

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

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

### **Discuss options for victim/survivor assistance with the survivor:**

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*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:**

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- 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:**

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- 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:**

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- 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:**

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- 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:**

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- 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:**

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- See the "Funeral Planning Checklist" offered by the National Caregivers Library here:  
[http://www.caregiverslibrary.org/portals/0/checklistsandforms\\_funeralplanningchecklist.pdf](http://www.caregiverslibrary.org/portals/0/checklistsandforms_funeralplanningchecklist.pdf)

### **Discuss personal memorial/tribute options with the survivors:**

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- 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:

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- 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 victim assistance professional 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:"

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- 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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**Adapted from:** Carolyn Hightower, Michelle Palmer & Anne Seymour (2016). "After the Death Notification: 12 Guidelines for Assisting Victims/Survivors." Washington, DC: Mayor's Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants.