



NMVC

National Mass Violence Center

Providing Resources to Victims,
Survivors, & Those Who Serve Them

The Impact of Mass Violence Incidents on Family Survivors of Homicide Victims & Resources to Assist Them

September 25, 2025

National Day of Remembrance for Murder Victims



15th Virtual National Town Hall on Mass Violence

This product is supported by Cooperative Agreement #15POVC-23-GK-00555-AERX awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this product are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

NATIONAL TOWN HALL ON MASS VIOLENCE

Sponsored by the
National Mass Violence Center (NMVC)

Providing Resources to Victims, Survivors & Those Who Serve Them

with support from
U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime

Housekeeping Announcements

- ♥ This National Town Hall is being recorded and has live ASL interpretation.
- ♥ Closed captioning is available to attendees; please go to your setting at the bottom of your screen and turn on "closed captions" (available in multiple languages).
- ♥ After being posted to our website, the recording, slide deck and resources will be available for download at www.nmvvrc.org.
- ♥ **Joining us by telephone?** Please email us at nmvc@musc.edu with your full name and email address to receive credit for attending.
- ♥ Thanks to many of you who sent questions to our presenters in advance – we will save time at the end to answer the most frequently asked questions.

Learning Objectives

- ♥ Describe the scope of homicide traumatic loss and its mental health outcomes, and models of grief that can be complicated by trauma.
- ♥ Identify the critical role of funeral directors and morticians in providing support and services to surviving family members, in coordination with hospitals, morgues and victim/survivor services.
- ♥ Describe victim/survivor services that are needed by surviving family members, including sensitive trauma notification.
- ♥ Identify effective strategies to “honor the legacy” of those killed in mass violence incidents, in collaboration with and support for family members.

National Town Hall Presenters

Aurelia Sands Belle, Ed.D., Moderator
Faculty, Research Instructor
National Mass Violence Center

Alyssa Rheingold, Ph.D.
Director, Response, Recovery & Resilience Division
National Mass Violence Center

Gage Rodriguez, ASL/English Interpreter

Courtney Workman, ASL/English Interpreter

Debra Howard-Burton, Th.D.
S.O.A.R Professional Services
NMVC Consultant

Vanessa Lopez
Funeral Director
International Funeral Services of New York

Aurelia Sands Belle, Ed.D., Moderator
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Photo credit: MUSC Brand Portrait Studio

"Power of the Personal Story" video

Liz Seal



Photo credit: Liz Seal

VIDEO AVAILABLE IN RECORDING

Video voice interpretation provided by Courtney Workman, ASL Interpreting Services, LLC

National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children (POMC)



2025 POMC Murder Wall

1978 - 2025
PARENTS OF MURDERED CHILDREN, INC.
For the families and friends of those who have died by violence.


HOPE
happens here

**39th Annual National
POMC Conference**
July 24 - 27, 2025
Charlotte, North Carolina

Hilton
CHARLOTTE UNIVERSITY PLACE
8629 J. M. Keynes Drive
Charlotte, NC 28262
1-704-547-7444
Charlotte.University.Hilton.com



UNCC Air Force ROTC Honor Guard at
the Unveiling of the Murder Wall

Impact of Traumatic Bereavement and Interventions to Foster Support



Alyssa Rheingold, Ph.D.,
Director, Response, Recovery & Resilience Division
National Mass Violence Center (NMVC)

Homicide and Mass Violence Differential

- Sudden death/Violent death
- Intent to harm - volition
- Stigma of murder
- Media and public view
- Criminal justice system
- Sudden financial stressors
- Religious faith
- Fear and vulnerability
- Anger
- Professionals who don't understand
- Collective mass violence incident vs. personal experience

A Universal Experience...

- **Grief is a normal reaction to the death of a loved one.**
- **Grief is a personal experience:**
 - Aside from intent to harm yourself or others, any other feelings are normal.
 - There is not a “right” way to grieve.



Photo by Todd Trapani on Unsplash

Key Terminology

Loss	Various domains of life, loss of something or someone
Bereavement	Objective situation of having lost someone significant through death
Grief	The reaction to loss with accompanying cognitive, psychological, and physical manifestations
Mourning	Varied expressions of grief that are mediated by socio-cultural factors

A Vulnerable Population

- Although grief and bereavement are considered normal processes that are universal, they do increased risk for adverse outcomes:
 - Death – medical causes
 - Immunologic dysfunction
 - Hypertension & cardiac event
 - Substance abuse
 - More health services utilization
 - 80% more frequent medical visits over general population
 - High-risk behaviors
 - Psychiatric diagnoses (MDD, anxiety, PTSD)
 - Suicide

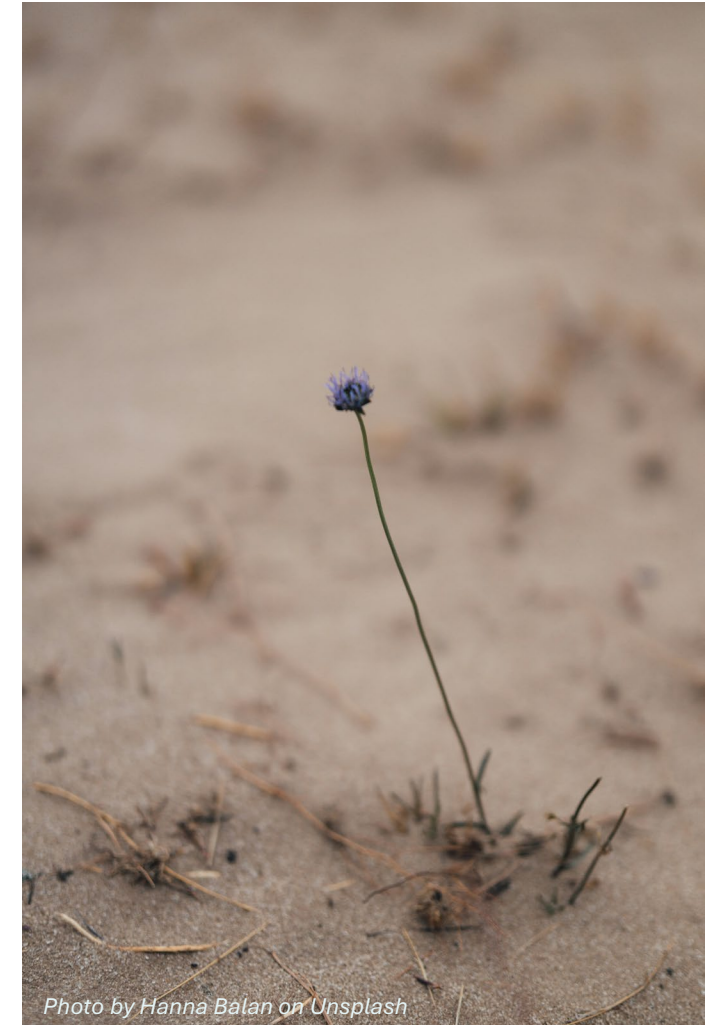


Photo by Hanna Balan on Unsplash

“Common” Grieving

- Thoughts and memories of the deceased are prominent.
- Disbelief, depressed mood and yearning decline gradually from 2-24 months.
- By six months, acceptance of loss increases:
 - Engage in productive work
 - Capable of experiencing enjoyment
 - Find meaning/purpose
 - Maintain emotional connections
 - New relationships/friendships



Grief Symptoms

Emotional	Physical	Cognitive	Spiritual
Sadness	Tightness in chest	Confusion	Questioning Beliefs
Anger	Rapid breathing	Disorientation	Anger with G-d
Guilt	Stomach aches	Poor concentration	Withdrawn from faith
Fear	Numbness	Poor memory	Comforted by faith
Relief	Feeling faint	Impaired judgement	
Anxiety	Headaches	Hallucinations	

S.T.U.G. Reactions

- **Sudden Temporary Upsurges of Grief:**
alternating moments
of REPRIEVE from grief
and ACUTE grief
- **Ripple Effect of STUG
reactions**



