

# Unit 12. Homicide

## What Is Homicide?

“Homicide” is defined as—

**Murder:** Killing another person with prior intent to kill that particular victim or anyone who gets in the way and with no legal excuse or authority.

**Manslaughter:** Killing another person without prior intent to kill.

- Voluntary manslaughter involves killing another person in the heat of passion or while in the act of committing another felony crime.
- Involuntary manslaughter involves killing another person while committing an illegal activity that is not a felony.

Homicide is one of the most traumatic experiences that can happen to a person or family. It is a catastrophic event that is sudden, violent, and final. Victims and survivors (covictims) have no time to prepare for the loss or to say goodbye. No amount of justice, restitution, compassion, or prayer will be enough. Certain events, such as birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays, will always be memory triggers for homicide survivors.

After a homicide—unlike some other crimes—the victim’s character and lifestyle are often questioned, as if the homicide was the victim’s fault. Survivors of homicide find the criminal justice system confusing, stressful, and painful.

Their loved ones are unable to speak for themselves, and many survivors struggle with making sure the victim’s life is adequately recognized, remembered, and fairly represented. In addition, survivors often are left asking why their loved ones were killed and whether they suffered. Many survivors never get an answer, which creates additional stress.

Homicide survivors differ in the way they grieve. The victim’s children may believe that the crime is their fault; parents may believe that in the natural order of life, their children should outlive them; and siblings may feel guilt in moving on with their lives. The long-term strain of the trauma can often be too much—marriages break up, children withdraw, family relationships are strained and changed, and friendships deteriorate.

The emotional stress can take a physical toll that leaves survivors struggling with chronic disease. Some turn to alcohol or other drugs to ease their pain. Many times, while the offender may find faith in prison, the victim’s family may lose its faith. Homicide also affects people who may not know the victim very well, such as coworkers, classmates, casual acquaintances, or neighbors. Homicide creates a ripple effect; many people feel the impact.

*We woke up a family of four and went to bed a family of three. A part of our lives was snatched up.*

—Homicide survivor

## Words To Know

- Covictim
- Homicide
- Homicide survivor
- Murder
- Manslaughter
- Ripple effect
- Survivor reactions

## Homicide survivors often must deal with—

- The death notification process.
- Identification of the body.
- Funeral arrangements.
- The media.
- An unsolved case.





## In the News: Homicide Trends

Homicide has a far-reaching effect. It affects not only victims, but also survivors, communities, and society. Review the facts below about homicide. Which trend is the most surprising to you?

- There are 7–10 close relatives—not counting significant others, friends, neighbors, or coworkers—for each homicide victim.
- Parents of children who are murdered are twice as likely to develop posttraumatic stress disorder as parents of children who die accidentally or commit suicide.
- Depression is common among surviving family members or friends of homicide victims.
- Most homicide victims killed with a weapon are shot.

## Examples of Homicide

Murder is defined as the willful killing of a person. Voluntary manslaughter is defined as the death of a person caused by gross negligence of any individual other than the victim. Involuntary manslaughter is defined as killing a person while committing a nonfelony, such as reckless driving. The following are examples of homicide. As you read each story, consider the impact of the crime on the victims.

### Murder

Carmen is kidnapped from her job at a convenience store. The cash register is found open and money is missing. The next morning, Carmen's dead body is found in a ditch.

What is your reaction?

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### Murder (Stalking)

Phil follows his former wife Brenda to and from her job, always staying out of sight. One day while high on drugs, he goes into her office with a gun and fatally shoots her in front of her coworkers.

How might Brenda's killing have affected her coworkers?

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*The only way I identified his body was by his fingernail biting . . . it was hard.*

—Homicide survivor

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*Who would think that you would be killed while you were asleep? That was supposed to be the safest place my son could be.*

—Mother of homicide victim

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**Voluntary Manslaughter**

A bank robber with a gun becomes nervous when Kendrik, the teller, can't transfer the money into the bag fast enough. The robber nervously shifts the gun in his hand and the gun fires, killing Kendrik.

How would your life be different if Kendrik were your father or brother?

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**Involuntary Manslaughter**

Matt and his friends join a parade of cars on campus celebrating the football victory. Two more friends, Derek and A.J., jump onto the hood of Matt's car shouting and waving. Matt suddenly swerves to miss another car and both young men fall off the hood. A.J. is hit by a car and dies.

Who has been victimized and how?

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*People don't know what to say to you, so they avoid you like you have a disease.*

—Mother of murder victim



## What Is the Impact of Homicide?

The following lists outline some examples of how homicide affects financial, physical, emotional, and religious/spiritual areas of homicide survivors' lives. Add your own examples below.

<p><b>Financial</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burial costs</li> <li>• Counseling and medical costs not covered by insurance</li> <li>• Time off work to attend the trial, appeal, parole hearings</li> <li>• Loss of income</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> </ul>	<p><b>Physical</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fatigue</li> <li>• Stress reactions</li> <li>• Problems sleeping</li> <li>• Inability to think, memory problems</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> </ul>
<p><b>Emotional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shock, disbelief</li> <li>• Anger/rage</li> <li>• Insecurity/intense fear (panic attacks)</li> <li>• Intense sadness</li> <li>• Complicated grief, haunted by details of loved one's death</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> </ul>	<p><b>Religious/Spiritual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Why would this happen to me?"</li> <li>• Sense of being "punished" without understanding why</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> </ul>





## Victim Impact: Listen and Learn

After viewing the OVC *Victim Impact: Listen and Learn* DVD clips about homicide, answer the following questions:

### Clip 1: Joey

**Peggy's son Joey was killed in an arson crime.**

What was the emotional impact of Joey's murder on Peggy?

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What was the "domino effect" of Joey's murder on Peggy's family?

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How can offenders demonstrate accountability and remorse for killing someone?

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### Clip 2: Nanette

**Myrtle's daughter, Nanette, was murdered.**

When Nanette was murdered, what was the emotional impact of this crime on Myrtle?

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When a victim/survivor is an elder, how might the impact of the crime be aggravated?

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What could Nanette's murderer do to be accountable?

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### Clip 3: Jill

**Amy's sister Jill was raped, tortured, and murdered 8 years ago.**

What was the emotional impact of her sister's rape and murder on Amy?

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How did the emotional stress of the murder affect Amy physically?

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What was the "domino effect" of Jill's murder on Amy's family?

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## Being Accountable for Your Crimes

Homicide is a crime of choice. It is the direct or indirect decision and behavior to harm a person that results in death, the ultimate loss. The result of this choice has long-term and intense emotional impacts on covictims and survivors. **No one has the right to kill another person, regardless of the circumstances.**

### How Can I Be Accountable for My Crimes?

*I will find an acceptable way to apologize for killing someone.*

—Adam

*I will pay restitution to the victim's family.*

—Reggie

*When I am released, I will live a crime-free, nonviolent life.*

—Sheila

*I will learn how I hurt the victim's family, friends, and community through counseling.*

—Emmit

How do you think the victims' families would feel hearing these statements?

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## Additional Activities

### Activity A—Reactions to My Murder

Imagine that you have been murdered. Read the following reactions typically experienced by covictims during the first weeks or months after someone they know has been murdered. Choose the reactions that you believe specific family members or friends would have. Write their names under each reaction that applies.

Shock:

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Suicidal thoughts:

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Denial:

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Anger:

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Unable to make day-to-day decisions:

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Unable to sleep:

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Worrying whether you suffered:

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Able to make day-to-day decisions:

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Thoughts of revenge:

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Sadness, missing you:

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Having to take medication:

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Attending the offenders' hearings or execution:

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Constantly thinking about you:

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For most survivors, the trauma of your murder would be made worse by the need to make decisions and plans that are very stressful. Write the name of the person who would most likely deal with the following decisions or planning:

Notifying family and friends of your death: \_\_\_\_\_

Identifying your body: \_\_\_\_\_

Dealing with the religious or cultural issues your death raises with your family: \_\_\_\_\_

Informing law enforcement officials or victim services advocates of any religious or cultural taboos or requirements of your family: \_\_\_\_\_

Making the cremation/funeral/burial arrangements: \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewing and paying the medical bills: \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewing and paying the cremation/funeral/burial bills: \_\_\_\_\_

Dealing with the court process: \_\_\_\_\_

### Activity B—Plan a Funeral

Plan a cremation, burial, ceremony, or memorial by filling out the information below. Be as specific as you can.

Services and burial costs:

- Burial options:
- Type of casket/urn/container:
- Flowers/decorations:
- Music:
- Photographers/video:
- Program (type of service):
- Obituary:
- Clothing:
- Faith leader, speakers or attendants:
- Reception/refreshments: