Expression

Activities like journaling, art, or music allow you to process emotions in a constructive way.

Physical Activity

Simple exercises like walking or yoga can significantly boost your mood and reduce stress.

Nutrition and Hydration

Proper diet and hydration support both physical and emotional health.

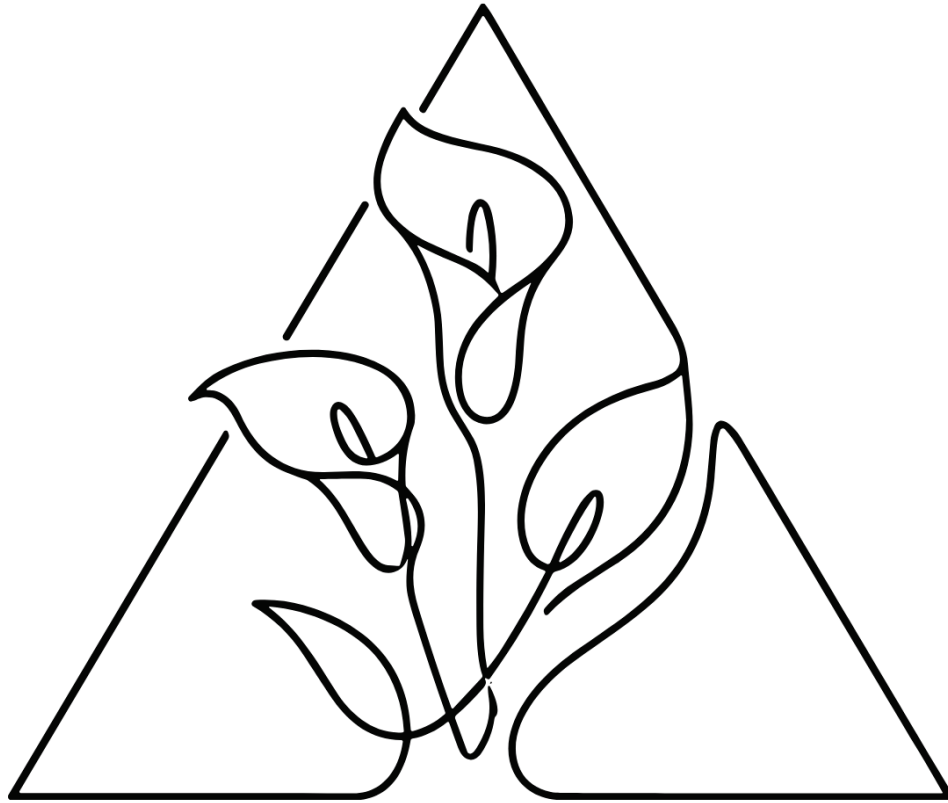
Rest

Ensure adequate sleep and allow yourself to rest when needed.

Movement

When moving feels impossible, start small. Set mini goals: Roll over, stretch your feet, or sit up for a few minutes. These small actions count as progress, it is important to acknowledge them.

When everything feels hard, focus on the essentials that keep your body functioning. Small steps count.



Basic Needs

Breathe

When you feel overwhelmed, pause and take three slow, deep breaths. This is a physical way to help calm your body.

Easy Personal Hygiene

When showering, brushing your hair, or brushing your teeth feels impossible, try quick alternatives:

- Use a wet washcloth or wipes to clean your face and underarms.
- Rinse your mouth with water or use mouthwash.
- Tie your hair back to keep it out of your face.
- Change your underwear and socks.

Hydrate

Keep a water bottle nearby and take small sips. You don't need to drink a large amount; any hydration helps.

Make Eating Simple and Easy

Right now, preparing a full meal might feel overwhelming—and that's completely okay. Give yourself permission to choose what feels easiest:

- Grab-and-go snacks you don't have to think about
- Simple, low-effort meals that take little energy



Navigating Physical Stagnation (Finding Comfort Where You Are)

Severe depression can make leaving your bed or room feel impossible. That's okay—focus on making your space work for you.

- **Make Your Space Manageable.** If you can't leave your room, bring essentials to you:
- **Create a "Survival Station":** Keep a container with water and snacks, paper plates, plastic cutlery, a trash can, tissues, and any medications within easy reach. This reduces the energy needed for basic tasks.
- **Minimize Clutter:** Cleaning everything can wait. For now, just remove garbage and food waste daily (ask for help if needed). Your well-being comes first.

Routine and Structure

Maintaining a daily routine can provide a sense of stability and normalcy amidst chaos. Predictable actions can provide comfort. Try waking up and going to bed around the same time, or having your coffee the same way each morning. These small habits can help you feel more grounded.

Learning

Educating yourself about grief and trauma can help you understand and manage your feelings more effectively.

Mindfulness and Meditation

These practices help you find peace in the present moment, often providing a much-needed break from the intensity of grief.

Nature

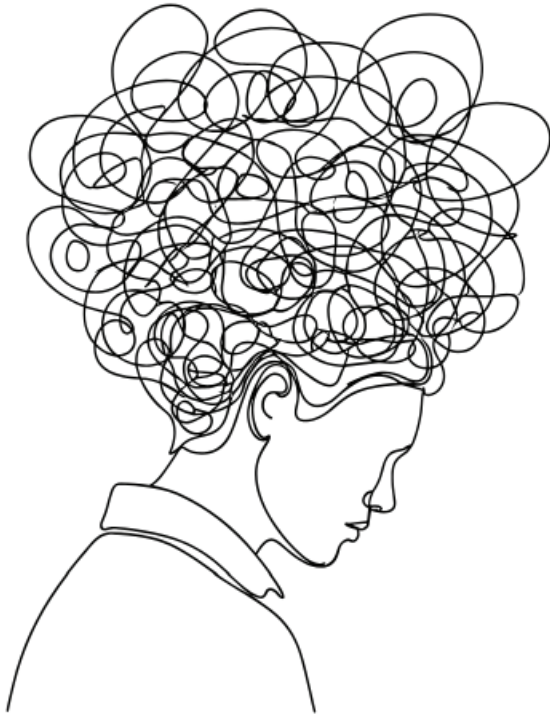
Spending time in natural surroundings can soothe the heart and remind you of the larger cycle of life and renewal.

Setting Boundaries

It's okay to protect your energy and emotional space. Learning to say "no" to commitments or interactions that feel overwhelming is an act of self-care. Remember, setting boundaries isn't selfish—it's necessary for your healing journey. Be gentle with yourself as you navigate what feels right for you during this time.

Limit Emotionally Charged Scenarios

Avoid media and situations that may intensify your grief or cause you further distress.



Mental Health Awareness During Traumatic Loss

Many people may have already been navigating mental health challenges before their loved one's homicide. A traumatic loss can intensify symptoms such as anxiety, depression, or PTSD.

