



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

These guidelines focus on steps that Victim Service Professionals (VSPs) can take after the initial death notification has been delivered.

### 1. 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:**

### 2. 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:**

- ⇒ <https://nacvcb.org/state-information/>

**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/>

### 3. 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



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

- ⇒ Provide them with a copy of "[Media Guidelines for Homicide Family Survivors](#)" and "[Additional Tips to Prepare for Media Interviews](#)"
- ⇒ 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

#### 5. 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

#### 6. 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

#### 7. Provide guidelines for funeral arrangements:

- ⇒ See the "Grief, Loss and End of Life" information by the AARP here:
  - <https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/grief-loss-end-of-life/>

#### 8. 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

### 9. 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 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 the 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)

### 10. 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.

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.



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