Image created by JOHNHAIN/NEEDPIX

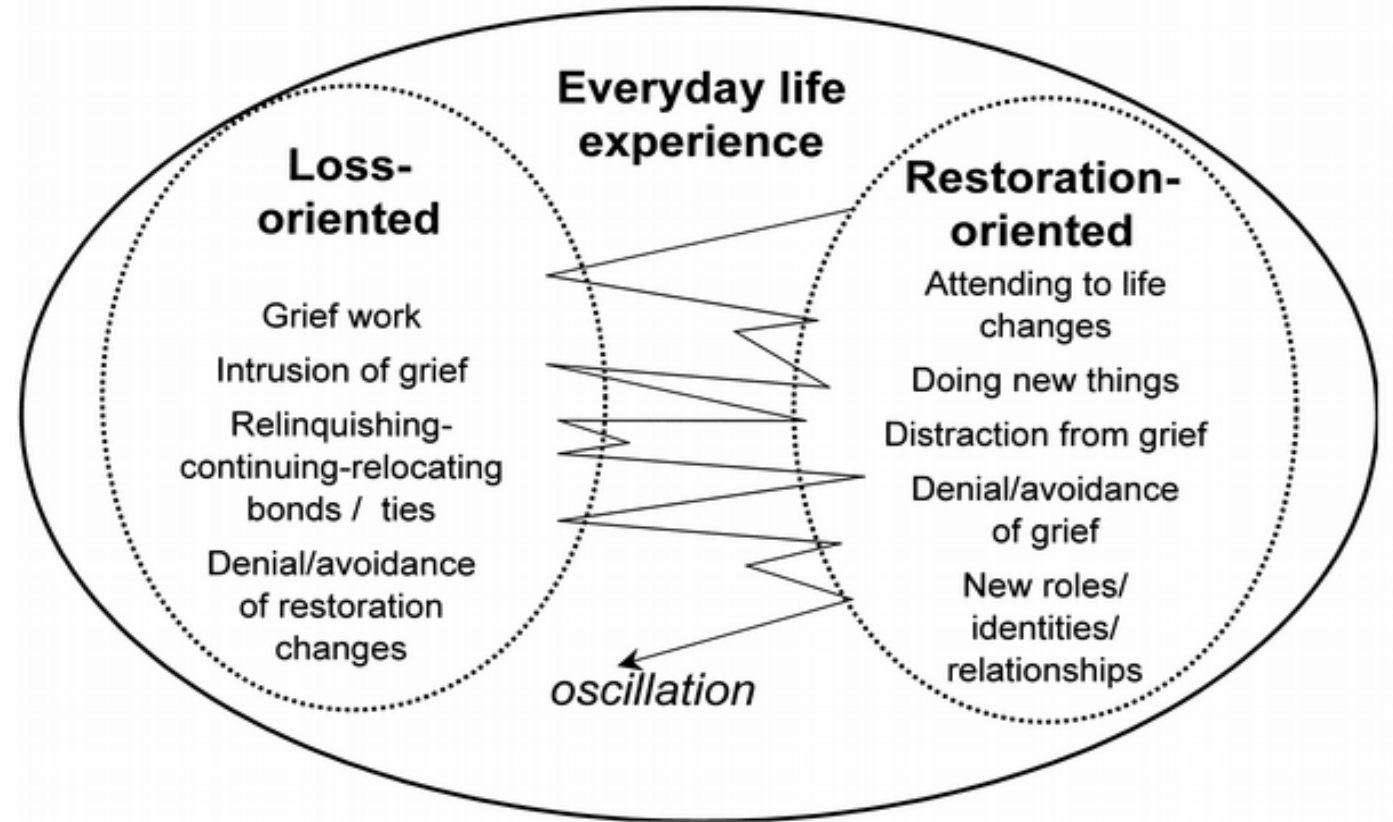
Moving Beyond the Stage Model

- The continued dominance of the stage model of bereavement in medical and nursing education, as well as popular culture
- Several studies have examined the Stage Model, showing no empirical support.



Dual-Process Model of Grief

- Well-supported model of adaptation to bereavement
- Grievers engage in a dynamic process of confronting and avoiding grief-related stimuli.
 - Oscillation is imperative.
 - Over-reliance on any one strategy will keep the griever “stuck.”
 - E.g., prolonged grief reaction



Stroebe & Schut, 2010

Meaning Making Model of Bereavement

Neimeyer, 2009

- The death of a loved one can shatter our fundamental assumptions in life.
- The grief process thus entails “making sense” of the loss, by developing a coherent narrative that integrates past, present, and future.
 - Grievors may lean on existential or practical “explanations” for the death and what it means for them, their loved one, and others.
 - This can include aspects of benefit finding and posttraumatic growth.



Photo credit: Alyssa Rheingold,

Artist: of Print: [Bible Study: a Tribute to the Charleston Emmanuel 9 by Leroy Campbell, Jan 31, 20217](#)



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The Dilemma

Pathologizing a grief reaction

Versus....

Neglecting to recognize and treat a clinically-impairing disorder

IMPACT OF TRAUMATIC BEREAVEMENT

PTSD

Depression

Prolonged Grief

Dual Burden of Traumatic Bereavement

Survivors of a traumatic death (*i.e., sudden, violent, or caused by human [in]action*) often experience a “dual burden” of grief and trauma symptoms.

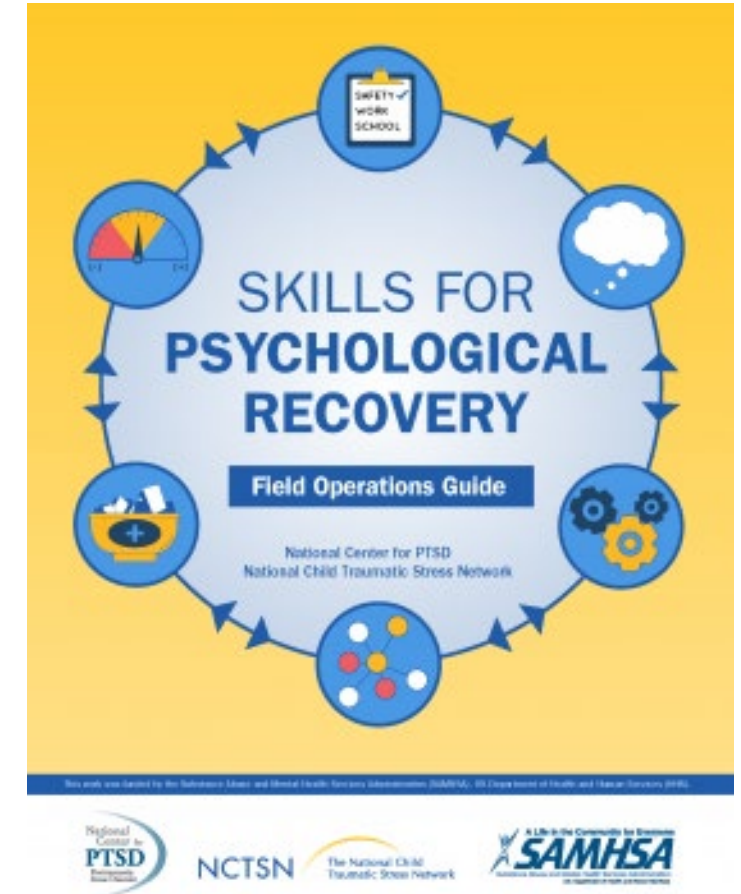


Ashes, Edvard Munch (1895)

Pearlman et al. (2014)

Promising Practices & Effective Early Intervention

- Social Support
 - Includes peer support groups.
 - Lowers risk for bereavement-related complications.
 - But can be difficult in traumatic loss.
 - Consistency and practicality are key for informal support.
- Early Intervention:
 - Skills for Psychological Recovery



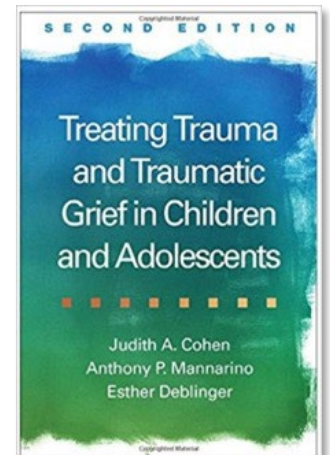
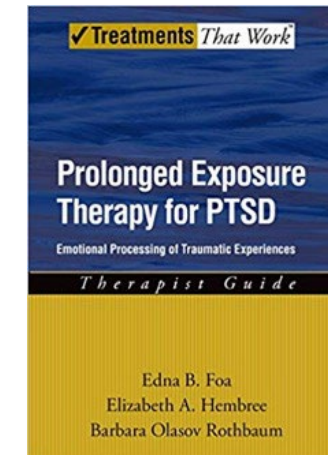
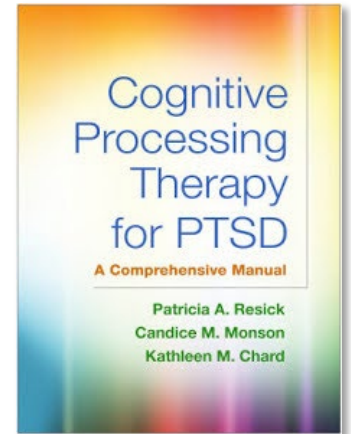
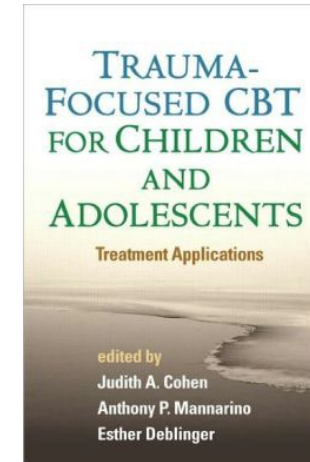
Examples of Evidence-based Treatments and Promising Practices

• Adults

- Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE)
- Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)
- Prolonged Grief Therapy (PGT)
- Behavioral Activation
- GRIEF Approach
- Restorative Retelling for Violent Death

• Children and Adolescents

- Trauma-Focused Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)
- Trauma and Grief Component Therapy (TGCT)



The Vital Role of Funeral Directors and Morticians in Coordinated Family Support After Loss



Vanessa Lopez
Funeral Director
Int'l Funeral Services of New York



Introduction

Who are Funeral Directors & Morticians?

- We are often the only community service provider that families voluntarily choose to engage with during crisis.
- We are also often the first non-law enforcement professionals the grieving families encounter.
- We are one of the few industries that operate 24/7/365.

Today's Goal:

Explore critical roles, current challenges and collaborative impacts of survivor support.

The Funeral Professional

Key Responsibilities & Services Provided

Our profession provides unique expertise that becomes crucial during mass violence response

- Cultural and religious knowledge
- Dignified care of the victims
- Provide emotional support and guidance
- Memorial planning expertise



Photo Credit: <https://pixabay.com/photos/candle-burial-cemetery-catholic-8137281/>

Navigating The Aftermath: The Importance of Collaboration and Partnerships

How Funeral Professionals Support Families:

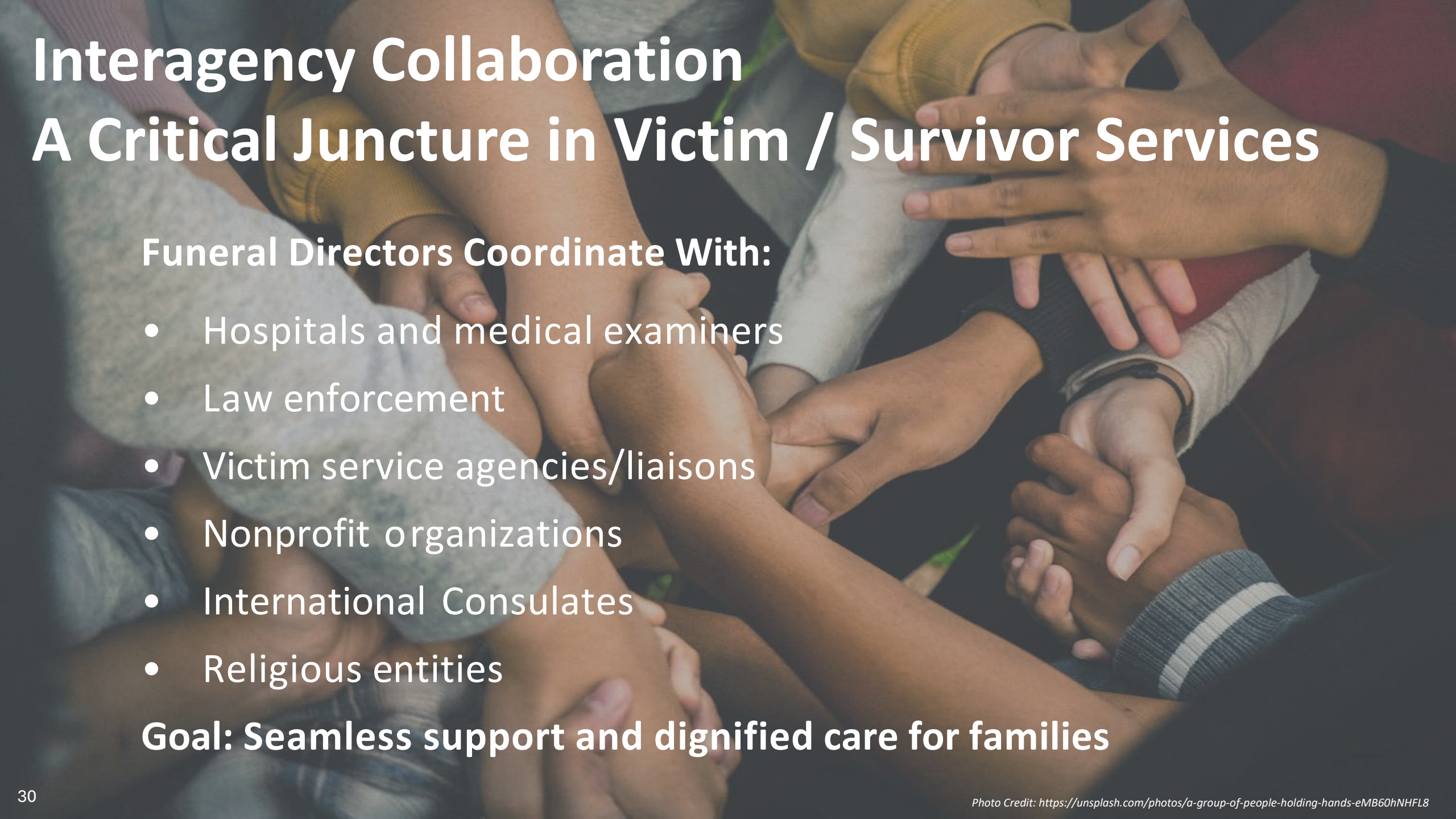
We help connect families with victim/survivor services.

We bridge the gaps between multiple entities.

We facilitate community healing.

We advocate for family rights.

“Grief is not a disorder, a disease or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity.” - Earl Grollman



Interagency Collaboration A Critical Juncture in Victim / Survivor Services

Funeral Directors Coordinate With:

- Hospitals and medical examiners
- Law enforcement
- Victim service agencies/liaisons
- Nonprofit organizations
- International Consulates
- Religious entities

Goal: Seamless support and dignified care for families

Coordinating Victim Compensation (New York example)

Types of compensations Office of Victim Services (OVS) can provide:

1. Compensation of funeral expenses up to \$6,000
2. Crime-related compensation of medical and counseling expenses
3. Compensation for crime scene clean-up
4. Replacement of essential personal property lost
5. Relocation, moving, and storage costs
6. Occupational rehabilitation expenses



Photo Credit: <https://unsplash.com/photos/two-sitting-women-holding-hands-each-other-while-praying-inside-room-PhbeusfMWZk>

Challenges & Ethical Considerations

Transparency, Sensitivity & Privacy

Let's advocate for

- Improved victim/survivor services funding and timelines
- Interdisciplinary partnerships
- Trauma-informed care training for funeral professionals
- Standardized mass violence response protocols across jurisdictions
- Community programs to promote collective healing

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” - Gandhi

National Funeral Organizations

National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) and Funeral Service Foundation (FSF): Supporting Funeral Directors After Homicide, Mass Violence, and Traumatic Loss



Crime Victim Compensation Guidance & Advocacy

- NFDA guides funeral directors in helping families access crime victim compensation (up to \$10,000).
- Advocates at federal/state levels to improve survivor access.



Grief & Trauma Support Resources for Families

- Free grief resources on trauma, sudden death, and homicide.
- FSF's "Grief Guide" addresses traumatic loss triggers, children's grief, and memorialization.



Professional Training: Mass Fatality & Homicide Response

- NFDA education on trauma cases, mass fatalities, embalming, and survivor communication.
- Certification in trauma-informed care & mass violence protocols.



Crisis Response Funds & Emergency Grants

- FSF deploys emergency funds (e.g., \$50,000 after mass shootings).
- Provides grants to grief support organizations.



Debriefing, Employee Wellness & Peer Support

- NFDA promotes team debriefing & staff mental health practices.
- Workshops & self-care resources for those serving survivor families.