- **Notice Changes:** Pay attention if symptoms worsen—like increased isolation, difficulty sleeping, or heightened panic.
- **Prioritize Mental Health:** This is not a sign of weakness; it's a normal response to an overwhelming event.
- **Reach out for Support:** If possible, connect with a mental health professional or a trusted person. Even small steps—like sending a text or scheduling a brief check-in—can help.
- **Continue or Begin Care:** If you were already receiving treatment, keep those supports if you can. If not, consider whether starting treatment might help during this acute phase.

Your mental health matters. Caring for it is an act of survival and self-preservation.

Emergent Help

If you are experiencing severe depression with no energy and thoughts of harming yourself, it can be a symptom of extreme trauma. Your most important priority is to seek immediate help.

Acknowledge your feelings. The pain you are experiencing can feel overwhelming, and thoughts of ending that pain may arise. This can be a symptom of severe depression and trauma.

If you are feeling unsafe or having thoughts of harming yourself, the most important step is to reach out for support.

- Call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the US/Canada)
- Text "HOME" to 741741 (Crisis Text) Line).

Take the First Step

If you are considering self-harm, focus on taking just one step towards getting help, i.e., telling a safe person immediately or calling 988. You don't have to figure it out alone.

How Others Can Help

Supporting someone after a homicide can feel overwhelming, but your care and presence truly matter. For compassionate guidance and practical ways to assist family members, loved ones, and anyone impacted by homicide, please visit the OVWA Homicide Co-Victim Resource website.

There you'll find recommendations and resources to help you offer comfort, provide meaningful support, and connect survivors to the help they need.

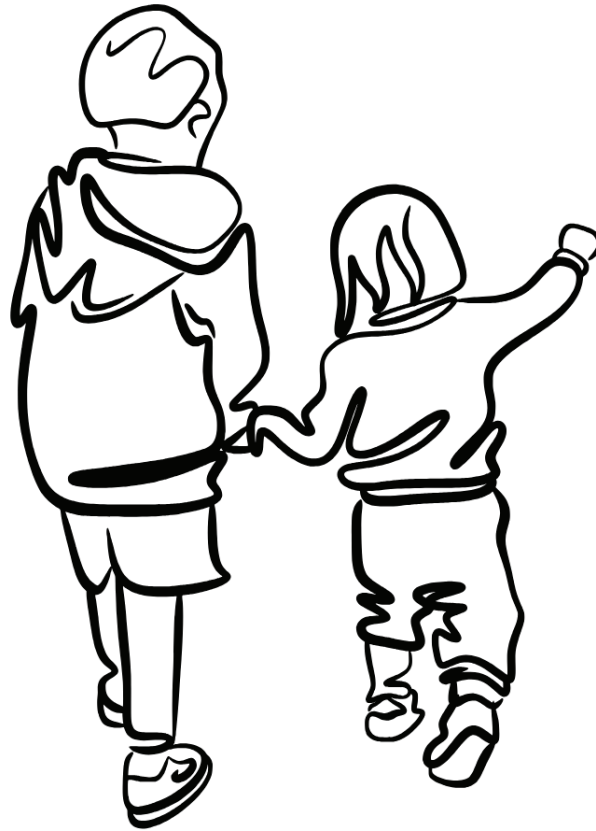
KEY TAKEAWAY

Self-care is often misunderstood as a luxury or an indulgence, but in reality, it is a fundamental aspect of your healing journey. Each act of self-care is a step toward recovery, honoring both your resilience and the memory of your loved one. Engage in self-care practices not just for survival but as a profound expression of self-respect and self-love.



Notes

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Chapter 9: Supporting Child Co-Victims

When a child loses a loved one to homicide, their grief is layered with fear, confusion, and sudden changes to daily life. According to developmental guidance from the National Organization for Victim Advocacy (NOVA), children process trauma and loss differently depending on their age and stage of development—young children may struggle with understanding permanence, while adolescents often experience intense emotions and question safety and trust.

Try to create environments that prioritize safety, predictability, and choice. Reducing exposure to graphic details, using clear and simple language, and allowing children to express feelings in their own way—whether through words, play, or silence can be very helpful for children experiencing this violent loss. Collaborate with caregivers and schools to maintain routines and provide consistent emotional support. Above all, professionals and caregivers should validate the child's experience, avoid judgment, and empower them with age-appropriate information about what to expect during investigations and court processes.

Healing is not linear. Children need patience, reassurance, and a network of support that respects their unique grieving process.

Steps You Can Take to Explain a Homicide Death to a Child

Children are literal thinkers. Avoid vague phrases that cause confusion (they may think the person will come back or wake up).

- Find a quiet, private place without interruptions; turn off your phone.
- Use clear, simple language to begin:
- “I need to talk to you about something. I am very sorry to tell you that a sad and terrible thing has happened to _____. They were (say where they were and simply what happened there). _____ was hurt so badly by a person that he/she died.”
- Avoid euphemisms like “passed away,” “gone,” or “went to sleep.”



A Few Words You May Want to Define

- **Death:** When a person's body stops working and they cannot be alive anymore.
- **Homicide:** When a person ends someone else's life on purpose.
- **Grieve/Grieving:** Normal thoughts, feelings, and reactions we have after someone close dies; they help us deal with what happened.
- **Trauma/Traumatic:** A sudden, frightening, and overwhelming thing that happens.

Protecting Our Small Co-Victims

For child co-victims, the trauma of homicide is profound. They not only lose a loved one but often lose their sense of safety in the world.

- **The "Five C's":** Children often harbor secret worries that they must work through: Did I Cause it? Can I Catch it? Why couldn't I Control or Cure it? And who will take Care of me now?
- **Regression and Behavior:** Children often "puddle jump" through grief, appearing fine one minute and being overwhelmed the next. Trauma may manifest as tummy aches, nightmares, or "death play" where they act out violent themes with toys to make sense of the event.
- **Honesty is Vital:** Use simple, direct, and age-appropriate language (e.g., "His body stopped working" rather than "He went to sleep"). Children often fill in gaps of information with their own imagination, which can be more frightening than the truth.
- **Routine as Medicine:** Establishing structured and predictable routines helps children feel secure. Consistency in when they eat, sleep, and go to school acts as an emotional anchor.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Please visit our website at <https://owwa.org/homicide/> for resources specifically for children in our Children's Corner.



Notes



Chapter 10: Understanding Your Rights as a Crime Victim

As you navigate the complexities of the criminal justice system, being aware of your rights is absolutely necessary. The following sections provide basic information about the criminal justice process, and the constitutional rights afforded to crime victims. If the homicide of your loved one has not resulted in an arrest, these sections may not apply to your situation at this time. Counties in Ohio have varying levels of advocacy services and some counties begin service when criminal charges have been filed. Please know that OVWA provides a helpline for co-victims of homicide which is available to you immediately and may be helpful if you have yet to be connected to an advocate.

