

DEATH BY MURDER

There is a commonness in grief that all bereaved people experience. We all suffer the same grief manifestations, but people who lose family members to murder have the additional problems caused by media coverage, the legal system and the knowledge that someone deliberately killed their loved one. As a result they experience extreme shock, anger, hatred, feelings of injustice and the need for retribution.

Usually the murder is sensationalized by the media. Newspapers sometimes print half-truths or blatantly inaccurate stories. They ask insensitive questions of the family, not only immediately after the death, but during the trial periods and even on anniversary dates. How a person responds to this coverage depends on the individual. Some refuse to even speak to media people and try to ignore the false information they may print. Others meticulously tell the truth in the hope that truth will be reported. Either way, persistence by the media can be cruel and never ending, thus adding to the pain.

There are times that the murderer is never apprehended. Sometimes the police have strong beliefs as to who the murderer is, but cannot prove it and the killer may go free, or they do not have enough evidence to convict the killer. Other times the murderer is unknown. Surviving family members can rarely let go of the need to find and convict the one or ones who killed their loved one. This has the effect of inhibiting grief resolution because the murder itself is not resolved.

If the murderer is found, the family members are frustrated at the slowness of the legal system, the delays and postponements, the technical details and legal bargaining. Then, if the murderer does go to trial there is the

painful rehashing of details that keep the wound of grief open.

Frequently the murdered person is made to seem deserving of the murder, or at least is made to seem less than good. The person's life is exposed to detailed scrutiny and many times attempts are made to disparage her character.

People whose loved ones die violently and suddenly must deal with the question of their thoughts and feelings at the time of the death. Was she afraid? Did she suffer? and on and on.

The terrible feelings of regret that you weren't there to help your love one plays over and over in your mind.

Of all the emotions survivor's of murdered people experience, frustration and anger are probably the most intense. You are constantly being thwarted in your efforts to find and punish the killer through the legal system that seems to favor the murderer while the victim and survivors are ignored. The anger, not only at the death of your loved one and her killer, but the unfairness in the treatment of both you and your loved one's memory can be overwhelming.

It is important that both the emotions of frustration and anger be expressed. Anger and rage can spill out onto undeserving people. Be careful of this. It is absolutely necessary to express your rage, lest you become personally consumed by it. Both emotions can be expressed through hard physical activity. Hitting a punching bag or beating a pillow is especially helpful in releasing emotions. You may need to do this many times. One father used a punching bag almost daily. He drew a face on it and pretended it was whomever he was angry with that day--the murderer, the court system, or the media.

A number of murdered individuals are mutilated. Sometimes they are mutilated so badly that officials don't let the survivors see their loved one. Sometimes they don't release the autopsy report. Survivors see mutilation as the ultimate insult in the final hours of their loved one's life. This adds to the subsequent rage.

I can't stress strongly enough the necessity of expressing the intense emotions of anger or rage. If these emotions are not expressed, bitterness and depression will follow and your grief will never be healthily resolved.

The grief of survivors of murdered people usually lasts longer than any other grief because of the anger and frustration, constant delays and drawing out of the trial, the feelings of injustice, sensationalism by the press and the constant rehashing of the painful details surrounding the actual killing. If your loved one was murdered, know that longer than usual grief is normal for you.

Charlotte Hullinger, founder of the national organization PARENTS OF MURDERED CHILDREN advises survivors to let themselves experience whatever emotions they feel. She says, "Let your anger out. Those around you may be uncomfortable to hear your expression of rage, hate and frustration, but don't let that deter you. It is imperative that you do not bury these emotions. You can't move beyond these emotions until you have let them out. Give yourself permission to be mad, sad, or even glad."