Essential Victim and Survivor Services: Supporting Families Through Trauma and Sensitive Notification



Photo provided by Dr. Howard-Burton

Debra Howard-Burton, Th.D.
S.O.A.R Professional Services,
NMVC Consultant

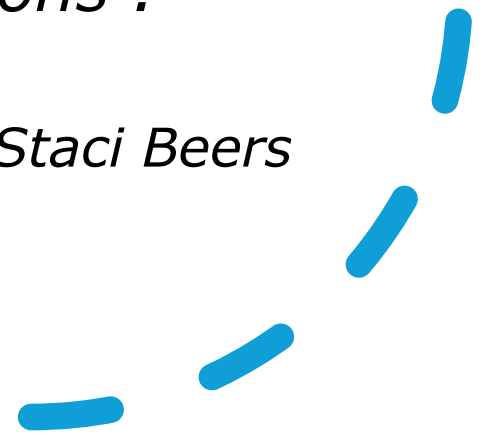


**When a loved one dies
in a mass violence
incident, the profound
impact reaches into
every corner of a
family's life, leaving a
lasting ripple that
affects us all.**

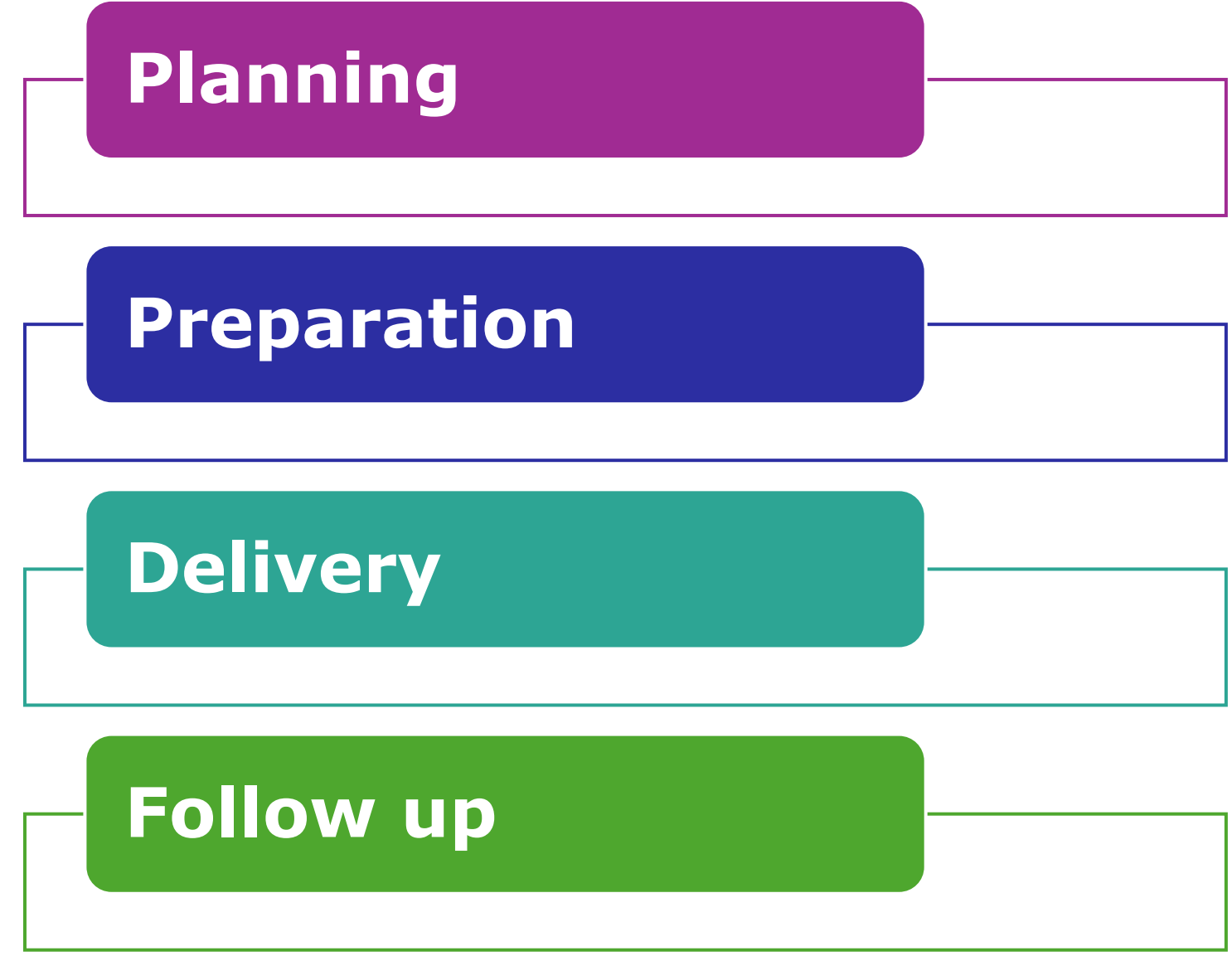
Death Notification Trauma Notification (FBI)

“It is important and essential to address victims in a trauma-informed manner because we only get one chance at trauma notifications. Professionals who show compassion, empathy, patience, teamwork, cultural responsiveness, flexibility, and adaptability and who are trauma-informed and victim-centered are best prepared to deliver these notifications .”

FBI VSD Victim Services Coordinator Staci Beers



Four Steps of the FBI's Trauma Notification Process



Planning

Preparation

Delivery

Follow up

Become a Bridge Between Tragedy and Healing

Victims of MVIs require not only immediate crisis intervention, but also comprehensive, long-term support services that address the multifaceted layers of trauma, disruption, and grief they endure.