Before you review the list of your constitutional rights, please note this list is an abbreviated list intended to be easy to be understand. The Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center has created a Crime Victims' Rights Toolkit, an online interactive tool that can provide more specific information on your situation, providing you with letters and forms to assert your rights.

You are not required to hire an attorney for the criminal case. In Ohio, there are two parties involved in a criminal case - the prosecution and the defense. The prosecutor represents the State of Ohio, and the defense attorney represents the offender. You are considered a crime victim and may also be a witness. You have constitutional rights as a victim of crime. If you are pursuing civil lawsuits or remedies, it is advised to hire an attorney for those purposes.

Crime Victim Rights Attorneys

If you believe your constitutional rights as a victim of crime have been violated, the Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center (www.ocjvc.org) provides free legal assistance for violations of your rights as a victim of crime.

Now, let's take a look at some of your constitutional rights. They include:

Ohio Constitutional Rights for Victims of Crime

Request Your Rights

Some rights are automatic; others **must be** requested in writing. It is very important that you complete the Victim Rights Request form as soon as possible. Hopefully, you have received and signed the Victim Rights Request (VRR) form. If not, please download a copy of the form and provide it to either the law enforcement officer or the prosecutor's office assigned to the case. It is important that either law enforcement or the prosecutor's office file this completed and signed form with the court and that there is a documented entry that it has been filed.

Keep It Updated! If your contact info changes or you would like to change any part of the form, submit a revised form to the relevant agency (police, prosecutor, court, or prison).

Your Constitutional Rights

Participation & Information

- **Be Informed:** Request timely notice of all public court proceedings.
- **Be Present:** Attend public proceedings with or without a support person.
- **Be Heard:** Speak during key hearings (bond, plea, sentencing, parole).
- **Confer with the Prosecutor:** Upon request, meet with the prosecutor to share your wishes.

Safety & Privacy

- **Protection:** Reasonable protection from the accused.
- **Protection Orders:** Ask about obtaining one.
- **Refuse Contact:** Decline interviews or requests from the defense attorney.
- **Privacy:** Request removal of personal information from public documents.

Notifications

- **Case Updates:** Automatically receive general case status either by email, phone call, or in person.
- **Release/Escapes Alerts:** Must request this on your VRR form and sign up for notifications through VINE or ODRC Victim Services

Additional notification programs

Ohio VINE

Register online for automatic offender status updates for incarcerated individuals.

<https://vinelink.vineapps.com/state/OH>

Please note that if the offender is incarcerated and you are signed up with VINE, you may also get notifications when the offender has been transferred to another facility.

Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections Victim Services

<https://drc.ohio.gov/victim-services>

Email: DRC.Victim.Services@drc.ohio.gov, Phone 1-888-842-8464. After sentencing, the Office of Victim Services through ODRC offers advocacy and assistance to you throughout the duration of the offenders time incarcerated or on parole.

Restitution

You have the constitutional right to full and timely restitution for any out-of-pocket financial losses related to the crime. Keep all documentation of

bills, receipts, estimates etc., and provide those to the prosecutor. Your advocate may be able to assist you in understanding what to retain, and there is a document prepared by the Ohio Supreme Court that may answer further questions and help you organize this request.

Additional Financial Recovery options

Ohio Crime Victim Compensation Fund

<https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Individuals-and-Families/Victims/Apply-for-Victims-Compensation>

May cover medical bills, counseling, lost wages, and partial funeral costs—even if no arrest has been made. Crime Victim Compensation awards can be issued even if a formal restitution request is before the court on the criminal case, or if there is a civil lawsuit pending. It is recommended that you file a claim through the Crime Victims Compensation program as soon as possible. You are not required to have an attorney to file this claim, but if you choose to obtain legal assistance, please know that attorney fees may be reimbursable for assistance with the claim. Your victim advocate can assist you in the application, or please contact us at 1-866-275-6892 if you do not yet have an advocate

Civil Remedies

You may have civil remedies available, separate from the criminal case. You may consider hiring an attorney. It is important to hire an attorney that you feel comfortable with, and most attorneys will meet with you prior to you officially hiring them.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Understanding your rights empowers you to participate fully and ensures your voice is heard and respected throughout the process.



Notes

Chapter 11: The Criminal Justice System

Part 1: Navigating the Criminal Justice System

Navigating the complexities of the criminal justice system extends beyond simply understanding your rights. It requires a basic understanding of the process and choosing how and when you feel comfortable participating. Active engagement can impact the choices made by both the prosecutor and the court, as victim rights include providing meaningful input before any decisions are made in the case.

Preparing for Meetings and Interviews

Think of these conversations as opportunities to share your story, concerns, ask questions and provide your wishes for the outcome of the case. Bring necessary items: Collect all relevant case paperwork and documents. Ask for clarification: There are no “silly” questions—seek clarity whenever needed.

Emotions may run high before and during these meetings; writing down the questions you have will ensure you do not forget to ask. If you have a support person with you for the meeting, consider providing them with the same list of questions in the event something is missed.

Preparing for Court Appearances

Court appearances can feel intimidating, but preparation with your advocate helps reduce stress and manage expectations. It is your choice whether to attend all hearings – you are not required to attend unless you are under subpoena. Prepare with your advocate and familiarize yourself with courtroom procedures to reduce anxiety and manage expectations.

Courtroom attire is generally conservative, your advocate can assist further with rules specific to the court. Arrive on time, or a few minutes early. Be concise and clear when speaking, and don't hesitate to express uncertainty if you're unclear about something - complete honesty is necessary in these settings.

Practical Guidance for Courtroom Interactions

If your case proceeds to trial, both your advocate and the prosecutor can offer important preparation tips. They will address concerns regarding courtroom procedures and expectations. Since court protocols can vary, obtaining specific information about your local system is advised.

Establishing positive communications

Establishing a positive relationship is important, even when conversations can be emotionally difficult. Open and respectful communication is helpful and promotes your comfort level in seeking updates and clarifying any uncertainties. Remember, criminal justice professionals are likely managing extensive caseloads, so immediate responses may not always be possible. That does not mean that your questions, or the case, is unimportant.

KEY TAKEAWAY: YOUR CHOICES MATTER

The journey through the legal system can be complex and emotionally challenging. It's important to remember that you have choices in how you engage with this process, and your emotional well-being should always come first.

While active participation can be empowering for some, it's equally valid to step back if that feels right for you. You have the right to decide how much you want to be involved. Some may find comfort in familiarizing themselves with criminal justice procedures. Others might prefer to have a trusted advocate or family member represent their interests.

Whatever level of engagement you choose, open communication is valuable. The professionals you interact with can help ensure your voice is heard, whether you're actively participating or have chosen to be less involved.

