

AFTER THE UNTHINKABLE

A RESOURCE FOR LOVED ONES
OF HOMICIDE VICTIMS



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Scan the QR code to access the resources referenced in this guide and additional support materials.

RESOURCES:

- Legal
- Mental Health
- Grief
- Support Groups
- Bloodborne Pathogen Clean-up
- Additional copies of After the Unthinkable

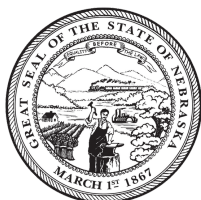
INFORMATION:

- Crime Victim Reparations
- Incarceration
- Investigations
- Prosecution

LEARN MORE: [AGO.NEBRASKA.GOV/RESOURCES-LOVED-ONES-HOMICIDE-VICTIMS](https://ago.nebraska.gov/resources-loved-ones-homicide-victims)



CREATED IN COLLABORATION WITH



Nebraska Attorney General's Office



NEBRASKA
DOMESTIC ABUSE
DEATH REVIEW TEAM

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Portions of this resource were adapted with permission from the Omaha Police Department and Omaha Homicide Support Group. Their contributions of content, insight, and support were instrumental in shaping this guide. We greatly appreciate their commitment to enhancing services for families and loved ones of homicide victims across the State of Nebraska.

CONTACTS

CONTACT

ADDRESS

PHONE NUMBER

Lead Officer:		
Victim Assistance Advocate:		

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	7
The First 24 Hours.....	7
Between 24 and 48 Hours.....	9
The Next Weeks and Months.....	12
Court Process.....	13
Common Terms Used During Prosecution.....	14
Attending Court.....	16
Preparing for Trial.....	16
Trial.....	17
After Sentencing.....	18
If an Arrest Has Not Been Made.....	19
Additional Resources.....	19
Victim Services.....	20
Obtaining a Death Certificate.....	23
The Grieving Process.....	25
Glossary.....	29

There are few words that can fully capture the pain of suddenly and tragically losing a loved one. Please accept our heartfelt sympathies during this profoundly difficult time.

This booklet was created to provide guidance, clarity, and support to ease some of the uncertainty that may arise in the days, weeks, and months ahead. Included within these pages are resources intended to help lessen the burden and connect families with information and support when it is most needed. Inside, you will find explanations of investigation and prosecution processes, information about available services, guidance on understanding the court process, and other details that may assist you through this journey.

It is our hope that this resource brings you some measure of comfort, reduces confusion during an overwhelming time, and supports you and your family as you navigate the path forward. We extend our condolences for your loss.



INTRODUCTION

During this difficult time, it can feel impossible to know what your next steps should be. This resource provides guidance to move forward in this process. If you have questions regarding any of the materials in this guide, please contact your local law enforcement agency or county attorney.

THE FIRST 24 HOURS

NOTIFICATION

The investigating jurisdiction notifies a victim's family as soon as possible after the death of their loved one. However, it can take time for officers to establish a victim's identity. The goal is for officers to notify each family in person. Unfortunately, with the technology and social media available today, family members sometimes find out about a death by other means. If this occurs, law enforcement will still make direct contact with next of kin.

Please contact additional family members as soon as possible. Law enforcement will release your loved one's name to the media soon after the initial family notification is made.

AT THE FORENSIC PATHOLOGIST'S FACILITY

While your loved one is at the forensic pathologist's facility, an autopsy will be performed to determine the cause of death and to complete a death certificate. It generally takes three to six months to complete a homicide autopsy report. The report must be signed by the county attorney before a death certificate can be issued. Families often need death certificates to manage their loved one's affairs. Check with your county attorney or the Office of Vital Records if this process is delayed. Funeral homes may assist as well. Unfortunately, you will not be able to view your loved one while they are at the forensic pathologist's facility. Interacting with or viewing your loved one can compromise evidence that may be present. Once your loved one arrives at a funeral home, you can arrange a viewing.

