

Glossary of terms for Homicide Survivors

accompaniment - providing support to a traumatized person through listening without judgment or offering advice

acute stress disorder (ADA) –an official diagnostic term that is time-limited. It is usually applied within the first month of the homicide and lasts for a month. Symptoms may go away on their own. If not, they may be re-diagnosed with PTSD. The symptoms are like PTSD.

aggravating factors – factors presented in court by the prosecution to show reasons why a defendant should get a harsher sentence. (Examples, lack of remorse, prior convictions.)

Alford plea/no contest - in the U.S. a person charged with murder is not admitting to guilt with this plea and asserts their innocence. By entering an Alford plea, the accused admits the evidence would likely lead to a guilty verdict. (Does not exist in all states.)

allostatic load – the wear and tear on the body which grows with chronic stress.

anniversary reaction – the yearly anniversary from when a loved one was killed.

anomalous experiences – experiences of seeing, hearing, or knowing that do not conform to scientific dogma and which are usually associated with a traumatic situation.

anticipatory grief – grief that stems from knowing someone is soon to die.

appeal - review of a verdict by a higher court to see if any mistakes were made that affected the verdict.

arraignment - the first time the defendant is seen in court. The purpose of the arraignment is for the defendant to tell the court whether he or she wants to fight the charges against them at trial or not. This is done before a judge. It usually happens within one business day after the arrest while they are in jail. The date for the probable cause hearing will be set.

avunculicide –the killing of an uncle.

bail bond notification – a formal document notifying the applicant of the authorized release of a detainee who is being released on bail or bond

bench trial: a trial without a jury. The judge hears the case and passes judgment.

beneficiary – a person who inherits property or money when there is a will.

bequest – property, money or land left to someone in a will following the death of the owner.

biohazard remediation - the process of disinfecting a contaminated surface with a powerful cleaning agent and protective suit.

biorecovery – a general term describing the restoration of a contaminated location to a state of cleanliness and sanitation by several means: disposing of infected materials, removal and replacement of structural areas and the carpet, removal, and replacement of major appliances, flooring, and so on.

body donation – the act of donating one’s body to a medical school or other institution for purposes of scientific or forensic study following death.

Brady Rule – is an important legal precedent pertaining to exculpatory evidence (evidence favoring the defense) which is deliberately withheld by the prosecution

burial transit permit - a legal document issued in the location where the death occurred after a death certificate has been issued (by the State registrar of vital statistics, the municipal clerk, or proper authority in a foreign country) to give authorization for the transport of a deceased person. In addition, the US embassy or consulate closest to or in the country where the US citizen or permanent resident died may help. If the deceased person’s next of kin or legal representative is in a different country from the deceased person, they should call the Department of State’s Office of Overseas Citizens Services in Washington D.C.

casket versus coffin – a casket is a rectangular container used for the burial of a person while a coffin is a kite-shaped container (tapered at the bottom).

cerebral hypoperfusion – during shock we have reduced blood flow to our brain

chain of evidence – documentation of what happened to the evidence upon discovery to when it is presented in court.

circumstantial evidence – evidence commonly used in a trial that draws a reasonable inference of a fact based on the evidence (also known as “indirect evidence”).

clearance rate – within the law enforcement system this is a number calculated by dividing the number of crimes “cleared” by the total number of crimes; the proportion of crimes where an arrest is made; clearance rates are frequently used to assess the effectiveness of a given police department; law enforcement considers crimes “solved” once they are “cleared” by an arrest

cognitive behavioral therapy – an approach in psychotherapy that rests on the central idea that our behavior and attitudes can be changed by changing our beliefs (cognitions).

collective grief – when a large group experiences a loss together. This is more common when a major leader of the area dies, when a village is destroyed, during widespread natural events or mass casualty situations like a plane crash.

columbarium – a structure where urns with cremated remains (ashes) are placed. It can be freestanding (outdoors) or part of a chapel or mausoleum.

competency hearing – in some cases the defense attorney will ask that a psychological evaluation be conducted to see if the defendant understands right from wrong if they are a danger to themselves or others if they understand the court process they are facing and if they will cooperate with the process. If the defendant is found to be incompetent, they will be forced to be in the custody of a mental health facility to see if they can be made competent (i.e., with medication). The length of time differs by state.

