

## Sibling Grief

“The silent, sometimes forgotten Mourners”

—Yvonne Harvey

### When Your Brother or Sister Is Murdered

When your brother or sister is murdered, the sudden reality of the death will probably be too much for you to accept all at once. Due to the shock and confusion that murder brings, there will be no comprehension of why your brother or sister was so quickly and violently taken from you. This pain is intense and frightening. The murder of your sibling that shared your childhood creates feelings of despair, loneliness, and hopelessness.

In addition to growing up in the same family and perhaps sharing a room and toys, you shared your parents. As you both grew older, perhaps you had some of the same experiences or attended the same college or university. As adults, you may have lived near each other and your children might have played with your sibling's children. Perhaps your families went on vacations or spent holidays together. Conversely, you may not have had much in common with your sibling and grew apart as you grew older.

As a sibling you may feel that you cannot share your feelings with other members of the family, especially your parents, because you want to protect them from additional pain. As a result, you may stifle the normal expressions of mourning that are imperative to journeying through the grief process.

The murder of your sibling can create a wide range of emotions. Denial, guilt, anger, fear, intense sorrow, listlessness, loss of appetite, profound sadness, depression, extensive crying, and physical distress are some of the natural responses to grief as a result of homicide. You may feel that your parents' attention is centred on your dead sibling or they may become overly protective of you.

### Why Is Your Grief Different?

As a sibling of a homicide victim you have your own method of grieving. Your parents have lost a child, you have lost your sibling, and the relationship is completely different. You may experience a loss of identity as self-image is inter-related with your sibling. The vast array of emotions that are necessary to deal with the immense grief of your loss may be suppressed by the powerful effect of denial. Your experience may be further complicated by the failure of others, including friends and colleagues to recognize your loss. You may be coping not only with the loss of a sibling, but also with the loss of functional parents.

### Sibling to Sibling

When your sibling dies, you will find the listening ears of others to be healing. While your friends, school colleagues, or co-workers might not understand what it is like to lose a sibling to homicide, others who have been through the same loss can help. The experience of being a surviving sibling will always be with you. A survivor once stated “Everyone asks me about my parents and how they are doing, but nobody ever thinks to ask me how I am doing”. Hopefully, by expressing your feelings you can change that.

## Sibling Support

Grief does not just go away with time; you have to work through it. Seek out those who understand. Acknowledge that others may not be able to handle dealing with the murder of their sibling either.

### ***The positive and healing approach:***

One of the most important things you can do for yourself is to connect with a person or group with whom you can talk freely, and who are travelling on the same path of healing. Canadian Parents of Murdered Children and Survivors of Homicide Victims, provides an Interactive Topic Forum on its website, where you can do just that. This forum can connect you to other sibling survivors across Canada, who understand your grief, and share the deep loss you feel.

### ***The negative and destructive approach:***

Avoid the temptation to self-medicate your feelings and emotions with the use of drugs, alcohol or any mood altering substance, or destructive behaviour that will only add to the grief you already feel. At some point, you will have to face the reality of this horrific event. Take the time to think about what you need to help you through this challenging time. The need to express your grief in a positive manner is imperative to getting to a better place than you are in today.

**Finally, realize that the deep loss you feel is a reflection of the love you have for the sibling you have lost. Your grief and the expression of it are important. Don't silence your grief.**