

After the Death Notification: Ten Guidelines for Assisting Victims & Survivors of Mass Violence

These guidelines focus on steps that victim assistance professionals (VAPs) can take *after* the initial death notification has been delivered.

Discuss options for victim/survivor assistance with the survivor:

Never tell survivors what to do. Simply provide options and then follow up in the days and weeks after the mass violence incident.

- Assistance in identifying the decedent
- Services and support that are specific to mass violence incidents
- Funeral and burial arrangements
- Counseling and mental or behavioral health support
- Family and social support
- The crime victim compensation process, which may be expedited at the designated response center for homicide family survivors of mass violence incidents

IN THE DAY (OR TWO) AFTER THE NOTIFICATION:

Provide information about crime victim compensation verbally (in person or over the telephone) and in writing:

- Funeral/burial
- Counseling and mental health needs
- Time lost from work
- Loss of the primary provider in a family
- Other compensable issues
- Points of contact in the justice system (if relevant)
- If the victim was the primary breadwinner, identify sources for immediate financial assistance and support

State Victim Compensation Programs: <http://www.nacvcb.org/index.asp?sid=6>

For homicides caused by international terrorism outside the United States, the International Terrorism Victim Expense Reimbursement Program (ITVERP) can provide assistance:

<https://www.ovc.gov/itverp/>.

Make an appointment to help the survivor(s) complete their compensation application and facilitate its delivery to the state compensation agency:

- If the survivor requests, follow up with the victim compensation agency to ensure that it has all information needed to process the claim.
- Provide survivors with contact information for the compensation agency and, if relevant, the compensation claims specialist assigned to their case.

Discuss the news media's interest in mass violence crimes and what that entails for them:

- Provide them with a copy of "Guidelines for Crime Victims and Survivors Who Choose to Deal with the Media."
- Determine if they want to speak publicly about the crime and their loved one who was murdered. If not, help the victim identify a "spokesperson" for the family (a family member, friend, victim advocate, or faith community representative)
- Determine if there is a journalist that the survivor(s) are comfortable to contact for an initial interview
- Discuss limiting exposure to television, other news media, and social media, which can be distressing to some victims but helpful to others.

Discuss how the survivor(s) want the victim to be portrayed:

- Creation of social media pages, messages and hashtags
- Collect photographs, video footage, montages, etc.
- Document personal testimonials and stories from family members and friends
- Document the victim's accomplishments and goals in life
- Document the victim's favorite things such as music, poems or religious, spiritual or inspirational passages

Assist with funeral arrangements:

- Identify the faith or spirituality of the victim and become familiar with traditions and rituals associated with their faith and culture
- Discuss options for funeral services and burial, and help the victim with decision-making
- Offer to serve as the liaison between survivors and the funeral home or cemetery and the crime victim compensation program
- Ask the survivors to identify someone who can serve as your liaison to assist with funeral arrangements

Provide guidelines for funeral arrangements:

- "Funeral Planning Checklist" offered by the National Caregivers Library here: [Funeral Planning Checklist](#)

Discuss personal memorial/tribute options with the survivors:

- Online website
- Social media
- Any community memorial efforts or foundations to recognize *all the people affected by the mass violence incident*
- Candlelight Vigil, faith community gathering, or other tributes that can honor *the individual victim*
- Designation of and publicizing a charity or nonprofit organization for memorial contributions

IF OR WHEN A TRIAL OCCURS:

Help the survivors prepare for a trial:

- Inform survivors of their rights (orally and in writing, and when applicable, across jurisdictions)
- Help survivors enroll in the jurisdiction's victim notification program
- Recommend for a VAP to be assigned to the survivors and case to:
 - Accompany the survivors to all hearings associated with the homicide to which they are entitled to attend
 - Determine if the victim has any safety concerns and address them
 - Document financial losses for the purpose of victim restitution
 - Suggest that the survivor's family is separate by sight and sound from the defendant's family during justice proceedings
 - Provide protection from the news media
 - Help the victim prepare a victim impact statement, and/or a public statement in cases where the defendant(s) are found "not guilty"
 - Advise the survivors of their post-sentencing rights (including the rights to information, notification, reasonable protection, restitution and speedy proceedings.)

Help the survivors consider and prepare for events that may be "trauma cues:"

- The homicide victim's birthday, wedding anniversary, date he/she would have graduated, etc.
- The anniversary of the mass violence incident
- Holidays
- Any criminal justice system hearings including pre-trial, trial, sentencing, parole, execution, etc.

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