complicated grief – refers to debilitating and long-lasting grief (chronic grief) which often comes about due to additional factors of the situation or other mental or physical conditions (such as depression, chronic pain). This may happen in situations where the death triggers multiple complications in the life of the survivor.

concurrent sentence – when a defendant is found guilty of multiple charges the sentences run together at the same time or overlap.

consecutive sentence - when a defendant is found guilty of multiple charges the sentences will run back-to-back, one after the other.

contemporary status – a term coined by Lt. Detective Jason Moran of the Chicago P.D. which means to bring a cold case up to date with a new lead or development.

contempt of court – when someone deliberately disobeys a court order or shows disrespect or unacceptable behavior in the presence of the judge.

continuance – a postponement of a court hearing, trial, or other scheduled legal proceedings at the request of either attorney or by the judge.

coroner – an elected public official who does not have to have specific medical qualifications and whose principal job is to order an inquest into the cause of death which is suspected to have occurred under suspicious circumstances and to identify an unknown deceased person. Not all states have a coroner.

corroborating evidence – used to strengthen, authenticate, or confirm other evidence in court

cortisol – a natural hormone, which is important to reduce inflammation, regulate blood pressure, increase blood sugar, helps with the sleep cycle, and boost energy to manage stress. If stress continues it can increase anxiety, depression, cause headaches, heart disease, reduce concentration, interfere with digestion and sleep.

courtroom deputy clerk - a government official who ensures rules are followed so that the trial can flow smoothly. The Clerk also tends to the jury and oversees legal documents and evidence. They are also called a “case administrator.”

cremains – (sometimes spelled “cremaains”) an alternative term for “ashes” used in connection with cremation.

cremation - a process of disposing of a dead body by burning it then pulverizing the bones to render them into a fine, granulated ash.

cremation jewelry –special memorial jewelry which includes a small amount of the cremated ashes in it; sometimes called mourning jewelry.

crematorium – a building where deceased bodies are cremated.

CSI effect – skewed expectations about criminal investigations in the public’s mind brought about by unrealistic television crime dramas.

cumulative grief – when a person has multiple losses and has not recovered from the first one before another one is experienced (bereavement overload). It is commonly seen in the elderly who rapidly lose a spouse, friends, and other relatives in rapid succession.

dactyloscopy – the science of fingerprint identification.

death certificate - a document required by law after a person dies which says the cause of death, time of death, and identity of the deceased. A medical professional completes it.

death notification –first notice to next of kin that someone in their family has died.

defendant - a suspect who is formally charged with the crime; the same as “the accused”.

delayed grief – when the symptoms of grief aren’t experienced until long after the death and much later than most people. This may happen in times of war and the grief is postponed until they have returned.

demonstrative evidence – evidence used in court to show a point a witness is making such as a graph, enactment, or a graph

deponent – a witness being deposed or giving formal testimony outside of a courtroom as part of pre-trial discovery process.

deposition – when a court orders testimony during the pre-trial “discovery” phase of a case. It usually happens outside the courtroom (like an attorney’s office). Everything said is recorded in some manner.

digital evidence is a kind of physical evidence and includes any relevant information that is stored for transmission in binary form (such as on a computer hard drive, a cell phone, a flash drive, or tablets).

direct cremation – when cremated ashes are given to the family without any memorial service.

direct evidence – evidence at a trial that clearly shows a defendant committed a crime (such as security video footage)

discovery process – a pretrial procedure where each attorney shares evidence in their possession (i.e., witness statements, police reports, videotaped evidence).

disenfranchised grief - when grief is not acknowledged or confirmed by society and where society tends to invalidate or minimize the griever's responses. This is more common in friends of the deceased, divorced spouse, coworker, or someone with dementia.

documentary evidence – refers to any relevant evidence brought into a court proceeding that is an authentic document (such as a medical report or will).

embalming – the process of preserving a body by circulating preservative and antiseptic fluid through the veins, arteries and body cavities.

