

"In Person, In Time"

Recommended Procedures for Death Notification

The principles of death notification:

*In person,
in time,
in pairs,
in plain language,
and with compassion.*

This manual was prepared in cooperation with:
Dr. Thomas L. Bennett, State Medical Examiner,
the Iowa Organization for Victim Assistance (IOVA),
MADD/Polk County Chapter, and
Polk County Victim Services

Crime Victim Assistance Division
Iowa Department of Justice

Thomas J. Miller
Attorney General of Iowa

Dedication

We dedicate this booklet to the survivors who will benefit from it, and to the men and women who will serve survivors and society by carrying out the difficult duty of death notification.

Death Notification Guidelines Committee

Suzan Brooks, MADD
Rich Conner, West Des Moines Police Dept.
John and Kay Egan, survivors of a homicide victim
Rich Joens, Polk County Victim Services
Kevin Seely, Hamilton's Funeral Services
With cooperation of the staff of the Iowa Attorney General's Office

Forms and any portion of this manual may be reproduced for local use.

**For additional copies, please contact the Crime Victim Assistance Division,
Lucas State Office Building, Ground Floor, 321 East 12th, Des Moines, IA 50319
Telephone: 515-281-5044 or 1-800-373-5044**

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Acknowledgments

The people who took the lead in proposing and drafting this manual were a committee of volunteers: Suzan Brooks then of MADD/Polk County Chapter, Rich Joens then of Polk County Victim Services, John and Kay Egan (who are the parents of a homicide victim), Rich Conner of the West Des Moines Police Department, and Kevin Seely of Hamilton's Funeral Services in Des Moines. Dr. Thomas L. Bennett, State Medical Examiner, also was a strong supporter and contributor to the project.

All these people have much first-hand experience in death notification and helping survivors. They exemplify the combination of professionalism and compassion that is so essential to the duty of death notification. We are very grateful for their service.

These people formed a volunteer Death Notification Guidelines Committee which asked my predecessor, Attorney General Bonnie Campbell, to produce the manual. Bonnie and her staff worked with the committee to design and draft the manual and distribute it throughout Iowa. Now, it also is being distributed to people all over the nation.

We believe the manual was the first of its kind. It continues to be requested by people throughout the country who face the duty of death notification: law enforcement agencies, medical examiners, college and university officials, and even businesses such as ski areas and airlines. Unfortunately, death notification duties fall to many people in many walks of life.

Iowa is honored to provide a manual that will serve both survivors and those who must do death notification.

-- Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Basic Death Notification Procedures	2
Death Notification Procedures in the Work Place	6
Death Notification in a Hospital Setting	7
Debriefing for Death Notification Volunteers and Professionals	8
How Survivors Respond to Death Notification (general information)	9
Resource Materials	following page 9

Survivor Intake Form for the notifiers' records

Community Resource Form to give to survivors

"A Guide to Survival for Family and Friends of Homicide Victims" (booklet)

Wallet Cards for notifiers

(The Resources are designed to be reproduced by local officials for their own use and for distribution to survivors.)

Introduction

The purpose of this booklet is to help those who must notify survivors of the death of a family member due to homicide, an automobile crash, a heart attack, drowning, or other sudden and unexpected events. We believe this is the first manual of its type in the nation, and our office is proud to cooperate in its preparation and distribution.

Death notification is acknowledged to be one of the most difficult tasks faced by law enforcement officers and other professionals, because learning of the death of a loved one often is the most traumatic event in a person's life.

The moment of notification is one that most people remember very vividly for the rest of their life -- sometimes with pain and anger.

Some survivors hear the news first through the media or a reporter calling, and then have flash-backs to that moment for years. Others tell how they were stunned to hear the person who was killed referred to as "the body" only minutes after the death.

This booklet suggests ways to notify survivors effectively and sensitively -- including tips on what not to do or say.

Notification is an exceedingly important duty. Besides being sensitive, notifiers have to be prepared in case a survivor goes into shock and requires emergency medical treatment.

Notifiers also can provide very important information to survivors, including details about how death occurred. They can volunteer to notify others and provide other invaluable support.

The principles described here are simple: Notification should be done in person, in time, in pairs whenever possible, in plain language, and with compassion.

