



ACADEMY of Grief & Loss
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Special Considerations for Family Members Grieving after Homicide

Adapted from: Victims of Violence, <http://www.victimsofviolence.on.ca>

Children

Like adults, not all children experience grief the same way. Depending on the age of the child, it is hard for them to understand what the word *die* means. Below are some points that can help a child understand grief:

- Regardless of age, children should be told of their loved one's death as soon as possible and in an honest way.
- A good way to explain death to children who might not understand what dead means is that when we say someone has died that means the person's body stopped working.
- Provide safety and security for the child so that they know their basic needs are being met and that they are safe.
- Using activities like reading books, watching videos, making up stories, drawing pictures, and playing can help children to express their feelings. Children sometimes find it easier to have characters in a story, picture, or stuffed animal, talk for them and express their feelings through those characters.
- Clarify any misconceptions that children might have about why their loved one has died. Let them lead you with their questions. Reassure them that the death was not their fault. Tell them that crying is how you express your sadness because you miss that person; you are not crying because of something they did. An adult who shows and talks about their feelings models healthy coping skills and this will help children to deal with their own feelings.

Siblings

Siblings of homicide victims may experience some aspects of grief in unique ways because of their relationship with the victim and other members of the family. They may:

- Feel alone. Siblings are often very close, and losing a sibling can make them feel like there is no one who would understand them like their brother or sister would.
- Believe that they cannot/should not express their feelings with other members of the family because they want to protect them from additional pain. But it is healthier if all members of the family share their feelings and support each other.
- Feel long-term guilt when they begin to move forward in their life. Graduating from school, getting married, or having children may trigger this guilt because they may experience things that their sibling never had the chance to.
- Have to help take care of siblings or even your parents for some time, which may lead to anxiety, stress, and frustration.

Parents

In the natural order of life, parents do not outlive their children. A parent living with the reality that their child has died before them is very difficult to accept, and can sometimes lead to feelings of guilt. Parents may feel as if they have failed in their role as protector; they could not save their child, even if there was nothing they could have done to stop it.

For fathers, they may have difficulty with their grief because men have been socialized to keep their feelings to themselves, and not to be overly emotional. They are often taught showing emotions is a sign of weakness. They may feel they are supposed to be strong for the rest of the family adding additional pressure. Men are more likely to be restoration-oriented; meaning they want things to be repaired and to return to normal as soon as possible. Unfortunately, this reaction can be misinterpreted by their partner as not caring about their child who has died, and may lead to resentment.

For mothers, grief is often expected to be visible and intense. Women tend to be loss-oriented and concerned with their feelings, and focus on the emotions they are experiencing. They frequently need to recall and share memories of the child who has died.