EMDR - stands for “Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing.” It is an intervention used by psychotherapists which uses visual, auditory or tactile stimuli in a rhythmic left-right pattern to essential change stored up brain images. EMDR is based on the idea that your brain can heal itself by processing things in a new way.

endorphins – natural chemicals in the nervous system to cope with pain or stress; often referred to as “feel-good” chemicals.

eulogy – a brief speech describing qualities of the deceased person and celebrating their life accomplishments.

exculpatory evidence – evidence that supports reasonable doubt or justification of behavior of the defendant.

executor - a person named in a will and appointed by the court to carry out the deceased person's wishes (also called a “personal representative”).

exonerate – when a prisoner has been absolved from blame and is released back into society.

extrasensory perception – (ESP) sometimes called a sixth sense are claims of receiving information not gained through the usual physical senses but instead are known through the mind

false confession – a formal statement of guilt made under duress or by coercion

familicide – the act of killing one’s own family; a multiple-victim killing.

family spokesperson – a person who has been asked to speak on behalf of the victim family by the victim family, usually to meet with the press.

filicide – the act of a parent killing their child.

first-degree murder – the intentional murder of a person that is willful and premeditated with malice and forethought (felony murder).

forensic evidence – scientific evidence which needs interpretation by an expert, it is often physical in nature (such as a shoeprint, handwriting or fiber evidence).

fratricide – the murder of one’s brother.

fruit of the poisonous tree doctrine – illegally obtained evidence which cannot be admitted at trial

FTC Funeral Rule – a law that gives the family the legal authority to choose only those goods and services needed for a funeral or memorial and to pay only for those selected.

funeral cortege – a procession of vehicles following a hearse from the funeral service to the cemetery; sometimes used to describe a following of people.

funeral director – the staff member at a funeral home who works with the family to arrange a burial, cremation, or other funeral services.

funeral versus memorial – a funeral is a ceremony attended by friends and family as a final goodbye to a loved one who is settled in a casket before burial or cremation; while a memorial usually uses a framed portrait of the deceased in place of the actual remains.

geronticide - the abandonment of the elderly to die by suicide or to be killed.

grand jury – is a jury empowered by law to conduct legal proceedings in private and investigate potential criminal conduct to see if criminal charges should be brought or not; they do not decide guilt or innocence. A judge, defense attorney and the public are not allowed to hear the proceedings. Grand juries are needed in all federal felony crimes.

green funeral – a funeral that uses environmentally friendly practices and materials (such as natural biodegradable coffins); also called a natural burial.

grief spasms – sudden, intense surges of grief following a period of calm without warning; typically happen in the days following the death notification, around the anniversary of the death, special dates associated with the deceased, holidays, and when the mourner unexpectedly sees or hears something which reminds them of the person who died.

grief therapy dog – a dog trained to help people (especially children) feel comfortable and relaxed while talking about the death of someone.

guideline range – for some offenses and offenders (murder being one) a judge will use a sentencing table to guide them in deciding the harshness of the sentence; criminal history is a large factor as are aggravating factors (such as torture).

habit evidence - refers to repetitive behaviors by a person under specific circumstances to show how that person would likely act in a similar situation (such as someone who repeatedly makes threats against women)

hearsay evidence is usually not admissible at trial because it refers to secondhand information, or information not directly seen or obtained

honour killing –murdering a family member thought to have brought disgrace.

hostile witness - is someone who is called as a witness in opposition to the attorney who called them, and their answers are antagonistic; they are also known as an “adverse witness.” It gives the attorney the right to ask leading questions.

hot case – a homicide case with promising leads; an active case.

inadmissible evidence – a ruling made by a judge to decide that prohibits some evidence because it is not authentic, is prejudicial, irrelevant or hearsay.

indictment – being formally accused of a crime in a preliminary hearing or a grand jury hearing.

infanticide – the act of killing a child within the first year of life.

inferential proof – is another term for circumstantial evidence in court

insufficient evidence – is a level of proof that has not been met and often leads to a case being dismissed before the defense presents their side

internment – the act of placing a body into a grave or tomb.

