

When Your Child Has Been Murdered



On hearing your child has died and that life has changed forever, shock will be the initial devastating reaction. This shock may at first protect you from the full impact of your feelings.

Murder is sudden, violent and usually deliberate.

Feelings of anger, grief and depression will surface as the numbness wears off.

Physical symptoms such as panic attacks may happen. The world has become a frightening place. Hostility and revenge fantasies may occur. Life may feel meaningless; laughter brings attendant guilt.

Media presence and the sense that the death is 'public property' will add to the sense of needing to tell the rest of the family and friends before they get to know by other means.

A friend or family member may be able to screen your telephone calls in case of media intrusion.

Telling your other children will be one of the most difficult things you have to do but it is better that they hear the facts from you than in the playground.

You need to be open and honest, both about the facts and your feelings, but at the same time age appropriate.

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Older children may feel that they ought to be able to help their parents but cannot. They will feel that the family unit has been destroyed but may not be able to share their feelings with their parents. Their place in the family will also have changed. Their peer group may be the place where they share how they feel.

Natural expressions of grief may be hampered by the desire to know who killed your child and how it happened.

Anxiety about how the child died and whether they suffered may be all-consuming.

Guilt about failure to protect them, though possibly irrational, will none the less be very real.

Reactions may divide the family – there will be those who seek revenge, and those who would rather consider forgiveness. Where feelings are not shared this can cause division and argument.

The funeral will be delayed with the inquest, legal procedures etc. This will give you time to think about what you would like to do, and whether you want the service to be public or private. It may feel as if life is suspended until the funeral can take place.

Victim Support can act as guides throughout the trial, in which distressing evidence may come to light.

Relief that a judgement has been made may be tempered by the feeling that the sentence is inadequate, compared to the 'life sentence' which has been dealt to the survivors.

After the trial your child's possessions will be returned to you; it is helpful to have a friend with you.

If the murder is not solved, long-term uncertainty will be the result.

Everyone has to deal with their grief their own way, but some of the things that can be done to look to the future are: campaigning for appropriate changes in the law; creating a place for memories, such as a bench; setting up a school or college prize in their name; eventually learning to focus on your child's life rather than their death.

Looking forward does not mean forgetting your child or leaving them behind, rather finding a way to carry them with you into the rest of your life.

Your child will always be loved, and as time passes, slowly the memories you shared can become a source of comfort.

It can be difficult to grieve as an individual when there is mass grief – it is hard to stand apart from the crowd.