The recommended procedures were developed by people with much experience in death notification, and with help from survivors who have been through it. As one of the survivors put it, "Please remember you are assisting innocent victims of circumstance."

If you have any suggestions about how to improve these guidelines, please contact the Attorney General's Office.

Thank you for your interest in this material, and good luck with your very important duty of death notification.

-- Tom Miller, Attorney General of Iowa

Basic Death Notification Procedures

These are some of the cardinal principles of death notification. Some of the points overlap, and all will be refined by the notifier's experience and judgment.

"In Person"

Always make death notification in person -- not by telephone.

It is very important to provide the survivor with a human presence or "presence of compassion" during an extremely stressful time. Notifiers who are present can help if the survivor has a dangerous shock reaction -- which is not at all uncommon -- and they can help the survivor move through this most difficult moment.

Arrange notification in person even if the survivor lives far away.

Contact a medical examiner or law enforcement department in the survivor's home area to deliver the notification in person.

Never take death information over the police radio.

Get the information over the telephone, or it might leak out to family through the media or private parties listening to police radio. If radio dispatchers start to give information over the radio, stop them and call in.

"In Time" -- and with certainty

Provide notification as soon as possible -- but be absolutely sure, first, that there is positive identification of the victim. Notify next of kin and others who live in the same household, including roommates and unmarried partners.

Too many survivors are devastated by learning of the death of a loved one from the media. Mistaken death notifications also have caused enormous trauma.

Before the notification, move quickly to gather information.

Be sure of the victim's identity. Determine the deceased person's next of kin and gather critical information -- obtain as much detail as possible about the circumstances of the death, about health considerations concerning the survivors to be notified, and whether other people are likely to be present at the notification.

"In Pairs"

Always try to have two people present to make the notification.

Ideally, the persons would be a law enforcement officer, in uniform, and the medical examiner or other civilian such as a chaplain, victim service counselor, family doctor, clergy person, or close friend. A female/male team often is advantageous.

It is important to have two notifiers. Survivors may experience severe emotional or physical reactions. (Some even strike out at notifiers.) There may be several survivors present. Notifiers can also support one another before and after the notification.

Take separate vehicles if possible.

The team never knows what they will encounter at the location. One might need to aid a survivor in shock while the other notifier assists other survivors. (*Shock is a medical emergency; you should call for emergency service.*) One notifier may be able to stay longer to help contact other family or friends for support. Having two vehicles gives notifiers maximum flexibility.

Plan the notification procedure.

Before they arrive, the notifier team should decide who will speak, what will be said, how much can be said.

"In Plain Language"

Notifiers should clearly identify themselves, present their credentials and ask to come in.

Do not make the notification at the doorstep. Ask to move inside, and get the survivor seated in the privacy of the home. Be sure you are speaking to the right person. You may offer to tell children separately if that is desired by adult survivors.

Relate the message directly and in plain language.

Survivors usually are served best by telling them directly what happened. The presence of the team already has alerted them of a problem.

Inform the survivor of the death, speaking slowly and carefully giving any details that are available. Then, calmly answer any questions the survivor may have.

Begin by saying, "I have some very bad news to tell you," or a similar statement. This gives the survivor an important moment to prepare for the shock.

Then, avoid vague expressions such as "Sally was lost" or "passed away." Examples of plain language include: "Your daughter was in an auto accident and she was killed." "Your husband was shot today and he died." "Your father had a heart attack at his work place and he died."

Call the victim by name -- rather than "the body."

Patently answer any questions about the cause of death, the location of the deceased's body, how the deceased's body will be released and transported to a funeral home, and whether an autopsy will be performed. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to say so. Offer to get back to the survivor when more information is available, and be sure to follow through.

There are few consoling words that survivors find helpful -- but it is always appropriate to say, "I am sorry this happened."

"With Compassion"

Remember: Your presence and compassion are the most important resources you bring to death notification.

Accept the survivor's emotions and your own. It is better to let a tear fall than to appear cold and unfeeling. Never try to "talk survivors out of their grief" or offer false hope. Be careful not to impose your own religious beliefs.