interrogatory – a pre-trial, formal statement where the witness answers written questions (not oral questions) by a certain date. The statement is used at trial.

intestate – when someone dies without a leaving a will.

inurnment – the placing of an urn with cremated ashes inside a columbarium

involuntary manslaughter – a killing from extreme negligence (manslaughter).

justifiable homicide – necessary homicide

just world hypothesis/ just world fallacy / just world belief - a belief that the world is fair, that people get what they deserve. So good things happen to good people and vice versa. It is similar to “you reap what you sow.”

living trust – a trust set up during the life of a person to distribute money or property to another person or organization.

mariticide –the killing of one’s husband or fiancé

matricide – the killing of one’s mother.

Marsy’s Law – a law originally passed in California by voters to give crime victims’ rights.

mausoleum – a building used to house and protect casketed remains of a person above ground instead of burial in a grave.

medical examiner – an appointed official trained in medicine – usually pathology - that investigates deaths that occur under unusual circumstances; they perform post-mortem examinations; they are usually trained in toxicology, DNA analysis, and blood analysis. This person is sometimes referred to as “the M.E.”

mermer – stands for “memory and encoding-related multifaceted electroencephalographic response”; sometimes used by law enforcement to determine if a suspect has seen the crime scene before (based on an experimental method called “brain fingerprinting”).”

mitigating factors – information presented to the court about the defendant or circumstances of the crime that could result in a reduced charge or lesser sentence. (Examples: no prior record, history of special education, or drug addiction.)

near death experience – (NDE) vivid, often life-transforming experiences which happen under extreme conditions like clinical death, trauma or deep general anesthesia that are commonly experienced as being pain free, seeing oneself at a distance, being drawn into darkness, bright lights or fog where the person claims to experience a life review, preview of future events, encounters with loved ones and often a point where they are aware they must return to their physical body.

neonaticide – the killing of an infant within the first 24 hours or month (varies by jurisdiction).

nepoticide - killing one’s nephew.

neurobehavioral – a collection of behavioral differences related to brain function, such as what happens with a stroke.

neurohormone – chemical messengers (such as norepinephrine) produced in the hypothalamus in the form of hormones that enter the bloodstream and travel to distant targets inside the body; hormones that mediate the interaction between external and internal environments (such as hunger)

neurotransmitter – a single molecule that produces a chemical messenger between one neuron to another to make it fire or not fire

NOK - abbreviation for next of kin sometimes used in the death care industry or among physicians and law enforcement.

not guilty by reason of insanity –a plea of not guilty due to being insane at the time of the homicide. If accepted, they are remanded to a locked mental facility where they will be reviewed periodically and then released back into society if they can be reintegrated.

obituary – an optional notice placed in the newspaper or online which announces a person's death.

open case – a term used interchangeably with an unsolved case.

organ and tissue donation – when healthy tissue or organs of a deceased or “brain dead” person is removed and transplanted into a live recipient to help save their life or greatly improve the functioning.

outer burial container - also known as a "vault" or "grave liner", this is a structure made of concrete, metal, or wood that supports the casket in the ground and helps to keep the grave from collapsing.

paranormal experience – events that are viewed as beyond the scope of normal scientific understanding; anomalous experience.

parole revocation - when someone on parole violates any of the conditions of parole the parole officer may ask that the Parole Board review the circumstances and decide if the person will be sent back to prison.

parricide /parenticide – the killing of one's mother, father, or other close relatives.

patricide –the killing of one's father.

pedicide – the killing of a child.

physical evidence – any material object entered into court proceedings that can be found at the scene (bullet casings or DNA) or produced (like a document).

plaintiff – a legal term for a person who brings a case against another in court, such as a prosecuting attorney.

plea bargain/plea agreement - agreements between the prosecutor and the defendant. This usually ends in a plea of guilty to a lesser charge, a dismissal of other charges, or a plea of guilty to the original criminal charge in return for a lenient sentence. Most homicide cases rely on plea bargains. The judge must accept the plea bargain.

post-traumatic growth - (PTG) someone who has had a positive transformation following a trauma that comes about naturally, helped through education or specialized treatment by mental health professionals.

