Expanding Resources in the aftermath of Homicide

By
Connie Saindon
Vilma Torres
Introduction

- Who we are
- Why this topic
- Overview
More people die from homicide than war (WHO 2014).

The FBI Crime Clock (2010) tells us that one person is murdered every 35.6 minutes.

Approximately 10 people are significantly impacted by each murder.
• The death of a loved family member or friend changes our lives forever. (Connie’s Poem)

• The toll can mount quickly with living and working with such horrific stories.

• How many of you have worked with a homicide case?
• How do you still remember it?
Our intent is...

- To provide resources and strategies to help reduce the strain on providers and the families they serve in the aftermath of murder.
- To provide information that attendees can apply based on presenters resources and work.

...In order for you to be more equipped in helping families rebuild their lives.
Sources

1. Presenters:
   - *Safe Horizon*– Vilma Torres
   - *Murder Survivors Handbook*– Connie Saindon

2. Ted Rynearson–Criminal Death Support Group

3. Susan Herman– Parallel Justice
Two Questions for the next slides

- Mark with an Y... which ones you have a responsibility for in your job.

- Mark on a scale 1–10 how well this job gets done. 10 represents Survivors would vote that they were well taken care of.

- Discuss your answers
Susan Herman: Parallel Justice

1. All victims deserve justice.
2. Victims should be presumed to be credible unless there is reason to believe otherwise.
3. Victims’ safety is a top priority.
4. Victims should experience no further harm.
5. Rights should be implemented and enforced.
6. Victims should be allowed an opportunity to talk about their experiences and their needs.
8. Victims should be told that what happened to them was wrong and that every effort will be made to help them rebuild their lives.

9. Victims’ needs should be addressed through a comprehensive, coordinated, communal response.

10. Decisions about how to address victims’ needs should be based on sound information and research.
Murder Survivors Handbook

- 100 sources, 30 reviewers and 11 real survivor stories
- Two and a half year project
- Ten Chapters
- Not an encyclopedia nor a bible.
- An empowerment tool. Each chapter focuses on what survivors can do and resources to get more information.

*Authors profits go to proving more books and education.*
Since 1978 has been at the forefront of helping victims of crime and abuse through their crises in New York City.

- Non profit organization in the courts, community, child advocacy center, in police precincts, and family justice center.
- Telephone hotlines are answered 24 hours a day.
Outreach to Families of Homicide Victims

Collaboration and Partnership
- ME Office and Funeral Arrangements
- Intervention by Service Provider
- Office of Victims Services Compensation
- Needs of the Survivor – Information
- Emotional Support Crisis Intervention
- Advocacy (Law Enforcement & DA Office)
No one should be with this alone

“It will bring you to your knees”
says a father who lost his daughter.
Multiple Levels of Complexity

- Murder
- DUI fatality
- Shaken baby death
- Gang killing
- Terrorist fatality
- Murder/suicide
- War
  - No body
  - Mass Shooting

- Multiple suspects/trials
- First arrest—32 years after death
- No suspect
- Happened in another state
- Killer found not guilty
- More…
Overwhelming complexity and demands

- Can easily thwart access to resources
- Can overwhelm those involved

At Risk for....

- Burnout
- PTSD
- Depression
- Substance Abuse
- Physical Illnesses
Normal reactions...

Can be:

- Being possessed with what has happened.
- Compulsive care-giving
- Compulsive inquiry

“At times it felt as this mission was my only life.”

—Founder, Connie Saindon, whose sister, “Tiny” was murdered in 1961
Most Symptoms are Normal Reactions

To abnormal events
Restorative Retelling: Unnatural Death

3 V’s of how Unnatural Dying is Different

• Violent - It is Violent
• Violation - It is a Wrong Doing
• Volitional - It is an on-purpose act
• Also Voyeuristic - private life becomes public
Two competing stressors

- **Separation Distress** occurs as a result of the loss of a loved one as understood by attachment theory.

- **Trauma Distress** relates more to how someone died.
How do you manage?

- What do you do, specifically to manage the difficult and traumatic material you are exposed to?

- Exercise: Draw three things you do to manage
- Discuss
The Three P’s are innate abilities. We are born with these abilities:

- **Pacification Strategies** – The ability to calm oneself down
- **Partitioning Strategies** – The ability to separate oneself
- **Perspective Strategies** – The ability for perspective such as hope for the future.
Breathing practice
Murder Survivors Handbook: Real-life Stories, Tips and Resources

- Initial Impact and Safety
- Grief and Resiliency—counterbalance
- Dealing with the Media—News, Social, and Public
- First Responders and Victim Rights
- Homicide Investigation
- Criminal Justice Process
- Prosecuting the Case
- Victim Impact Statements, Justice and Cold Cases
- Long-Term consequences—Mental Health, Parole Hearings…
- Remembrances and Missions
Chapter One: Initial Impact and Safety

First Thing: Safety

Initial Impact

- What do you do, specifically; to help you manage and keep safe after what has happened to you and your loved one?

- What Happened?

Resources/Examples
Chapter Two– Grief and Resiliency

Counterbalance of grief and resiliency

- What did you experience initially? What Today?
- Did you notice differences in how people around you experienced grief?
- Is the experience of this loss different than other losses you have had and, if so, how?
- What helped in those early days? What helps now?

Do you have any tips for others?

Resources/Examples
Chapter Four–The Early Response

Roles and Responsibilities with First Responders

- *Who did you first have contact with? What did you understand were their roles? What did you learn about what/who was helpful? Do you have any tips for others?*

Victims' Rights
Resources/Examples
Chapter Six– The Criminal Justice Process

Role of Criminal Justice Professionals
Going to court, postponement and delays
Legal terms, tips for going to court.

– Who informed you that the case would be prosecuted and kept you updated? What mistakes did you make? What mistakes did others make?
– What is your experience of the court process? What are the rules of behavior in court for you, for the accused, your family, their family and friends? What surprises did you have?

Resources/Examples
Q & A

• We hope this gave you ideas on how to expand resources for you and your families in the aftermath of murder.

• We hope we have expanded ideas to help you manage the difficult emotional path this kind of work takes you on as well.

• Your comments and questions are most welcome now
Contact us...

Founder of Survivors of Violent Loss and former Clinical Director.

Author of two books:
- Murder Survivors Handbook
- The Journey: Learning to live with violent death.

Researcher: Pilot study plus two studies published in Death Studies

www.svlp.org
csaindon@svlp.org
858 699 7700

Director, Safe Horizon
New York City
Family Justice Center

vtorres@safehorizon.org
www.safehorizon.org
718 508-1275

Connie Saindon, MFT
Vilma Torres, LMSW