Advocates play a crucial role in serving as a vital connection to these essential resources, thereby reducing the likelihood of re-traumatization.

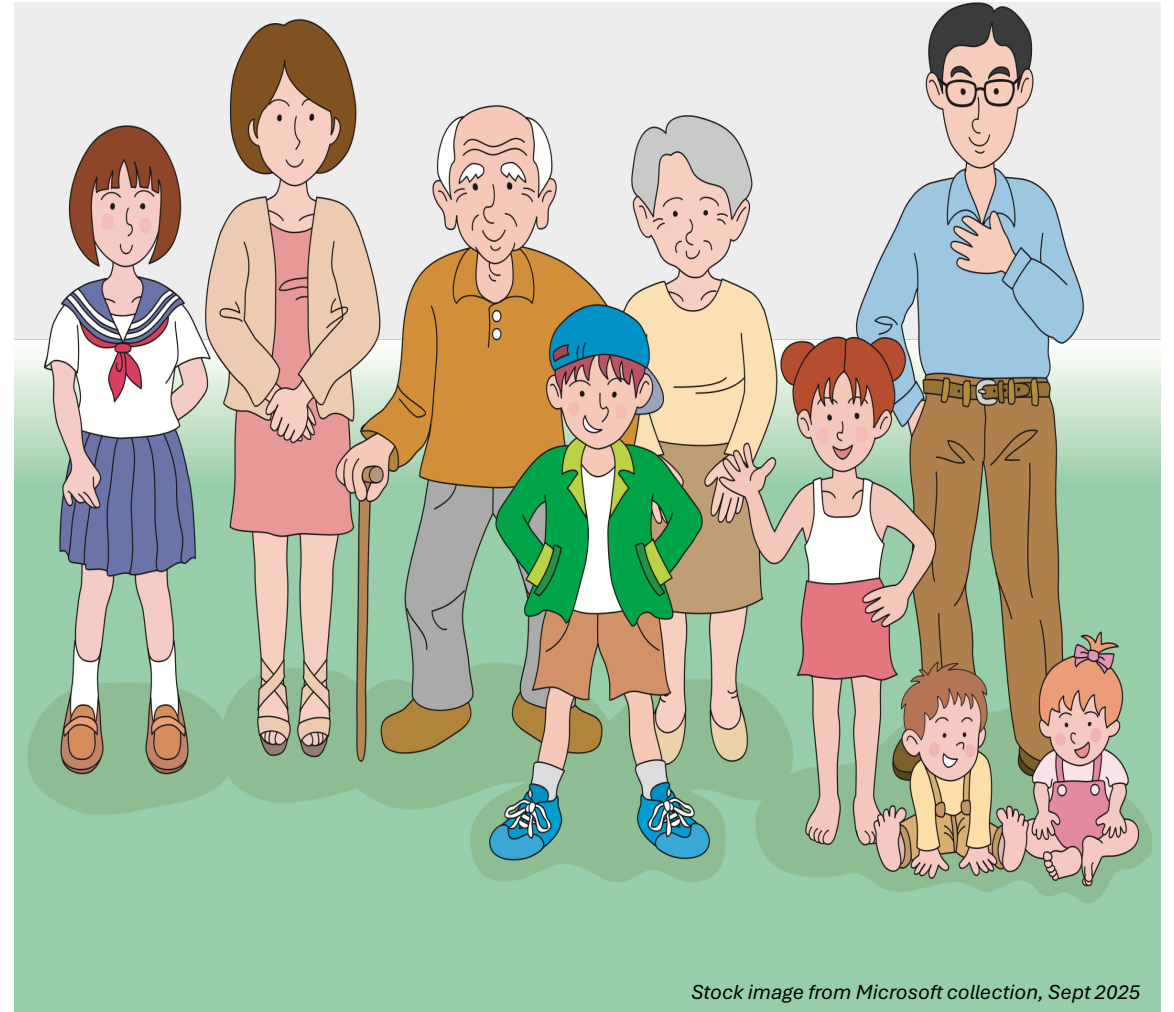


Services



Multiple Families of MVIs

MVIs often have a unique and compound effect on multiple families and extended family members. These families may face layered trauma, financial strains, and challenges navigating services. Advocates and service providers must consider these factors to ensure the provision of effective, trauma-informed, and family-centered support.



