

**INSTRUCTOR GUIDELINES**

***Key Concepts/Objectives to Emphasize in Instruction and Learning Activities:***

1. Impact of homicide and traumatic grief. (12-9 to 12-12)
2. Core components of a sensitive and effective death notification. (12-15 to 12-18)
3. Practical approaches to assist surviving family members of homicide victims. (12-19 to 12-21)

***Objectives:***

1. Identify the range of problems that co-victims of homicide might experience.
2. Practice responding to homicide co-victims's needs through role plays, focusing on words that are most helpful.

***Description of Activity and Faculty Guidelines:***

Parents of Murdered Children identifies eight key problems that co-victims might experience (with a “ninth problem” defined by Dr. Ted Rynearson). Each of these “problems” is listed on the “Selecting Topic for Group Division” worksheet. The instructor will cut these into strips, which students will pull from a hat.

Students are divided into pairs of two. For each “problem,” the instructor asks students to role play their “problem,” with their partner responding with words and actions they feel are sensitive and helpful. For example:

*News media:* “I can’t believe I heard about my brother’s death over the radio while driving home—I nearly crashed my car. Now, I have journalists camped on my front lawn begging for an interview. They’re the last people I want to talk to now.”

Then the role plays are reversed, with the student who acted the role of the victim now acting the role of a helping professional.

Students should be instructed to write down words or comments that were helpful, and not so helpful, on the student worksheet, and to share their responses with their partner. The instructor can process worksheet responses in the full group if time permits.

***Can Be Utilized As:***

Individual Activity     Small Group Activity     Large Group Activity

***Anticipated Amount of Time Required: 15 Minutes***

- 10 minutes for two five-minute role plays and student processing.
- 05 minutes to process student responses in the full groups.

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**RESOURCES NEEDED** *(Please check all that apply:)*

- Tear sheets and felt pens  
 VCR/monitor  
 Overhead projector and screen/LCD and laptop  
 Blank overhead transparencies and overhead pens  
 Masking tape  
 Index cards  
 Individual or group worksheets  
 Timer  
 Other *(please describe):*
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## SELECTING TOPIC FOR GROUP ACTIVITY

Make copies of these pages, and cut each “problem area” into strips. Each student group will pull *one strip* from a hat. Please ensure that there are enough strips to accommodate *all* groups.

***Financial considerations.*** Expenses related to funeral, burial, medical treatment, psychiatric care for family members, etc., are all part of the aftermath experienced by co-victims and can contribute in a major way to the continuing distress experienced.

***The criminal (federal or state) or juvenile justice system.*** Co-victims of homicide have a vested interest in participating in the criminal or juvenile justice system and in understanding the complex issues of a cumbersome legal system.

***Employment.*** Co-victims’ ability to function and perform on the job is diminished. Motivation is sometimes altered. They can experience emotional outbursts of crying or losing their tempers. They are impatient with trivia. Having to explain or apologize can create additional stress. Some co-victims use work as an escape to avoid experiencing their grief. They resist dealing directly with their pain by placing it on hold while at work.

***Marriages.*** It is common for marital partners to grieve differently, and they may even separate after a death due to homicide. (Divorces, however, are not as common as once believed.) They may blame each other for the loss, particularly in the case of the death of a child. They may each wish to turn away from the memories that the other partner evokes. They are sometimes unable to help each other because they cannot help themselves.

**Children.** Parents often fail to communicate with their children either by ignoring them when they are preoccupied with their own issues or by hoping to protect them from unnecessary trauma. The children, in turn, are afraid of adding to their parents' pain and simply withdraw. Children who witness the killing of someone they love experience profound emotional trauma (including posttraumatic stress disorder) and may not receive adequate intervention.

Furthermore, young people who report having to perform tasks associated with the fatal injury, such as telephoning for police or emergency medical services, or responding to the immediate needs of the injured person or the perpetrator, are often traumatized. When the issue of blame or accountability for the death is not resolved through police investigation, children may re-examine their behavior, believing that if they had done something differently, they could have prevented the death. Without support and an opportunity to explore the feasibility of such alternatives, children often continue to unnecessarily blame themselves.

**Religious faith.** Questions of, anger at, and challenges to faith surface regarding the reason for the death. How could a loving God allow it to happen? Where is the loved one? Some conclude, at least for a while, that "if there were a God, then God would not have let this happen. Since it happened, there must not be a God." Co-victims seeking to understand sometimes look for answers from unorthodox sources. Over-simplistic comments and "answers" by some clergy and church members can create problems for co-victims who take their spiritual pilgrimage seriously.

**The media.** Many homicide co-victims are subjected to the intrusion of what they perceive to be an insensitive media. The competitive quest for sensational, fast-breaking news items may override the need for privacy of anguishing families who may experience prolonged scrutiny, inaccurate reporting, and gruesome reminders of the violence associated with the death.

**Professionals who do not understand.** Co-victims report that too many professionals (police, court personnel, hospital personnel, funeral directors, clergy, school personnel, psychologists, and psychiatrists) demonstrate by their comments and actions that they do not fully understand the impact of death by homicide upon the remaining family members.

**Substance Abuse.** Working with co-victims through the Separation and Loss Services, Dr. Ted Rynearson estimated that 30 percent of his clients had substance abuse problems (Rynearson and McCreery 1993).

**STUDENT WORKSHEET**

**RESPONDING TO CO-VICTIMS OF HOMICIDE**

<p><b>WORDS AND RESPONSES THAT WERE <i>HELPFUL</i></b></p>	<p><b>WORDS AND RESPONSES THAT WERE <i>NOT HELPFUL</i></b></p>