Remember, there's no “right” way to navigate this process. Your journey is unique, and it's okay to adjust your involvement based on what feels manageable and supportive of your healing. Support services and victim advocates are available to help you understand your options and make decisions that feel right for you.

Part 2: The Criminal Justice System Journey Roadmap

Losing someone to homicide introduces you to a complex journey through the criminal justice system - a path that can often feel like navigating a puzzle in the shadow of trauma. It's common to feel overwhelmed by the detailed steps and rules, from the initial police investigations to the judicial decisions that conclude a case.

This section is designed to introduce you to each part of the process. Please remember that you can read as little or as much of this guide as you are able, honoring your capacity to tackle complex information during this time.

Vital Tip: It's important to recognize from the outset that the criminal justice system primarily focuses on legal procedures, which might not always align with your personal expectations or how you feel about your case. However, you are not alone in this.

Victim advocates are available in many communities, through prosecutor's offices, and police departments, to provide clear explanations and empower you with the knowledge needed to navigate this system confidently. You can connect with a victim's advocate through prosecutor's offices, law enforcement or other advocacy programs.

Finally, if at any point you feel that your rights have been violated, the Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center is at your disposal to offer free legal assistance. You can reach out to them at www.ocvjc.org for support.

The following information is to help explain the common hearings and procedures in a criminal court case. There could be additional hearings or it may not follow the same path for each case.

With this understanding, let's explore the various phases of the criminal justice process and set realistic expectations for the road ahead.



Investigation

The process begins when a homicide is reported. Police gather evidence, interview witnesses, and identify suspects. You may be asked for a statement or to identify property. You have the right to be notified of an arrest and to confer with the prosecutor about initial charges. The investigation may lead to a warrant for the offender's arrest.



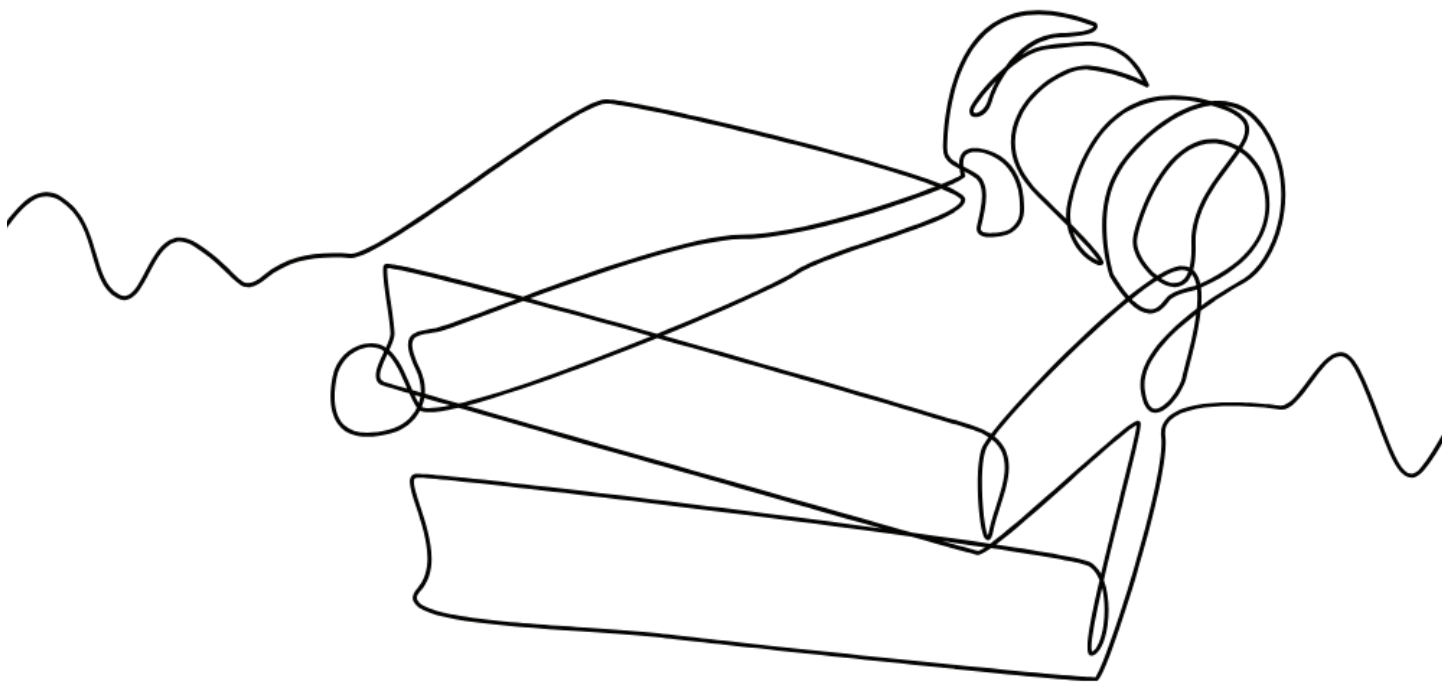
To Do: Contact your Victim Advocate to confirm your contact info and ensure your Victim Rights Request (VRR) form is processed.

Grand Jury

In Ohio, homicide charges are charged through a process called a Grand Jury. This is a non public process in which the prosecutor presents the facts of a situation to a panel of chosen jurors, specially selected for the process of grand jury. Unlike jury duty for a trial, this panel of citizens is chosen and their role is to look at the presented evidence and determine if the evidence rises to the level of filing criminal charges against a person. If charges are approved, it is considered an indictment, or grand jury indictment. A warrant will be issued for the offender's arrest or an arraignment will be scheduled. In the event the Grand jury finds there is not enough evidence to file a criminal charge, it is considered a "No Bill", and no further action will be taken at that time. However, the prosecution can still present the facts of the case to a grand jury in the future if additional evidence becomes available.



To Do: Register with Ohio VINE program and file a claim with the Ohio Crime Victim Compensation Program.



Arraignment & Bond

The defendant appears in court to hear the charges filed against them and will enter a plea. A plea is letting the court know how they would like to proceed with the case and whether they are pleading guilty or not guilty. It is also possible that a plea of not guilty by reason of insanity be filed, which will also start the process of psychiatric evaluations to determine if the defendant is competent to stand trial, and if they were competent at the time of the offense. This type of plea adds steps to the normal criminal justice process. It is very important to remember that in 99% of the cases of homicide, a not guilty plea is entered at the time of the arraignment. This is the only type of plea that will start the process below. The judge then decides whether they remain in jail or are released on bond.

Bond is an amount of money payable to the court (and returnable at the end of the case if the defendant complies with the bond conditions) to ensure the defendant will return for trial. Decisions by the court on an amount of bond consider both the likelihood of the person returning and the safety of the victims in the case, or the level of violence in the alleged offense. When setting bond, the Judge may add certain conditions the defendant must follow if they are able to post the bond set in the case.



