What is homicide?

Homicide is generally defined as the willful, intentional killing of one human being by another. There are different types of homicide, including murder and manslaughter. People from all walks of life and all types of backgrounds can be victims of homicide. Family members and significant others become co-victims when their loved one is murdered.

The violent death of a family member, intimate partner, or close friend is one of the most traumatic experiences you could ever face. It is an event for which no one can adequately prepare but that results in a
Such experiences are called trauma and grief "spasms." Certain events, such as birthdays or anniversaries, may trigger this kind of grief. Your involvement with the criminal justice system may complicate your grief. Often, homicide co-victims are depersonalized throughout the criminal process. Through the police investigation, you may hear for the first time certain details about your loved one that can be confusing and sometimes hurtful. Inaccurate or inappropriate information about your loved one may come out in court or in the media. In addition, court rules and continuances can be very frustrating. Co-victims find that arrests do not always end in prosecution, prosecutions do not always end in convictions, and convictions do not always mean jail sentences. If the murderer is never arrested, your grief process may be even more difficult.

Remember, each person deals with tragedy in his or her own way. At times, you may feel depressed or hopeless and lack interest in things you once enjoyed. Emotions may come and go or overwhelm you. Know that intense feelings are normal. What you feel is what you need to feel moment by moment. Co-victims are forever changed by homicide. Life will never be the same for you and your family, but many homicide co-victims find that with time, they can face life with new understanding and new meaning.

Where can you get help?
Information is crucial for you to deal with this overwhelming event in your life. You and your family might want to seek the support and understanding of others who have gone through similar trauma. Many co-victims say that attending a homicide support group, though sometimes difficult, helped them in their grieving process. These support groups can help you realize that you are not alone and that others experience and survive the same depth and complexity of emotions and frustrations. Call on victim assistance programs in your community or seek out counselors who understand the grief that follows traumatic death. Counselors can provide you with information and a full range of victim support services and assist you through the criminal justice process. Social services program personnel and other trained professionals also can help you find out about crime victim rights in your state.

When a loved one has been killed, the financial impact can be a second victimization. Homicide may mean a loss of income for your family. If the victim survived briefly before death, there may be large medical bills to pay. Funeral expenses can be a burden. All states now have crime victim compensation programs that reimburse victims' families for certain out-of-pocket expenses, including funeral expenses, medical expenses, counseling, and other financial needs considered reasonable. Contact the Alabama Crime Victims Compensation Commission to discuss eligibility requirements.

What are the facts about homicide?
- Arguments were the cause of 30% of homicides in 1999; whereas 17% happened in conjunction with another crime, such as robbery or arson. (Crime in the United States 1999. Washington, DC: FBI, 2000)
- In 1999, 76% of murder victims were male, and males constituted 90% of those who committed murder in cases in which gender was reported. (Crime in the United States 1999. Washington, DC: FBI, 2000)
- In 1999, 48% of all murder victims knew their assailants: 14% were related to the offenders, and 34% were acquainted with them. (Crime in the United States 1999. Washington, DC: FBI, 2000)
- Murder is most often intraracial. Data based on incidents involving one victim and one offender show that in 1999, 94% of black murder victims were killed by black offenders and 85% of white murder victims were killed by white offenders. (Crime in the United States 1999. Washington, DC: FBI, 2000)
- In the United States, homicide causes 20% of all deaths among persons ages 10 to 24. (MMWR-CDC Surveillance Summaries: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, United States 1997,47(55-3). Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998)
- In 1999, 32% of all female murder victims were killed by their current or former spouses or boyfriends, whereas 3% of male murder victims were killed by their current or former spouses or girlfriends. (Crime in the United States 1999. Washington, DC: FBI, 2000)
- Among women, being black, young, divorced, or separated; earning lower incomes; living in rental housing; and living in an urban area were all associated with higher rates of intimate partner victimization between 1993 and 1998. (Intimate Partner Violence. Washington, DC: BJS, 2000)