precognition – a claim of being able to know events in the future; sometimes called “future sight” which is rejected by science because it violates the “natural” law of effects do not come before its cause.

preliminary exam / probable cause hearing – a shortened, official court proceeding in the early stages of a felony case. It is sometimes known as a “probable cause hearing.” There is no jury, but the central question is if there is enough evidence to move to the next legal phase of the court case. If not, the case is dismissed. The defendant will enter a plea of guilty or not guilty at this time.

premorbid – the state of functioning before the onset of a stressor or illness.

pretrial motion hearing – an official court process where the attorneys ask the judge to rule on a particular issue. Examples: keep certain pieces of evidence out of the courtroom, to move to strike a confession.

prima facie evidence – is testimonial evidence in court said under oath, otherwise known as testimonial evidence.

probable cause hearing - the attorneys from both sides appear within 10 days of the arraignment for the judge to determine if the State had enough evidence to make the arrest.

probate – a judge deciding if a will is valid, giving legal permission to pass on assets with or without a will; the legal process of transferring property after the property owner’s death to pay debts and distribute any remaining assets to beneficiaries (retirement plans, life insurance, and bank accounts do not go through probate if there is a beneficiary named or if the property is in a living trust.)

probative evidence – evidence necessary to prosecute a case, to prove guilt or innocence.

prolicide - the killing of one’s children; often used right before or after birth

prolonged exposure therapy (PE) - a form of intervention that stops the avoidance response and makes the upsetting memory more neutral.

prosecutorial immunity – prosecutors are immune from lawsuits, being fired or otherwise held to answer for their role in a court case where they falsify evidence, force witnesses, solicit perjured

testimony, withhold “exculpatory” evidence (which could prove innocence), introduce illegal evidence, coerce a witness, introduce illegally obtained evidence, or start a prosecution in bad faith for personal reasons or with the knowledge that the detainee is innocent.

PTSD - post-traumatic stress disorder is a response to seeing or experiencing a life-threatening event. It usually presents with upsetting thoughts, memories, and feelings even long after the trauma has passed. People with PTSD tend to avoid situations or people that remind them of the original incident and may re-experience vivid recollections of the original trauma. It is common in first responders, natural disasters, military veterans, rape survivors, and homicide survivors. The person may or may not have been diagnosed with Acute Stress Disorder earlier.

quash – to cancel, suppress, stop or extinguish an action or request.

Reid technique – a method used by investigators to get a confession using non-accusatory, non-confrontational techniques where the suspect is led to believe their actions were caused by an understandable human error which will not lead to harsh penalties. There is growing concern it is associated with false confessions.

remand – a legal term meaning “to send to” or “to send back” and commonly used after a sentencing hearing to place the defendant back to prison or to send back a case to a lower court from which it came.

remote viewing – seeking impressions (often visual) about a distant object or event which is understood through the mind; a tool which has been used by the military and homicide investigators when all usual sources of gathering intelligence has been exhausted.

restitution – an amount of money ordered by the court for the defendant to pay a crime victim for expenses they had as a result of the homicide (i.e., funeral).

restorative justice – an approach to justice in which the convicted or the one harmed meet with a mediator to decide how to repair the harm done to the victim or victim's family. It emphasizes accountability and common ground.

retention policies in law enforcement – how long state and local agencies keep and store forensic evidence.

retort – the metal chamber where cremation is completed.

revictimization – after the original offense or victimization of an individual, they are victimized a second or third time by other individuals.

rituals – when applied to grief, rituals are ways people give honor and meaning to their deceased loved one; they are usually symbolic and personal; they can be an activity, an object, a sound, or a thought.

scattering garden - a plot of land for scattering the cremated remains of humans or pets. The scattering garden is usually owned by a cemetery or crematory.

secondary victimization –when someone suffers further harm not as a direct result of the criminal act, but from how institutions and other individuals deal with the victim.

second-degree murder – an intentional murder with malice and forethought but not premeditated or planned.

selection bias – when people who are similar in major ways are included or excluded from an event; the outcome is biased or unfair - not inclusive of all people.

