

CO-VICTIMS OF HOMICIDE

When a life ends violently, many lives are affected (such as family, friends, and often groups and communities the victim was involved). We are defining violent death as death by homicide or vehicular homicide.

It is estimated that each homicide victim is survived by an average of three loved ones for whom the death produces a traumatic and painful grief. Deborah Spungen, victim advocate and mother of a murder victim created the term “co-victim” to describe anyone who is impacted by the death of a loved one by homicide. Co-victim illustrates how those impacted by a death by homicide must survive the intrusion of media, criminal justice system, and others in or outside the system who are insensitive to the complications and pain co-victims endure. Another description is “invisible” because co-victims are not always recognized as crime victims, although they experience a similar journey that a direct victim of a violent crime (police investigation, court system, parole, etc.).

HELP IS HERE

The Metropolitan Nashville Police Department (MNPDP) has provided counseling, advocacy, and support services for those whose lives have been impacted by violent crime since 1975. In 2016, two MNPDP counseling programs, the Victim Intervention Program (VIP) and Domestic Violence Counseling united to become the Family Intervention Program (FIP). Specialized services for co-victims offered by FIP, including individual and group counseling, advocacy, and the Season to Remember ceremony. This ceremony is the second Thursday in December and provides a special ritual during the season of Christmas, Hanukah, and Kwanzaa to honor and remember loved ones lost to violence.

The mission of FIP is to provide mental health services and criminal justice system advocacy whenever individuals, families, and/or the community are affected by violent crime. All services are free, confidential, and provided in an environment which supports cultural diversity: with respect to race, religion, creed, and sexual orientation.

Staffed by licensed mental health professionals and trained advocates, FIP is available to individuals, families, and or groups impacted by violent death.

TRAUMATIC GRIEF IS UNIQUE

Grief is a natural reaction to a loss and everyone's grief is unique. When the loss is a life of a loved one by violent death, the grief is different than other losses. Traumatic grief is different from normal grief because of the sudden nature and the manner in which it occurred. There is no time to say good-bye, there are questions co-victims have that will never be answered, and no one can be prepared for the deep emotional, physical, and spiritual reactions they may experience.

Although everyone's grief is unique, there are common reactions that many co-victims experience. You may experience many or only a few, regardless remember that they are common for many co-victims.

- **Denial/Shock/Numbness:** What has happened is too difficult to believe.
- **Fear/ Vulnerability:** Co victims may have felt violent death would never happen to their loved ones, but it has. They become fearful and feel vulnerable that tragedy could strike again.
- **Aches/ Pains/ Illness:** The stress from traumatic grief can make a person physically sick, appetite can be affected, sleep disrupted, and immune system may be compromised.
- **Anger:** Many co victims feel anger. It can be early in grief, or after the numbness wears off. We are taught anger is not a “good” emotion. It is not anger that is bad; it is how we react to our anger. Allow yourself to feel anger, but do not let your response be destructive.

“After the tragic murder of my son, FIP helped me to not only keep standing, but to walk again through life.”

– Judy, Mother of a Homicide Victim



WHY COUNSELING?

A violent death of a loved one can be devastating to co-victims. When anyone experiences a traumatic loss, the balance that existed in their life before the death is shattered. Many who have experienced a violent death may try or want to avoid their feelings. Although this is a natural response, it is usually impossible and can be emotionally and physically harmful.

Understanding the emotions you are experiencing is important. Although you may be reluctant to talk about your emotions, a FIP counselor knowledgeable of the effects of loss is available to assist you. Counseling can help you to feel more in control of your life and assist you in your journey as you learn to live again.

IT'S YOUR CALL

The goal of FIP is to help co victims reclaim a sense of health and well-being. If you or someone you know has been impacted by a violent death, call the Family Intervention Program.

CONTACT NUMBERS

Family Intervention Program

(615) 862-7773

Police Investigations:

North Precinct	(615) 862-7901
South Precinct	(615) 862-7763
East Precinct	(615) 862-7525
West Precinct	(615) 862-7385
Midtown Hills Precinct	(615) 880-1513
Hermitage Precinct	(615) 862-6993
Madison Precinct	(615) 880-3311
Central Precinct	(615) 862-7044
Crash Investigation Unit	(615) 862-7738
District Attorney's Office	(615) 862-5500
TN Criminal Injury Compensation	(615) 741-2734

REFER TO BACK PANEL FOR MAP AND DIRECTIONS

