

What is Homicide Grief?

Not all grief is the same. Every person will manage and display their grief differently, and certainly different types of loss can result in varying emotions for the bereaved.

However, when someone is murdered, the family left behind embarks on an unwanted emotional rollercoaster, experiencing wave after wave of anger, guilt, blame, rage, depression and denial. Unlike other losses, this sudden and traumatic loss plunges the family head first into the middle of these emotions, which only adds to the intensity of their grief.

The intensity of this loss can remain with homicide survivor families forever after the actual incident, and over time, can result in further pressures. Often, family members struggle to communicate with each other, individuals struggle to retain concentration at work, children's schooling suffers, families can even disintegrate in divorces and estrangement, and people can begin to feel despondent about life in general.

Society offers many misconceptions about grief. Many people believe it is a lineal experience where the bereaved person goes through various 'stages' of their grief, eventually reaching some kind of 'acceptance'.

Our experience, as survivors of homicide victims is that while various emotions continue to crop up, they rarely come and go in stages, and can actually co-exist.

When a homicide occurs, the family's grief is often worsened by a seemingly drawn-out legal process, of bail hearings, preliminary trials, adjournments, mental health assessment, more adjournments and perhaps finally the trial. Then comes the preparation and delivery of an impact statement, and hopefully the sentencing. For families bereaved by homicide, the constant involvement in the investigation and the legal process creates a situation where survivors of homicide victims re-live the horror of what has happened to their loved one.

When the investigation is over and it then becomes a matter for the "Crown" survivors may feel dissatisfied with the level of involvement they have in the judicial process. For loved ones of the victim, the law appears 'black and white' in other words, murder is murder! They soon realize however the law has many shades of grey. Families can often feel lost or swept up in the legal system, liaising between various agencies, and government departments in the midst of trying to function in everyday life.

So, how does someone move forward from here? Terms such as 'get over it' and 'move on' must be removed from your vocabulary! No one should ever be expected to 'get over' the loss of a loved one to murder. However, to allow ourselves to be consumed by grief, so much so that our entire life dissolves because of it; is no solution either. We never "get over it" we do however slowly and with great support, understanding and encouragement work to evolve through it. Many counsellors, talk of "accommodated grief", that is the point in a bereaved person's life where they begin to reinvest in the world again.

While it is impossible not to think about the horrendous and cruel cowardly act of murder without anger and distress, gradually over time the bad days very slowly lessen, where we can focus more on the special memories and adventures we had together. While our lives will never return to what was normal, we strive to create a new type of normal, allowing us a rare insight into what is truly important and meaningful in life. There is no guide book that exists, we write our own guidelines as we evolve through it.