

# Speaking with Survivors of Homicide

- Allow survivors to grieve in whatever manner they wish and for as long as they wish.
- Allow survivors to cry freely. It is a healthy expression of grief and releases tensions.
- Allow survivors to talk about and personalize the victim. Let him or her tell you about the victim, his or her life and the murder. Allow the survivor to criticize the victim and to talk about the good times and the bad times.
- Allow survivors to get angry at you, the criminal justice system, the criminal, the victim, or simply the unfairness of life. Anger needs to be expressed.
- Remember the survivors at holiday times, on the anniversary date of the murder and the victim's birthday. Let the survivors know you remember, too.
- Reassure the survivors that the murder was neither their fault, nor the victim's fault.
- Tell survivors that you are sorry the murder happened and it is horrible that someone they loved was killed.
- Support survivors in their efforts to reconstruct a life.

**Although many people want to comfort and help the bereaved, the stress and anxiety of the encounter sometimes makes it difficult to know what is actually helpful. Often, the phrase that is meant to help actually produces more pain and distress. What follows is a partial list of phrases that have been found to be helpful in comforting the grieving person.**

- I'm sorry
- I'm sad for you
- How are you doing with all this?
- I don't know why it happened
- What can I do for you?
- I'm here and I want to listen
- Please tell me what you are feeling
- This must be hard for you
- What's the hardest part for you?
- I'll call you tomorrow (and do it!)
- You must really be hurting
- It isn't fair, is it?
- You must really feel angry
- Take all the time you need
- Thank you for sharing your feelings
- Encourage survivors to seek additional emotional support, whether from mental health professionals or through grief support groups. They should be reassured that their feelings are normal and that these feelings are overwhelming for most individuals
- Never promise something that you cannot control or follow through on. One of the most painful things a family can experience through the CJ process is being told their offender will be found guilty and spend x amount of years in prison and then that person is found not guilty or receives a very small sentence.

**Discounting Statements:** Refrain from the following statements:

- You can always find someone worse off than yourself
- You must focus on your precious memories- They are grieving over the loss of their future and any future memories.
- It's better to have loved and lost than never loved at all
- Do not make promises, especially ones you do not plan on keeping.
- Your loved one is in a better place - surviving families feel that the "better place" is home with them.
- You need to go on with your life - let it go- Life will never be the same after a homicide. Things get different, not better.
- I know how you feel - unless you have lost a loved one to murder, you will never know how a Survivor feels.
- He is up with God looking down on you- Families want their loved ones with them, not with God.
- Things happen for a reason - what possible reason could there be to murder anyone?
- God needs him more than we did - who can speak for God? Not everyone is religious and these statements are discounting.
- He will no longer be in pain - most loved ones who were murdered weren't in pain to begin with.
- It will be all right - how can it be all right? Their loved one has been murdered.
- It will get better - things may get easier, but it takes many months and even years - too far in the future for families to find comfort from these words.
- It was God's will - what does that make the murderer - Calling a tragic loss the "will of God" can have a devastating impact on the faith of others.
- He was in the wrong place at the wrong time - this statement places the blame on the victim.
- Time heals all wounds - time doesn't heal anything - it's what you do with that time.
- No sense in crying over spilled milk
- Life goes on
- Count your blessings
- Only the good die young
- What doesn't kill you, helps you
- God didn't give you anything you cannot handle
- God has something better for you in store
- This will pass