Many survivors have reported later that statements like these were *not* helpful to them: "It was God's will," "She led a full life," and "I understand what you are going through" (unless the notifier indeed had a similar experience.)

Plan to take time to provide information, support, and direction. Never simply notify and leave.

Do not take a victim's personal items with you at the time of notification.

Survivors often need time, even days, before accepting the victim's belongings. Eventually, survivors will want all items, however. (A victim's belongings should *never* be delivered in a trash bag.) Tell survivors how to recover items if they are in the custody of law enforcement officials.

Give survivors helpful guidance and direction:

Survivors bear the burden of inevitable responsibilities. You can help them begin to move through the mourning and grieving process by providing immediate direction in dealing with the death.

Offer to call a friend or family member who will come to support the survivor -- and stay until the support person arrives.

Offer to help contact others who must be notified (until a support person arrives to help with this duty.)

Survivors may have a hard time remembering what is done and said, so write down for them the names of all who are contacted.

Inform the survivor of any chance to view the deceased's body.

Be available to transport the survivor or representative for identification of the victim, if necessary. Explain the condition of the deceased's body and any restrictions on contact that may apply if there are forensic concerns. If appropriate, explain that an autopsy will be done.

Viewing the deceased's body should be the survivor's choice. Providing accurate information in advance will help a survivor make that decision. Some survivors will choose to see the body immediately, and this should be allowed if possible. *(Denying access to see the body is not an act of kindness.)*

Provide other specific information. Take a copy of the "*Community Resource Information*" form, fill it out, and leave it with the survivor. [See copy of form at end of this booklet.]

Fill out and keep the "*Survivor Intake Form.*" [See copy of form at end of this booklet.]

This form records basic information about survivors and their wishes. Complete the form, sign it, and keep it with the report or investigation file.

Follow up.

Always leave a name and phone number with survivors.

Plan to make a follow-up contact with the survivor the next day.

If the death occurred in another county or state, leave the name and phone number of a contact person at that location.

Most survivors are confused and some might feel abandoned after the initial notification. Many will want clarifications or may need more direction on arrangements that are necessary.

Following up can be the last step in completing a "person-centered" and sensitive death notification that is truly helpful to survivors.

The notification team should be sure they are clear on any follow-up assignments they need to carry out. (See also the discussion of "debriefing" notifiers, on page 8.)

Death Notification in the Work Place

Survivors often must be notified at their work place. Here are several tips to help apply the basic principles described above to a work place notification.

Ask to speak to the manager or supervisor, and ask if the person to be notified is available. It is not necessary to divulge any details regarding the purpose of your visit.

Ask the manager or supervisor to arrange for a private room in which to make the notification.

Follow the basic notification procedures described above: in person, in time, in pairs, in plain language, with compassion.

Allow the survivor time to react and offer your support.

Transport the survivor to his or her home, or to identify the body, if necessary.

Let the survivor determine what he or she wishes to tell the manager or supervisor regarding the death. Offer to notify the supervisor, if that is what the survivor prefers.

Death Notification in a Hospital Setting

Law enforcement officers and medical examiners may be called on to do death notification at a hospital after an accident or a shooting, for example.

It is a very good idea for hospitals and other officials to determine general procedures and protocols in advance, so all parties are familiar with their duties and roles.

The principles of death notification described above all apply in the hospital setting. Here are a few points to be sure to remember:

Find a quiet room for the notification and be sure survivors are seated. (Do not notify in a crowded hall or waiting room.)

Arrange for a doctor to be present or available shortly to answer medical questions. Doctors should be in *clean uniform*.

Inform simply and directly.

Provide assistance and guidance:

Ask if survivors wish to spend time with the body of the deceased.

Explain the procedure if identification of the deceased is necessary. Explain about autopsy or organ donation, if appropriate.

Volunteer to help notify others. Make a list of any calls made.

If there are media calls, refer them to the investigating officer or (if available) a victim service advocate.

Do not leave survivors alone. Be sure someone is there to accompany them.

Fill out the "Survivor Intake Form" for your records, and give survivors the "Community Resource Information" form. Be sure the survivor has your name and number.

Contact the survivor the next day.

"Debriefing" for Death Notification Volunteers and Professionals

Members of a notification team should meet as soon as possible to debrief the situation:

Double-check who is responsible for any follow-up tasks to help ease the pain and suffering of survivors.

Review the notification: what went wrong, what went right, how it could be done better in the future.

Share personal feelings and emotions of the notification team.

Death notifications are, without a doubt, stressful and difficult and sometimes very depressing.

Be frank and honest. Share your concerns with one another. Discuss any feelings team members have about the death and notification. For example, the notification experience may have triggered emotions and stress related to a notifier's own loss of a loved one.

Support one another.

General Information on
**How Survivors Respond
to Death Notification**

Physical Shock:

Persons learning of the death of a loved one may experience symptoms of shock such as tremors and a sudden decrease in blood pressure.

Shock is a medical emergency -- help should be summoned.

Some of the factors that affect stress reactions are:

- the intensity of the event (for example, violent death vs. heart attack),
- the survivor's ability to understand what's happening,
- and the survivor's equilibrium.

Whenever possible, notifiers should be aware of any available background information about the survivors, including medical or emotional history.

Other general reactions to death notification:

Even if there is no physical shock response, death notification must be considered a crisis for the survivors. They will have a need to express feelings; a need for calm and reassuring authority; a need for help in determining what happens next; and a need to begin restoring control by making some choices -- naming a support person to call, for example, or selecting a funeral home.

These needs can be met through the humane, patient, and non-judgmental approach of notifiers. Allow survivors to express their grief freely. Take the time to give them adequate information about the death and about official procedures subsequent to the death.

Many survivors, regardless of background, find themselves numb and unable to take the next step. This is where the support person helps the most. Survivors need support persons to help them through the initial crisis. Before you leave a survivor, make sure such ongoing support is available.

The suggested *Survivor Intake Form* and *Community Resources Form* ("What Do I Do Now?") will help with this process.

Resource Materials

for death notification

The following pages contain four resource items for local departments:

1. **Survivor Intake Form,** (To be reproduced locally.)

This form should be completed at the time of notification by the notifier and retained by the notifier.

The form records essential information from survivors. It will help notifiers give survivors information and comply with their wishes. Gathering the listed information will help avoid needless follow-up calls or interviews with survivors.

2. **Community Resource Form for survivors.** (to be reproduced locally.)

This form should be completed and left with survivors at the time of notification.

It will help notifiers provide essential information that survivors will need after a family member has died suddenly.

3. **“A Guide to Survival for Family and Friends of Homicide Victims.”** (May be reproduced locally or obtained from the Iowa Attorney General’s Office.)

This brief Guide will help survivors of homicide victims cope with the tragedy. Your department can simply copy the Guide and give it to survivors.

The “Guide to Survival” is available as a free pamphlet from the Crime Victim Assistance Division of the attorney General’s Office, Lucas State Office Building, Ground Floor, 321 East 12th Des Moines, Iowa 50319. Phone 1-800-373-5044 or 515-281-5044

4. **Wallet cards for notifiers.**

These cards should be carried like Miranda cards by notifiers.
(Use these cards, or copy and laminate them to make more cards.)

Survivor Intake Form

Information about survivors and their wishes -- to be completed by notifier.

[This form is to be filled out at the time of notification and retained by the notifier.]

Name of survivor: _____

Person providing information (if different): _____

Address of survivor: _____

Community: _____ ZIP _____

Telephone: Home _____ Work _____

Relation to the deceased: _____

Name of funeral home to which the body of the deceased should be sent:

If the survivor has no preference in funeral homes, would he or she like the medical examiner to choose one? _____ Yes _____ No

Do any survivors wish to see the body of the person who has died?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ Will decide later.

Are there any special items that might have been in the possession of the person who died (such as jewelry or a donor card)?

List: _____

Others to be contacted by notifier (other kin, unmarried partners, roommates, etc.):

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

Persons contacted by notifier to provide support to the survivor:

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

Signature of the notifier _____ Date _____

Community Resource Information

"What do I do now?" - Basic information for survivors.

[This form should be completed by notifiers at the time of notification and left with the survivor.]

1. You may obtain copies of the *death certificate* from the funeral home.
2. You may obtain a copy of the *autopsy report* from the county medical examiner (name and phone): _____
3. You may obtain a copy of a *police report* from the agency investigating an accident or crime: _____
Police case number, if any: _____
4. You may obtain *medical records* from the hospital or clinic where the deceased was taken: _____

Note that it takes varying amounts of time to obtain death certificates, medical records and autopsy and police reports. Ask officials when you can expect them.

5. You may file for *social security benefits* by contacting the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213.
6. If the person who died was a veteran, contact the *Veterans Administration Regional Office*, 210 Walnut, Des Moines, Iowa 50309. Phone 1-800-827-1000.
7. Notify the *insurance agent* and the bank of the person who has died.
8. If the person who died was murdered, or was killed by a drunk or reckless driver or hit-and-run driver, you may be eligible for *Crime Victim Compensation* for medical, funeral and counseling bills and for loss of wages. Contact the Crime Victim Assistance Division, Attorney General's Office, Lucas State Office Building, Ground Floor, 321 East 12th Des Moines, Iowa 50319. Phone 1-800-373-5044 or 515-281-5044.
9. If there is a pending, contact the county attorney in the county where the crime occurred for more information: _____
10. Name of the person who notified you:

Phone: _____

Note to Departments and notifiers: You may copy this "Guide to Survival" and give it to homicide survivors. The Guide also is available in pamphlet form, at no charge to survivors or others, from the Crime Victim Assistance Division of the Attorney General's Office, 1-800-373-5044.

A Guide To Survival

***For Family and Friends
of Homicide Victims***

Iowa Department of Justice

**Thomas J. Miller
Attorney General of Iowa**

A Guide To Survival

***For Family and Friends
of Homicide Victims***

**Written by and printed in cooperation with
Polk County Victim Services,
Des Moines, Iowa**

Iowa Department of Justice

**Thomas J. Miller
Attorney General of Iowa**

A Guide To Survival

For Family and Friends of Homicide Victims

Introduction

Someone you love has been murdered, or was killed by a drunk or reckless driver. It is an understatement to say that your life has been changed. Your anger and pain are deep, and it will take a great deal of hard work and time to recover. You may never feel as if you have "recovered." However, many persons who have been in your situation learn to "manage their grief." You will need time, determination, and, often, the support of a caring listener.

The feelings you experience are likely to be very difficult and foreign for you, but, most likely, they will be similar to what others have felt. This booklet was written for you by counselors from Polk County Victim Services who work with survivors -- with help from people who have lived through the loss of a loved one to homicide.

The Most Common Feelings of Grief

Shock

In the beginning most people feel a profound numbness. Some liken it to "being in a fog." It may be this fog that allows you to accomplish the necessary arrangements for the funeral and other duties.

Turmoil

When the fog clears, most people's emotions fall into turmoil. You may have flashbacks of the moment you were notified of the death, or of the last time you saw your loved one alive. You may dream of your loved one, or believe that he or she will soon "walk through that door." Part of you will deny that your loved one really is dead.

You may experience many grief spasms at first, crying as if you couldn't stop. The spasms gradually will come farther apart. You may have panic attacks and feel afraid for your life or the lives of other family members. You may be filled with restlessness and unable to concentrate on anything. You may be unable to sleep at night or find it very hard to get out of bed in the morning.

As the reality of death sinks in, depression usually is not far behind. The world may seem to lose its meaning for you. Activities that you once enjoyed may seem like a burden. You may feel as if there is little point in going on, or you may want to withdraw from everyone.

During all of these emotions and phases, you need to keep talking with someone you can trust and with someone who will listen with a non-judgmental ear. It is the only way we know to keep from getting stuck in one of the phases.

Searching for Understanding

You will probably experience a great need to understand why this tragedy happened. In your search for understanding, you may feel the need to know everything there is to know about what happened, where it happened, and who did it. If someone is arrested, you may want to know as much as you can find out about the person.

You may expect the criminal justice system to work more quickly and keep you informed better than it does. (For information about how to register to receive information about the progress of a case through the legal system, please see the end of this booklet.)