senicide - the killing of one's elderly family member when they are seen as a burden; abandonment of elderly person.

sequestered – when a jury is kept private and separated from the public until they make a verdict.

siblicide –killing of an infant or sibling by its close relatives; it may happen between siblings or from the parents.

silent mass disaster – a term referring to the number of missing and unsolved homicide cases.

sixth sense – an anomalous experience, or having an experience that does not fit our expectations and contradicts what science says is possible.

sororicide – the murder of one's sister.

stigmatized property – in real estate it is a property that buyers or renters avoid or devalue for reasons of reputation not because of the physical condition or location.

subpoena – a written, legal document ordering someone to appear in court. If they fail to show it can result in an arrest.

suppression hearing – in homicide cases it is common for the defense attorney to ask for a suppression hearing to keep certain pieces of evidence from being introduced at trial. A common reason is illegally obtained evidence.

survivor guilt - when a person believes they are responsible for a tragedy when others did not survive, that they could have changed the outcome; they feel guilt for surviving, guilt for what they could have done but didn't, or guilt for doing something they should not have done.

taphonomy – the scientific study of decomposition of a body in a natural environment; commonly used in archaeology

testimonial evidence – is evidence gathered from a sworn witness in court; testimonial evidence can be lay witnesses, expert witnesses or character witnesses.

trace evidence – is created when two very small pieces of evidence come into contact with one another (such as gunshot residue, carpet fibers or hair).

transient evidence – evidence which is fragile and temporary, like the odor of gasoline or shoeprints in the snow

tunnel memory – during a very emotional situation we vividly memorize some aspects of the event while not taking notice of other details.

unattended death – when a deceased person is only found after days, weeks or even longer (most unattended deaths are from natural causes).

undertaker – an older term for funeral director.

urn - container used to hold the cremated ash of a human who has been cremated

uxoricide – the killing of one's wife or fiancé

vasoconstriction - during a crisis, there is reduced blood flow to our arms, and legs as a way of protecting us from bleeding to death

victim advocate – is a specially trained individual to support victims of crime in several ways; they act as go-between with organizations and victims.

victim allocution – another term for victim impact statement.

victim compensation - governmental programs designed to help crime victims with immediate needs to reduce the impact of crime on their lives financially and psychologically.

victim impact statement – is a chance for homicide survivors to address the court to explain how the death has affected their family. It can be prepared ahead of time or spoken on the spot. Someone on behalf of the homicide survivor can read it. It can be handed to the judge without reading it aloud. It cannot have profanity or make threats against the defendant.

Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (VICAP) - a unit within the FBI, founded in 1985. It tracks and correlates information on violent crime, especially murder, and is available to law enforcement only. It looks for “signature” or patterns of crimes.

violentization – a term coined by Richard Rhodes used to describe the developmental process of becoming a violent offender.

voir dire – selection of a jury pool where both the defense and the prosecution can accept or excuse a particular juror until such time that they have 12 jurors with two extras in case of an emergency. Jurors are typically screened out if they are seen as biased or unable to make a fair verdict in a trial.

voluntary manslaughter –intentional killing without a prior intent to kill committed under highly emotional or mentally upsetting circumstances (crime of passion).

well of the court - the area where official court proceedings are conducted, near the front, where the public is allowed by invitation only.

whole body donation – a decision to donate a deceased person’s body for the benefit of society; to give a corpse to specific educational, scientific, or law enforcement organizations.

will – a legal document that lists a person’s wishes about what will happen to his or her property after they die. (A “holographic will” is handwritten, dated, and signed by the person writing the will.)

wraparound services – an individually tailored plan to support people or families with multiple needs (such as mental health intervention, an interpreter, tutoring, medication and transportation).

writ of habeas corpus – a court order demanding a public official (such as a warden) to deliver a prisoner to the court to show a valid reason for their detention; it is a way to dispute the legal basis for confinement.

wrongful conviction – an error of justice when a person is wrongfully convicted and punished for a crime they did not commit with a grossly unfair outcome.

Yahrzeit – the observation of the death anniversary in the Hebrew calendar where it is customary to attend a Synagogue and recite Kaddish prayers.