To Do: You have the right to attend and be heard before any public hearing in which your rights are implicated. If you cannot attend, contact your advocate to submit a written statement or have an advocate speak on your behalf.

Discovery & Pre-Trial

This is often the longest stage, involving evidence exchange, legal motions, and meetings with attorneys and the judge to decide what evidence may be admitted in a trial, and what is not allowed to be presented.

Privacy & Safety: Under Ohio Criminal Rule 16, request that sensitive materials be marked “Counsel Only” so the defendant cannot personally view them. There are other crime victim rights that also may apply during this stage of the process.

Resolution (Plea or Trial)

About 75% of Ohio felony cases end in a plea agreement.

- **Negotiated Plea:** This is an agreement (sometimes referred to as a plea bargain) that the defense and the prosecution develop to avoid a trial and resolve the criminal charges against the defendant. This could mean reducing or dismissing one or more of the charges in exchange for a plea to others and may include recommendations for sentencing. You have the right to be notified and to confer with the prosecutor before an agreement is finalized.
- **Trial:** If no plea agreement is reached, you have the right to be present for the entire trial, even if you testify. Your victim advocate and the prosecutor will assist you in preparing for a trial. It is important for you to be made aware of any difficult information that might come out in testimony or evidence during the trial, so that you may prepare yourself and decide if you want to step out during certain testimony. The trial could be conducted with a jury. If it is a jury trial, the process of picking the jury is a formal process that will occur before the trial begins. A jury is convened by citizens reporting for jury duty and then answering questions so that the parties to the case can officially pick people they would like to serve on the jury. This is a legal process where each side can ask questions and can reject a certain number of jury members. The jury is required to attend the entire trial and then meet after the trial ends to decide if the defendant is guilty of any, all or some of the charges filed against them.

 **To Do:** Request a secure waiting area (if possible) to avoid contact with the defendant's family, discuss with the prosecutor or your advocate if, and how often you would like to be in the courtroom, what evidence will be presented and if you are considering wearing or bringing items in memory of your loved one

Sentencing

Upon a guilty plea, or after have been found guilty after the trial, the judge determines penalties and orders restitution. In capital (death penalty) cases juries also make recommendations for sentencing.

Victim Impact Statement: You may submit a written or oral statement about the crime's impact.

 **To Do:** Provide all financial receipts (funeral, counseling, lost wages) to the prosecutor in the manner determined by the prosecutor's office, and if you choose, prepare a victim impact statement. You may also consider if you would like a support person or your advocate to assist you at the sentencing hearing or in presenting a victim impact statement.

Note: Both the prosecution and the defense have the opportunity to present legal arguments regarding sentencing.



SPECIAL NOTE: NAVIGATING THE OUTCOME OF THE TRIAL

It's important to prepare for all possible outcomes as the trial concludes. Despite the hope for a verdict that brings justice, sometimes the result may be far from the justice you seek. This can be deeply disappointing and may intensify feelings of injustice and grief.

Finding other avenues to express your anger and outrage can be beneficial as having an outlet for your emotions has been proven to help. While it can't bring back your loved one, it can provide potential healing.

Remember, the outcome of the trial does not invalidate your feelings or the reality of your loss. It's crucial to seek support during this time, whether through counseling, community groups, or loved ones. Allow yourself generous space to process your emotions.

Post-Sentencing & Appeals

Defendants may appeal their conviction, and often on homicide cases, an appeal may be filed immediately. This begins the post-conviction phase of the criminal court process. By Ohio law, victims of Felony 1, 2, 3 crimes of violence have automatic rights. The Notification Unit of the Ohio Parole Board will search for you, if you are not registered to notify you of upcoming post-conviction actions, unless you opt-out of notifications. You will have additional services or assistance provided to you through the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, Office of Victim Services (OVS), if you choose. OVS is available throughout the post-conviction process. You may still have contact with your advocate who assisted you through the criminal case and/or the prosecutor, depending on the situation.



To Do: Contact ODRC Victim Services (888-842-8464) to request services and to request a Cease-and-Desist order if unwanted contact is happening when the incarcerated person is in prison.

Update your registration with Ohio VINE and ODRC/OVS for ongoing notifications.

Incarceration & Parole

The offender is transferred to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC).

The Office of Victim Services (OVS) through ODRC provides statutory and other notifications intended to ensure victim support and safety, including notice of offender's escapes, apprehensions, and offender deaths. Registering for notification with OVS allows victims to be fully informed of post-conviction events. OVS provides direct support to crime victims at victim conference day appointments, full board hearings, clemency hearings (death and non-death penalty cases), and violation hearings.

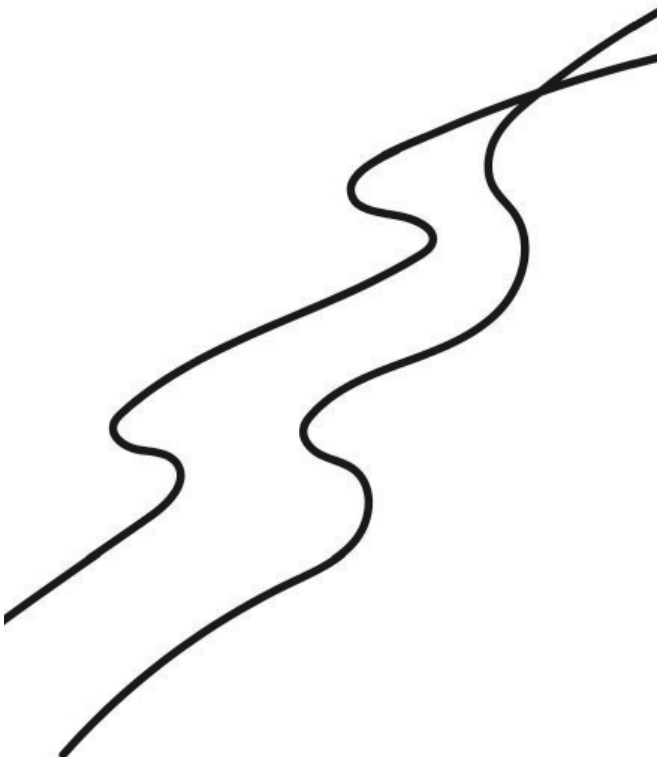
KEY TAKEAWAY

Armed with knowledge of your rights and having a general understanding about the criminal justice system, you're better equipped to navigate the legal journey ahead. This empowerment comes from understanding what you're entitled to and how to assert those rights, ensuring your voice is heard and respected every step of the way.

SPECIAL NOTE: CONCLUSION TO JOURNEY THROUGH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Navigating the criminal justice system presents a long journey filled with numerous challenges and important decisions. It's essential to approach each step at your own pace, supported by the resources and rights specifically designed to protect and empower you as a co-victim of crime.