Rumors and opinions of many people may come your way concerning the crime, the motivation, and the criminal. You may decide to attend the trial, if there is one, as part of your search for why this happened. Oftentimes you will not find answers to all of your questions. (If a survivor is a witness at the trial, he or she could be barred from attending the remainder of the trial, if witnesses are sequestered. You can ask the County Attorney for information on this.)

Guilt

Each survivor lives with "*what-if's*." "Why did I let her go home alone?" "What if I had been there with him?" This is a normal reaction. Please remember that no one can predict the future or recreate what might have been. We can't change the events that took place, and to continue blaming ourselves will only be destructive.

Anger

Anger can be both frightening and motivating. Sometimes it may feel as if anger will overwhelm you. It may be directed at the murderer, society, the criminal justice system, family members, or friends. It is not uncommon to be angry at God. Many people feel *guilty* about their anger, but it is a completely normal feeling that many people experience.

Anger may immobilize you or move you to relentless activity. It is a natural reaction to severe loss. Your anger will never completely go away. With time and

support your anger can be managed and may even contribute to helping you gain back some control in your life.

Revenge

For the first time in their lives, many survivors find themselves thinking of ways to kill another human being, the killer. Understandably, some people are deeply disturbed by this emotion. You may wonder if you are losing your mind. You aren't. You are normal. Counselors of survivors find that almost every person they work with thinks about revenge. Having these feelings does not mean you are going to act on them.

Some people will tell you that wanting revenge is unhealthy and that the only way you can find peace is to forgive. If forgiveness is in your heart, fine, but do not allow people to place unnecessary guilt on you. Chances are they have never been through what you are experiencing.

Coping With the Reactions of Others

Each of us is an individual. We like different foods, wear different clothing, and choose unique lifestyles. It stands to reason that, at the most painful time in our lives, we would also grieve in our own way. How we choose to grieve is determined by three things -- our personal view of death, how society views death, and our individual personalities.

Family

When a homicide happens to a family, you might expect it to pull the family together. This is not always true. It is not unusual for counselors to see families separate, both physically and emotionally. At this time, communication is very important. Work hard to express your feelings within the family and with supportive friends.

Friends

When you hurt, you turn to people who have always been there, your friends. But where are they a month, six months or a year after the murder? Often, they have gone back to their lives, but you still need to talk.

If you bring up the homicide, some people will change the subject. Many people do not want to listen to the details of the tragedy, even though survivors often need to talk about details. People often can't bring themselves to talk about homicide. They may feel they do not have the words to say or the ability to listen. They may feel hopelessly inadequate. And the loss of your loved one probably hit them with a stark reality: If it happened to you, it could happen to them.

You may notice that people you have known for years avoid you on the street or in a store. Your co-workers may avert their eyes and "not see you." They usually have no idea that this feels like rejection and only adds to your grief.

You can face this problem in various ways. You can write these friends off and stop seeing them. You can continue contact but avoid the subject you most need to discuss. You can raise the issue directly with your friends, which may allow you to deal openly and honestly with each other. You can add to your circle of friends other people who have lost loved ones or who are willing to share your experience. Many people are ready to respond when they understand how important it is to talk with you about the experience rather than avoid it.

Coping with Holidays

Holidays can be very difficult. They usually are an accumulation of traditions or customs created by families to be shared with family members. When a member of the family is no longer there to share a cherished tradition, the holiday can become a painful reminder instead of a time of joy.

The first time you celebrate a holiday after a death, it may become a nightmare. Holiday gifts that once were ripped open immediately may sit for days. Thanksgiving is hollow. ("What do I have to be thankful for?" shouts the survivor.) New Year's Day and birthdays, which celebrate another year of life, become reminders of death.

You may find the need to develop new traditions. For some, a trip out of town at holiday-time is beneficial. A birthday can be observed by donating to a charitable organization or doing something that is meaningful to you. There is no rule to follow on how to "get through" a holiday. You will grieve. Allow yourself to grieve. It is a key part of the healing process.

Coping with the Criminal Justice System

Most victims are new to the workings of the criminal justice system. As you progress through various stages, you may become angry and frustrated because your impressions of the justice system are false. People naturally want to see justice done swiftly so that they can heal from that part of the trauma. But the criminal justice system often seems to prolong people's grief.

