

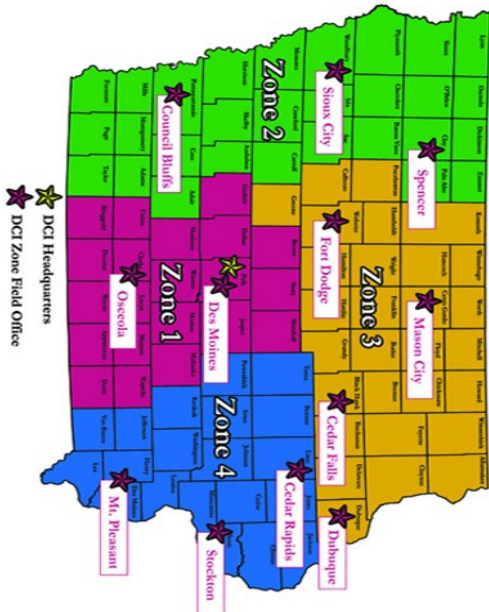
## Victim's Rights and the Media

Unfortunately, a homicide victim's survivor is almost always sought out by news media for news interviews and statements as soon as they learn of the murder. Most people have never experienced this type of invasion but people do have rights when it comes to the media.

When a homicide occurs, the news media often rushes to find a photograph of the deceased. If the family chooses not to provide one, media may use other sources, for example, a driver's license photo, police photo or other available photograph. It often is best for the grieving family to choose a photograph of the deceased for use by the media. A trusted person may take a copy of an original photo to the media and allow them to copy it. Remember, this is only a suggestion, and no one is under any obligation to provide for the media.

The following is a partial list of crime victim's rights with the media developed by the National Center for Victims of Crime. You have a right to say no to an interview; select a spokesperson or advocate of your choice; select the time and place for an interview; ask for a specific reporter; release a written statement; not answer any questions you feel are inappropriate; know in advance what questions the reporter will ask; avoid or ask for a news conference; demand a retraction when inaccurate information is reported; conduct a TV interview in silhouette; and to grieve in privacy.

## Organizations that can help



### Iowa Attorney General's Office:

800-373-5044/515-281-5044

#### Zone 1:

Polk County Crisis & Advocacy Services at 515-286-3600

#### Zone 2:

Family Crisis Services-WISH Unit at 800-382-5603/712-899-6382

#### Zone 3:

Homicide Victim Survivor Program (Fort Dodge/Waterloo) at 515-955-2273/888-356-2006 OR Survivors of Homicide Program (Mason City) at 641-530-5180.

#### Zone 4:

Horizon's Homicide Survivor Program at 319-398-3943/877-653-3123

In the event of a loved one's death...  
immediate decisions must be made.



Survivor Tree  
Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial  
Jeter Photography

## Information for Homicide Victim's Survivors

### Iowa Attorney General's Office Crime Victim Assistance Division

Lucas State Office Building

321 East 12th Street

Des Moines, IA 50319

Phone: (515) 281-5044

Toll free: (800) 373-5044

Fax: (515) 281-8199

[www.iowaattorneygeneral.gov](http://www.iowaattorneygeneral.gov)

Click on "Assisting Crime Victims"

# Decisions in the face of grief

Grieving after the loss of a loved one to homicide is different than any other type of grief. The death is violent, unexpected and committed at the hands of another person who had control. There is no chance to say goodbye. We refer to people who have had a loved one killed by homicide as homicide victim's survivors.

This brochure addresses the immediate issues that are unique to a homicide victim's survivor. We hope it will guide a survivor through the first days following the death of their loved one, offering information on issues such as viewing a loved one's body, autopsy, organ donation, the funeral, crime scene clean-up and victim's rights with the news media.

## Viewing Your Loved Ones Body

Many times after being notified of the death, family members desperately want to go to the body of their loved one. When the death is from a homicide, law enforcement often must prohibit viewing the body at the crime scene. Some family members will want to view the body at the morgue rather than wait for the cosmetic work of the funeral home. They often have a need to say goodbye as soon as possible after the death.

It is now generally acknowledged that a survivor who is given a choice of viewing their loved ones body benefits from the opportunity to make a choice. The choice on whether to view a loved one's body **SHOULD ALWAYS BE AN INFORMED CHOICE**. When family members are told the condition of their loved one's body, they will generally know whether it is in their best interests to view their loved one.

Seeing a part of the body often is helpful if the entire body cannot be viewed. Unfortunately, a homicide victim's survivor is often prevented from making the choice about viewing the body of their loved one. With the best intentions friends, family members and some professionals may discourage the survivor from seeing the victim.

If it is not possible to view the victim before burial, police photos sometimes are available for later viewing. Again, the choice to view the photographs should always be an informed choice.

## Autopsy

It is understandable that for various reasons, many family members are unhappy when an autopsy is performed without consent. Although there is no state law that an autopsy is mandatory, there is an Iowa law that orders the medical examiner to conduct an investigation as to the cause and manner of death when a person dies unnaturally. Only an autopsy can provide an accurate cause of death. This information becomes an important tool for the police and prosecution.

## Organ Donation

If the family desires, it is sometimes possible to donate the victim's organs, even if an autopsy is performed. This is a very personal decision that should only be presented as an option. Because of the suddenness of homicides, decisions about this issue must be made quickly. Every hospital has information on organ procurement. The Iowa Donor Network number is (800) 831-4131.

## The Funeral

Funerals and burials involve very personal and individual choices. When a death is anticipated, although difficult, the family usually has time to think about arrangements; they may even have discussed their loved one's funeral wishes. With homicide, there is usually no preplanning.

Many funeral homes allow the family, if they desire, to help in preparing their loved one's body. For some people grooming the deceased is the final physical act in which they can participate. Again, this is a very personal and private decision.

## Crime Scene Clean-up

Many times in the event of a homicide, the crime occurs in the victim's residence. After evidence has been collected and the investigation is complete, it is often a homicide victim's survivor who is left to deal with the clean-up of the crime scene. Due to the overwhelming nature and safety issues involved in cleaning a crime scene, family members are likely to seek the services of a professional who specializes in returning a scene to a safe and clean environment. The costs of such services are usually covered under the homeowner's or landlord's insurance policy. Family members requiring such services should consult with either law enforcement or a victim advocate to receive a list of area crime scene clean-up providers.