The pursuit of justice and healing extends beyond confronting legal obstacles; it involves finding ways to restore and maintain your sense of security and well-being. As we transition to the next section, "Finding Support to Fill the Gaps - Advocacy," we will uncover how advocacy is crucial in supporting you throughout this process, ensuring that no victim has to face this journey alone.





Notes

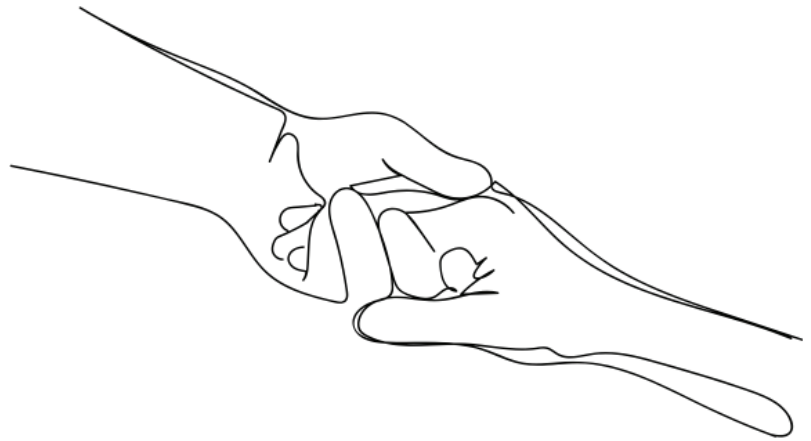
Chapter 12: Finding Support to Fill the Gaps - Advocacy

In the aftermath of tragic loss, victim advocates play a pivotal role in bridging the gaps within the criminal justice system, ensuring your voice is heard, your rights are upheld, and your needs are met. Many, but not all, counties have victim advocates in the prosecutor's office whose role is focused on you as the co-victim.

Here's how they provide comprehensive support:

Guided Assistance

From the moment tragedy strikes, advocates may be by your side, or they may become involved after the suspect has been arrested and charged in criminal court. When advocates are available, their role is to offer immediate support, access to necessary resources, assist with safety planning, and help you connect to resources that meet logistical needs. Their assistance allows you to focus on healing. By addressing your essential needs and helping to remove barriers to your participation in the justice process, advocates ensure you can engage fully and confidently.



Working Through Legal Processes

Advocates serve as your guide through the often intimidating landscape of the criminal justice system while offering clarity and support. They facilitate crucial discussions, ensuring your concerns and wishes are communicated effectively to legal professionals and professionals working on the case. If they are a division of the Prosecutor's Office, advocates may assist you in all stages of the criminal court process. Whether it's navigating pre-trial procedures, attending court proceedings, or understanding post-conviction processes, advocates may be there to ensure you have information about your crime victim rights. Some courts in Ohio have advocates who routinely provide support during protection order hearings.

Representation

Acting as your liaison, advocates may be able to convey your perspective at key stages of the legal process, from bond hearings to victim impact statements. They strive for fair treatment in all interactions, ensuring you're treated with respect and dignity. Advocates also maintain a collaborative relationship with criminal justice, legal and post-conviction support services, enhancing the network of support available to you.

Ongoing Support and Information

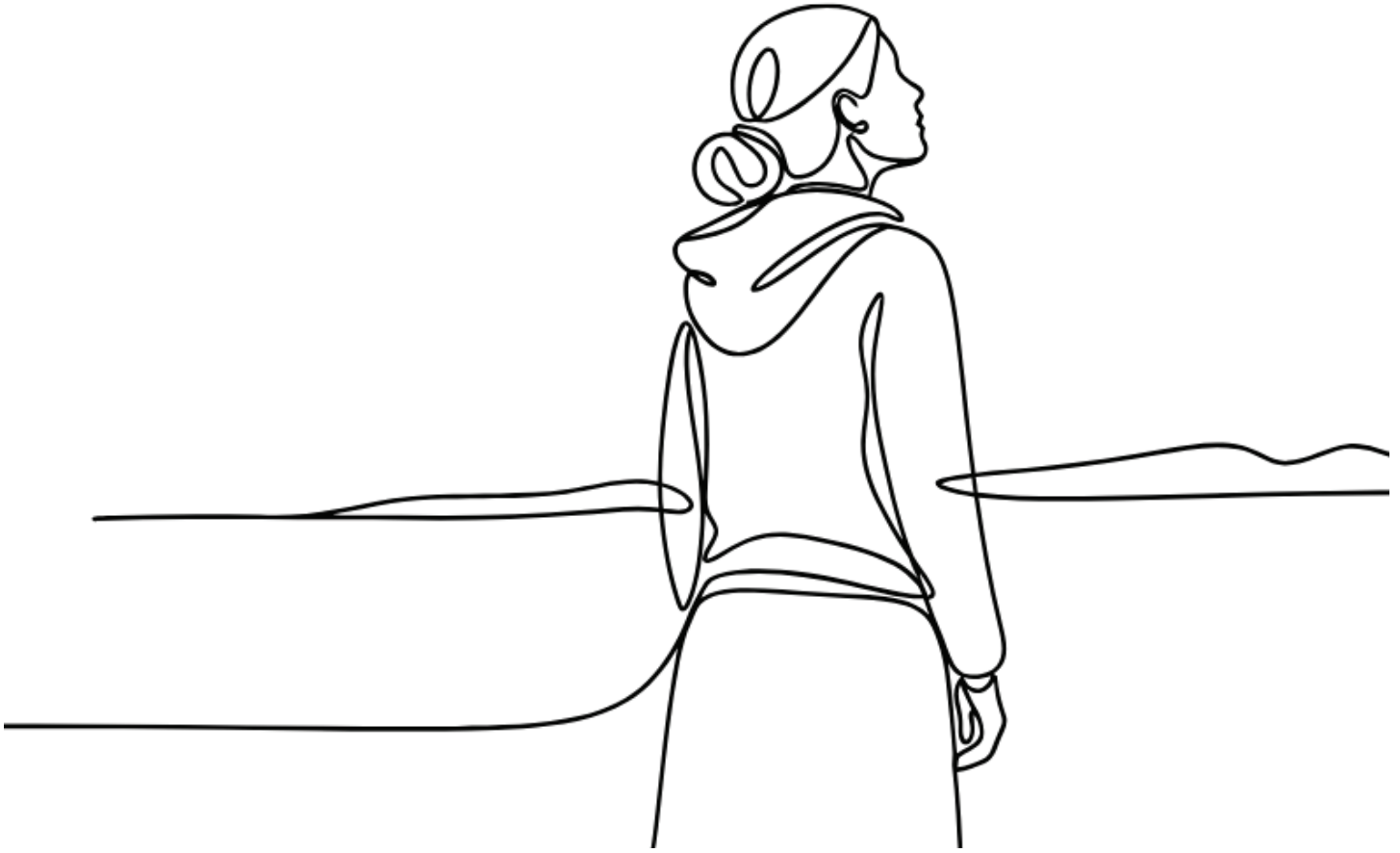
The advocacy relationship extends beyond the courtroom. Advocates offer support and keep you informed about significant events, such as appeals, judicial release hearings, parole hearings or other changes in the offender's status. Depending on the court action, you may continue to receive this support with the advocate you have worked with since the beginning of the case, or you may have an advocate through the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Correction.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Advocacy bridges the gaps that the criminal justice system alone cannot fill, providing a foundation of support, guidance, and understanding that is essential to your well-being.



Notes



Chapter 13: Honoring Your Journey: The Road Ahead

Pursuing your own healing and justice after homicide loss is long and often unpredictable; something you may have already realized. As unpredictable as it may be, managing it alone is nearly impossible.

The information on our website and in this guide was crafted not only to outline the practical steps and legal complexities of the criminal justice system, but to also recognize and validate your experience of grief, and most importantly - remind you that through advocacy, community support, and resources - you are not alone. This publication shares the voices of co-victims and advocates from Ohio, in addition to our writer and collaborator k. Neycha Herford.

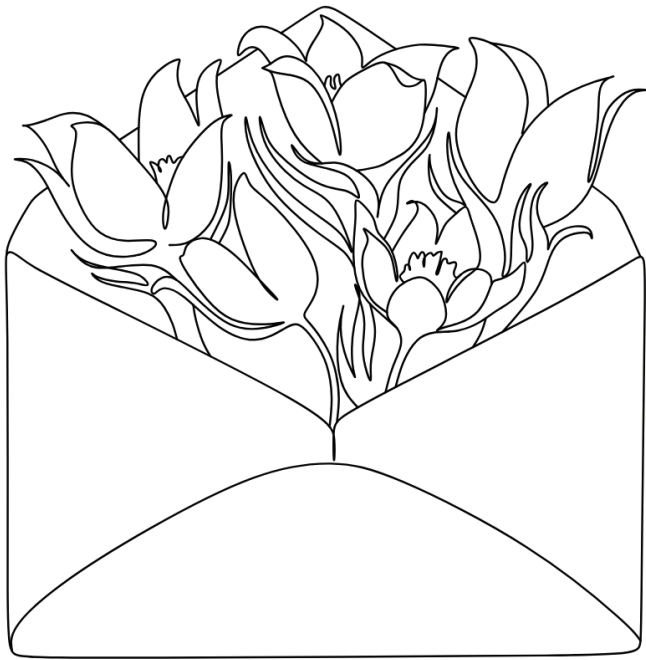
While no guide can fully capture the entirety of what you face, we hope that the pages you've turned have brought you some comfort, clarity, and a sense of companionship.

We acknowledge this may be the hardest thing you've ever had to endure. But every step you take, no matter how tough, comes from your strength and resilience. We salute you.

Your voice matters. Your loved one's life matters. You matter.

In the spirit of continuous support and care, we encourage you to reach out to the services and individuals listed in the resources section, who can assist as you move toward your new normal. Please do not hesitate to reach out to our Homicide Co-Victim Helpline 1-866-ASKOVWA (1-866-275-6892) at any time, and visit our webpage for more information. We can provide support and connection to local resources.

It is our wish that this guide will continue to serve as a steadfast companion on your journey from the life you once knew to your new reality. One day, perhaps when you least expect it, you may find that life still holds meaning; joy remains possible, and the darkest night always gives way to the light of day. May you find your light again, one day soon!



Resource Directory

This Resource Directory offers national, statewide, and local resources to support co victims of homicide. Services include emotional support, peer connection, mental health care, legal assistance, advocacy, culturally responsive services, and opportunities for healing and empowerment. We have included those resources you may find most useful in the immediate aftermath of a homicide. We have extensive additional resources on our Homicide Co-Victim Website, at <https://ovwa.org/homicide/>

If you need immediate emotional support in the aftermath of a homicide, contact the Ohio Homicide Co Victim Helpline during operating hours at 1-866-ASKOVWA or 1-866-275-6892. If you are in need of immediate mental health support, call or text 988, and if you need immediate assistance with basic needs please call 211.

How to use this resource directory

You do not need to contact all of these resources. Choose what feels most relevant to your needs right now—emotional support, legal help, or immediate safety. It is okay to move at your own pace.

Ohio Attorney General – Crime Victim Compensation Program

Financial assistance for funeral costs, counseling, lost wages, and crime scene cleanup.

<https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Individuals-and-Families/Victims/Apply-for-Victims-Compensation>

Ohio Attorney General – Crime Victim Services Directory

Statewide crime victim services information and searchable directory of local assistance programs. This directory has many of the crime victim advocacy programs listed, and other crime victim services. It is not representative of all the victim service organizations in Ohio. Feel free to contact the Ohio Homicide Co-victim Helpline if you are unable to find advocates in your area.

<https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Individuals-and-Families/Victims/Victim-Services-Directory>

VINE (Victim Information and Notification Everyday)

If the offender has been arrested, VINE assists with incarceration status and court notifications by phone, email, or text.

<http://vinelink.vineapps.com/state/OH>

Homicide & Traumatic Loss Support Groups and Advocacy Assistance

National Organization of Parents Of Murdered Children, Inc. (POMC) (Northwest / Southwest / Central Ohio)

Provides advocacy, support groups, and resource linkage for homicide co victims.

513 721 5683 | www.pomc.org

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) (National)

Advocacy to end drunk driving, 24/7 support, and advocacy services.

1 800 GET MADD or 1 800 438 6233 | www.madd.org

Cornerstone of Hope (Cleveland, Columbus, Lima)

Support groups for traumatic grief, including murder loss (Cleveland location).

cornerstoneofhope.org/support-groups

Columbus Public Health - Living After Loss Peer Support Group (Columbus)

Compassionate peer support services for those grieving traumatic loss, including homicide. Also referred to as Living After Loss Peer Support.

614 645 9602 | www.columbus.gov/publichealth

Sacred Circle Traumatic Grief Support Groups (Columbus)

Parent and sibling support groups hosted at Columbus Public Health.

Email: starkscounseling72@gmail.com

Survivors of Homicide Victims Support Group (Dayton)

Meets the 2nd Monday of each month. Free and open to any adult who has lost a loved one to homicide.

Montgomery County Victim/Witness Division, 41 N. Perry Street, Second Floor, Dayton, OH 45402 | 937 225 5623

Mothers of Murdered Columbus Children (Columbus)

Promotes peace and supports mothers who have lost children to violence.

614 721 2354 | mothersofmurderedcolumbuschildren.com

Crisis Support & Immediate Help

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text 988, or visit 988lifeline.org

Free, confidential, 24/7 support for emotional distress, suicidal thoughts, and crisis related to traumatic loss.

211 United Way

Dial 211 or visit your local United Way 211 website.

Connects individuals to local resources such as counseling, housing support, food assistance, utility help, and crisis services.

Mental Health & Trauma Informed Counseling

FrontLine Service (Northeast Ohio)

Provides crisis intervention, suicide prevention, trauma response, and behavioral health services.

- Children Who Witness Violence (CWWV)
- Supporting Children after homicide, suicide, or sudden traumatic loss
- Traumatic Loss Response Team (TLRT)

216 623 6555 | frontlineservice.org

Mount Carmel Crime & Trauma Assistance Program (CTAP)

Outpatient counseling, grief groups, trauma informed yoga, iRest meditation, and provider training.

mountcarmelhealth.com

Ohio State University Stress, Trauma And Resilience (STAR) Program

Therapy for survivors and training for providers.

614 293 7827 | medicine.osu.edu/departments/psychiatry-and-behavioral-health/star

Mental Health America of Ohio (Central Ohio)

Pro bono counseling, peer support, and connection services.

mhaohio.org

Columbus CARE Coalition

Crisis response and follow up after traumatic death, virtual support groups, and community education.

614 645 6248 | ColumbusCareCoalition@columbus.gov

National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI)

Mental health education, support groups, and a 24/7 Helpline.

nami.org/support-education/nami-helpline/

- Call 1 800 950 NAMI (6264)
- Text "Helpline" to 62640
- Email helpline@nami.org

Legal & Financial Assistance

Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center (OCVJC)

Offers free legal advocacy to protect and enforce crime victims' constitutional rights under Marsy's Law in Ohio.

<https://www.ocvjc.org/>

Ohio Legal Help

Plain language legal information, interactive self help tools, and referrals.

ohiolegalhelp.org

National Crime Victim Bar Association

Network of civil attorneys for victims of crime.

victimbar.org/attorney-referral-request-form

Supreme Court of Ohio & Ohio Judicial System

Forms, e filing, and attorney search. This may be helpful for information about protection orders, restitution or crime victim rights.

supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms

National Victim Service Organizations

VictimConnect Resource Center (VCRC)

A weekday phone, chat, and text-based referral helpline for all victims of crime in the United States and its territories that provides emotional support, information, and individualized referrals.

Call or text: 1-855-484-2846

Chat: Connect via the online platform <https://victimconnect.org/get-help/>

National Mass Violence Resource Center

nmvrc.org

Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) Directory of Crime Victim Services

ovc.ojp.gov/directory-crime-victim-services

National Organization of Parents Of Murdered Children, Inc. (POMC) (Northwest / Southwest / Central Ohio)

Provides advocacy, support groups, and resource linkage for homicide co victims.

513 721 5683 | www.pomc.org

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) (National)

Advocacy to end drunk driving, 24/7 support, and advocacy services.

1 800 GET MADD or 1 800 438 6233 | www.madd.org

Culturally Responsive & Community Specific Services

Asian American Community Services (AACS)

– 614 220 4023 | aacsohio.org

Asian Services in Action (ASIA) – asiaohio.org

Buckeye Region Anti Violence Organization (BRAVO – LGBTQ+) – 1 866 86 BRAVO | bravo.equitashealth.org

Community Refugee & Immigration Services (CRIS)

– 614 235 5747 | crisohio.org

Deaf World Against Violence Everywhere (DWAVE) –

614 678 5476 | dwaveohio.org

Tribal Resource Tool - A searchable directory of services available for all AI/AN survivors of crime and abuse in Indian Country tribalresourcetool.org/

US Together – 614 437 9941 | ustogether.us

Corrections, Law Enforcement & Investigations

Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Correction – Office of Victim Services

1 888 842 8464 | drc.ohio.gov/victims/registration

Ohio Parole Board – Victim Representative: 614 752 1200

Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI)

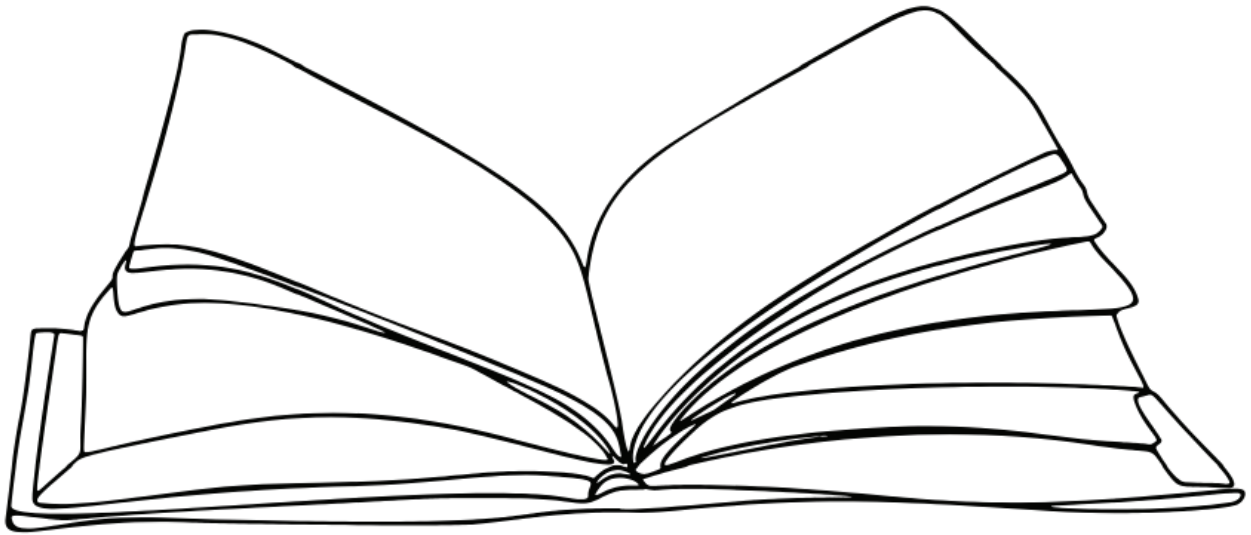
Cold case support and unsolved homicide resources.

855 BCI OHIO | OhioUnsolvedHomicides@OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov

ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Law-Enforcement/Local-Law-Enforcement/Cold-Case

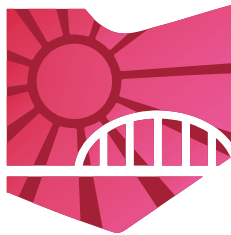
Project: Cold Case – projectcoldcase.org

Cold Case Foundation – coldcasefoundation.org



Recommended reading

Please visit our website at <https://ovwa.org/homicide/> for an extensive recommended reading list and for additional resources, updates, and ongoing support for co victims of homicide, or call 1-866-275-6892 (ASK-OVWA).



**Ohio Victim
Witness**
ASSOCIATION