

## Judicial System

For many, this may be the first involvement with law enforcement or the judicial system. It's very common for people to expect what they have seen on television or movies to apply to their current circumstances. Unfortunately, these expectations are often unrealistic or a distorted snapshot of how things truly operate.

Texas has laws and regulations in place aimed at protecting victims. For cases involving prosecution, court advocates can provide you with information, education, and support that will help reduce fears and uncertainties.

Criminal case resolution by plea agreement is a practice that is often utilized. Through both negotiation and agreement, this approach to resolution can prevent the need for testifying in court.

Education and information regarding how the judicial system operates can assist victims and their family in the reduction of trauma.

## Benefits of Counseling

Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Reviewing the incident and processing the event can help you clarify what actually happened.
- Legal and judicial decisions can be discussed and utilized as part of the promotion of healing and resolution.
- Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies—allowing for the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network can help to decrease the negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from grief.

You can utilize your grief as an opportunity to build confidence, reduce isolation, and develop protective instinct skills.

## Who can help?

The Travis County Sheriff's Office Victim Services Unit can assist you with information regarding your case status, Victims' Rights, Crime Victim Compensation, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to the appropriate community helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.



## Resources

### The Christi Center

512.467.2600

[www.christicenter.org](http://www.christicenter.org)

### My Healing Place

512.472.7878

[www.myhealingplace.org](http://www.myhealingplace.org)

### People Against Violent Crime

512.837.7282

[www.peopleagainstviolentcrime.org](http://www.peopleagainstviolentcrime.org)

### Travis County Medical

#### Examiner's Office

512.854.9599

[www.co.travis.tx.us/medical\\_examiner](http://www.co.travis.tx.us/medical_examiner)

## Survivors of Homicide

### Victim Services Unit

5555 Airport Blvd  
Austin, TX 78751  
512-854-9709



Name/ID Number:

Direct Number:

Mailing Address:

PO Box 1748  
Austin, TX 78767

You have lost someone you know and love to homicide. It is an understatement to say that your life has been changed. Your anger and pain are deep. You may feel as if you'll never recover, but with determination and time you can learn to manage your grief. You will need to surround yourself with supportive and caring people.

## Most Common Feelings of Grief

**SHOCK**—In the beginning, most people feel a profound numbness. Some liken it to "being in a fog". It may be this fog that allows you to accomplish the necessary arrangements for the funeral and other duties.

**TURMOIL**—When the fog clears, the emotions of most people fall into turmoil. You may have flashbacks of the moments you were notified of the death, or the last time you saw your loved one alive. You may dream of your loved one, or believe that he or she will soon "walk through that door". Part of you will deny that your loved one is really dead.

You may experience times of uncontrolled crying. You may have panic attacks and feel afraid for your life or the lives of other family members. You may be filled with restlessness or feel unable to concentrate on anything. You may be unable to sleep at night or find it very hard to get out of bed in the morning.

As the reality of death sinks in, depression usually is not far behind. The world may seem to lose its meaning for you. Activities that you once enjoyed may seem like a burden. You may feel as if there is little point in going on, or you may want to withdraw from everyone.

During all of these emotions, you need to keep talking with people you can trust and who will listen with a non-judgmental ear.

**SEARCH FOR UNDERSTANDING**—You will probably experience a great need to understand why this tragedy happened. In your search for understanding, you may feel the need to know what happened, where it happened, and who did it. If someone is arrested, you may want to know as much as you can about the person.

You may expect the criminal justice system to work more quickly and keep you informed better than it does. You may decide to attend the trial, if there is one, as a part of your search for why this happened. If a survivor is a witness at the trial, he or she could be barred from attending the remainder of the trial, contributing to unanswered questions. If there is not a trial, you may feel the need to hear the explanation for that decision often.

Opinions of many people may come your way about the crime, motivation, and the criminal. You will likely not find answers to all your questions.

**GUILT**—Each survivor lives with "what-ifs". This is a normal reaction. Please remember that no one can predict the future or recreate what might have been. We can't change the events that took place, and blaming ourselves will only be destructive.

**ANGER**—Sometimes it may feel as if anger will overwhelm you. It may be directed at the murderer, the criminal justice system, family members, or friends. It's not uncommon to be angry at God. Many people feel guilty about their anger, but it is a completely normal reaction.

Anger may either immobilize you or move you to relentless activity. Your anger will never completely go away. With time and support your anger can be managed and may even contribute to helping you gain back some control in your life.

**REVENGE**—For the first time in their lives, many survivors find themselves thinking of ways to kill another human being, the killer. Understandably, some people are deeply disturbed by this emotion. You may wonder if you are losing your mind, but it's important to remember that having these feelings does not mean that you will act on them.

## Coping with the Reactions of Others

Each of us is an individual—we like different foods, wear different clothing, and choose unique lifestyles. It stands to reason that, at the most painful time in our lives, we would also grieve in our own way. How we choose to grieve is determined by three things—our personal view of death, how society views death, and our individual personalities.

**FAMILY**—When a homicide occurs, you might expect it to bring a family together. However, it is not uncommon for families to separate, both physically and emotionally. At this time, communication is very important. Work hard to express your feelings within the family in a supportive and honest way.

**FRIENDS**—When you hurt, you turn to people who have always been there, your friends. But where are they a month, six months or a year after the murder? Often, they have gone back to their lives, but you still need support.

Even though survivors often need to talk about the details of the homicide, people often feel they do not have the words to say or the ability to listen. They may feel inadequate. And the loss of your loved one probably hit them with a stark reality: If it can happen to you, it could happen to them.

**COWORKERS**—You may notice that people you have known for years avoid you. They may avert their eyes and "not see you." They usually have no idea this feels like a rejection and only adds to your grief.

You can face this issue in various ways—stop seeing them, continue contact but avoid the subject you most need to discuss, raise the issue directly, or you can add other people to your circle who have lost loved ones or who are willing to share your experience.