For example, you may find that justice does not always prevail. Sometimes, the guilty are released on procedural grounds. Many homicide cases are never solved or do not result in convictions, even if the identity of the offender is known.

Sometimes, the only ones serving a "life sentence" are the victim and the victim's loved ones. Cases may drag on and on. Many cases never go to trial or take years for a conviction. If there is a conviction, it likely will be appealed, and a small fraction of cases find their way back to court for another trial.

Those who administer our laws -- law officers, prosecutors, judges, and others -- must deal every day with the most brutal crimes. Sometimes they build self-protective barriers which come across to victims as insensitivity.

To help you through this ordeal, seek out supportive friends, counselors or advocates.

Remember, too, that Iowa law gives survivors of homicide victims certain rights to information about pending cases, and other assistance. Please see the end of this booklet for information.

Epilogue

The rest of your life is the epilogue. The widow of a homicide victim said recently, "My life has been permanently changed. I don't know who I am anymore." This is a common reaction for most homicide survivors.

Your life *has* changed. You will see things differently now. You may never again want to watch violence portrayed on TV. You may have to struggle with new or stronger prejudices for the rest of your life. You may feel irritated by "the little things" in life. Or, incidents that once seemed to be a catastrophe will be only minor aggravations because you have already survived the worst.

Your faith may be shaken. You may find it impossible to trust strangers. You may feel that laws you thought were designed to protect you are really designed to protect criminals. You may wonder if the victim has any rights.

But most survivors slowly heal. Meaning comes back into their daily activities. They find people to stand by them and give them support. Some find sensitivity for others they never experienced before. Most find joy in the treasured memories of their loved ones. Many join others who want to carry on the vigil for all of those who have died as a result of violence.

This booklet was written by Polk County Victim Services, Des Moines, Iowa, based on material from Families and Friends of Missing Persons and Violent Crime Victims, of Seattle, Washington.



Sources of Assistance or Information for Survivors

Victim Compensation:

Survivors of homicide victims may be eligible for compensation for out-of-pocket expenses relating to the crime, such as: compensation for cleaning up a murder site; compensation for funeral and burial expenses; compensation for reasonable charges for counseling of survivors of a homicide victim; and compensation of loss of support for dependents of homicide victims. (Compensation limits for these and other categories are established by the Iowa General Assembly.)

The compensation program, which is funded entirely by fines and penalties paid by criminals, never can erase the painful memories of a crime, but it can help people in recovery and help ease financial burdens faced by survivors.

For information or an application, please contact the Attorney General's Office, Crime Victim Assistance Division, Lucas State Office Building, Ground Floor, 321 East 12th Des Moines, Iowa 50319. Telephone 1-800-373-5044 or 515-281-5044.

Information about a criminal case, and "victim impact statements":

Iowa Code Chapter 910A gives victims a right to be notified by authorities with information about the progress of a case, and the right to file a "victim impact statement" to assist the court in sentencing if there is a conviction. Immediate family of a homicide victims are considered victims under this law.

To register as a victim or for information, contact the county attorney in the county where the crime occurred.

Other aid for homicide survivors:

In Iowa, there are services for survivors in some communities, such as support groups, court advocacy and referrals to counseling. **For information on possible resources, please call the Attorney General's Crime Victim Assistance Division at 1-800-373-5044 or 515-281-5044.**

For additional copies of this booklet:

Call or write the Attorney General's Crime Victim assistance Division, Lucas State Office Building, Ground Floor, 321 East 12th, Des Moines, Iowa 50319. Phone 1-800-373-5044 or 515-281-5044.

**Wallet Cards
on Death
Notification**

This wallet card is for officers who may do death notification. It reminds notifiers of the highlights of their task and should be carried like a "Miranda" card. For additional copies of the card, contact the Crime Victim Assistance Division of the Attorney General's Office, or copy, laminate and cut this sheet.

The principles of
Death Notification

In person
In time (as soon as possible)
In pairs
In plain language
With compassion

(over)

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Leave with survivors:

The case number, if any.
Names and numbers of the notifier(s).
"Community Resource" form.
"Guide to Survival" booklet
for survivors of homicide
victims, if appropriate.

Keep the intake form.

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