Impact of MVIs on Multi-Family Victims/Survivors



Emotional and Psychological Impact



Services Navigation Challenges



Financial and Housing



Culture Considerations



Long Term Recovery

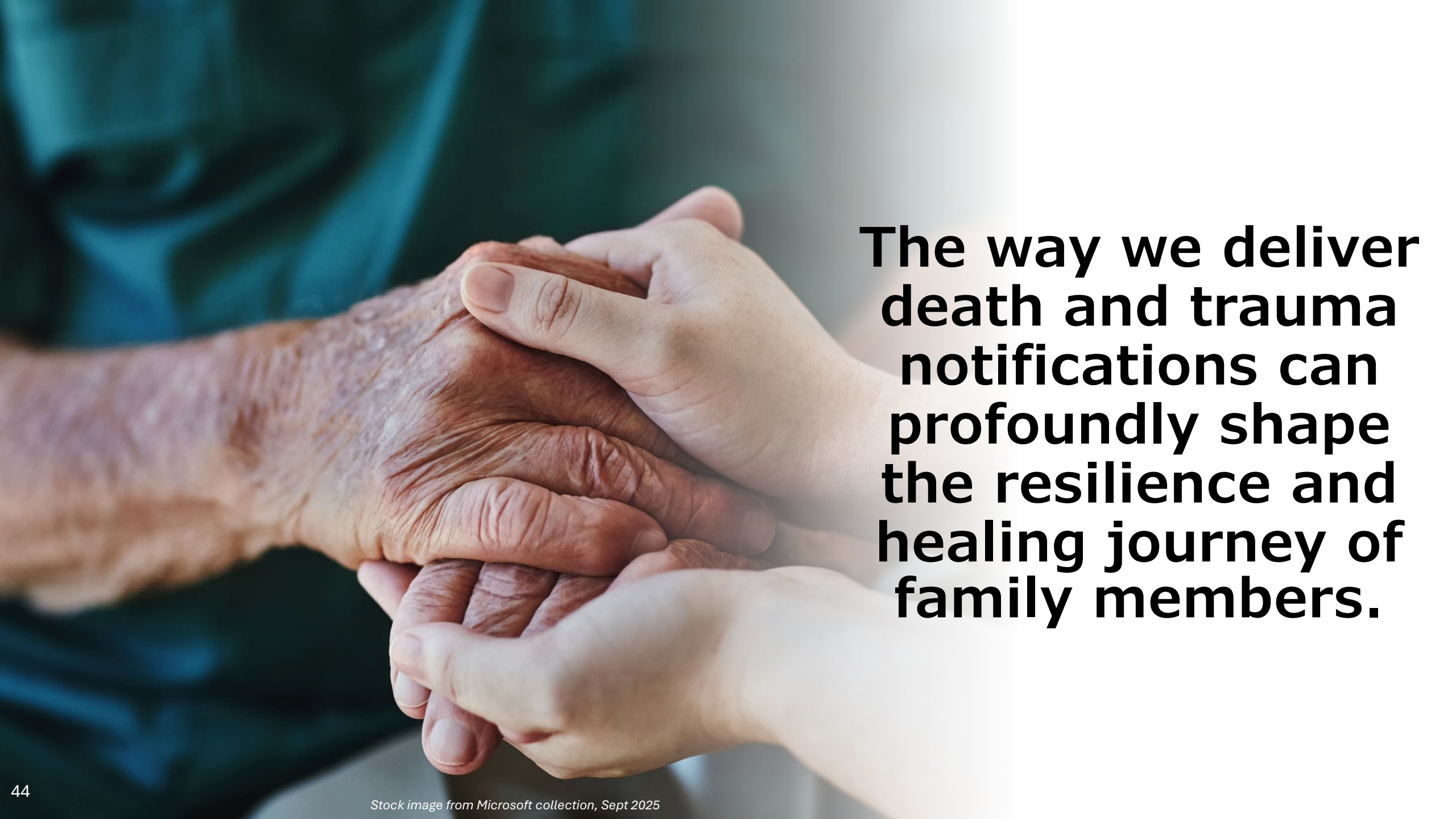


International Victims



Honoring the Victims

MVI victims and survivors must be involved in leadership roles during all planning processes. Their voices and choices form the basis for a memorial that honors them and their loved ones.



The way we deliver death and trauma notifications can profoundly shape the resilience and healing journey of family members.

**“In the face of
loss, we rise by
lifting others.
Justice begins
with
compassion.”**



Effective Strategies to "HONOR THE LEGACY" of Victims Killed in MVIs

9/11 Memorial & Museum “In Memoriam” Room/Display

Photos by Anne Seymour, September 11, 2025

In Memoriam was created with resources contributed by family members and friends of those killed in the attacks. Content was also provided through the Voices of September 11th's 9/11 Living Memorial project, originally conceived by September's Mission; the StoryCorps September 11th Initiative, with support from the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation; the 9/11 Tribute Center; the New York City Fire Department Family Assistance Unit; the New York City Police Department; the Port Authority Police Department; the *New York Times*; the Pentagon Memorial Fund; the Cantor Fitzgerald Relief Fund; and the U.S. Department of Justice.

We acknowledge with gratitude the participation of family members in providing guidance about their loved ones' representation in this installation.



ONE STRATEGY OR SKILL

Questions from the Field

Thank you for submitting questions in advance.



Let's answer a few frequently asked questions...

To Request an NMVC Consultation or Technical Assistance:

♥ For Consultations: nmvc@musc.edu

♥ For Technical Assistance: ICP-TTA@musc.edu

WRAP-UP & EVALUATION

Upon ending your session, a survey will appear.
***We ask that you please take the time to complete
this brief survey.***

Your feedback and suggestions are appreciated, and
are helpful to improve our National Town Hall series,
and to identify National Town Hall topics for the future.

We appreciate your time and attention.

Next National Town Hall #16

FEBRUARY 2026

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

www.GrabCalendar.com

Topic: *TBD*

Date: February 26, 2026

Thank
you