FORENSIC PATHOLOGY FACILITIES

- Physicians Lab, LLC Omaha, NE (Most utilized)
- Office of the Coroner for Adams & Broomfield Counties Brighton, CO
- Monument Health Rapid City Hospital Rapid City, SD
- Weld County Coroner Greeley, CO

THESE FACILITIES:

- Complete autopsies or external examinations, as appropriate. (All homicide victims are autopsied.)
- Determine the cause of death and may file the death certificate with vital records.
- Prepare and release the deceased to the designated funeral home. (Viewing of the deceased does not occur at the Forensic Pathologist's Office to ensure that trace evidence is not compromised.)

SELECTING A FUNERAL HOME

One of the first things you must do is select a funeral home. Call the local county attorney's office on the morning following the death of your loved one to let the staff know which funeral home will handle arrangements for your loved one.

The Nebraska Crime Victims Reparations (CVR) is a state program that can assist with burial and other expenses related to deaths involving an innocent victim of a crime committed in Nebraska. Your assigned victim advocate or county attorney can assist with the victim compensation application process.

BETWEEN 24 AND 48 HOURS

BLOODBORNE PATHOGEN CLEAN-UP

If your loved one was injured or died at home, it is recommended that you hire a professional cleaning company due to health and safety issues with bloodborne pathogens. It is possible that your homeowner's insurance, renter's insurance, or Nebraska Crime Victims Reparations (CVR) may cover the expense. Check with the professional cleaning service you choose to see if they contract with your insurance company or CVR. Use the QR code on page two to access a list of companies in Nebraska who provide this service. Ask for an estimate and discuss payment upfront.

DESIGNATING A FAMILY CONTACT

Law enforcement prefers to maintain contact with one designated person in each family. They will rely on that person to pass along the information to other family members. Please determine who that contact will be and relay that information to the lead officer.

Designating a primary contact ensures that one family member has as much information as possible. Multiple family members may have different information, which can easily lead to miscommunication and possibly jeopardize the case investigation. The assigned advocate or county attorney may be in contact with the primary contact person to offer referrals for services and to explain the victim reparations process and other assistance for funeral and cremation services.

GETTING INFORMATION FROM LAW ENFORCEMENT

A lead officer will be assigned to your loved one's case. This often is not the officer who notified you of the death. They will share what information they can, but it may be limited at this point. *It is important to limit the information to protect the integrity of the investigation.* The designated family contact will only be given information by law enforcement that may be shared with family. In certain situations, additional law enforcement agencies may assist the primary investigating agency by providing personnel, supplemental expertise, technical assistance, or operational capacity when needed.

**Please treat any information law enforcement gives you as confidential.
Telling others may jeopardize the investigation.**

Be aware that law enforcement may have to withhold details from you. Solving the crime is of the utmost importance. Sometimes, certain details must remain confidential so that as detectives receive information, they are better able to determine its truthfulness. Later in the first week, typically, law enforcement may sit down with family members to provide more details on the progress of the investigation and answer questions.

IF YOU HEAR INFORMATION ELSEWHERE

It is not uncommon for friends and associates of a victim to share information with the victim's family that they haven't shared with law enforcement. Encourage anyone with information to speak with the lead officer and pass on any information you hear. If the information is critical to the case, law enforcement must hear it from the source.

If someone knows information about your loved one's case and will not speak directly to law enforcement, encourage them to anonymously contact CrimeStoppers at 1-800-422-1494. The smallest piece of information could be a critical piece of evidence.

MEDIA

You may be contacted by reporters from newspapers, television, or other media outlets. It's up to you whether or not to speak to them. If you are interviewed by a reporter, please remember to not share any details you know, have heard, or have learned as this could jeopardize the case.

Reporters can be very persistent. It is your right to refuse an interview or make a comment to a reporter.

Reporters are not required to use the information you disclose and may include information from other sources in their story.

WHEN AN ARREST IS MADE

When an arrest is made in the case, the primary contact for your family will be notified by a law enforcement officer. They will call, even if it is 3:00 a.m., so you will be the first to know about the arrest and initial charges prior to media notification. Consider contacting other family members immediately, as the media will be alerted after the primary contact.

THE NEXT WEEKS AND MONTHS

STAYING IN TOUCH

Your family's primary contact should feel comfortable calling the lead officer or the victim advocate any time you have questions.

Please make an appointment, rather than just stopping by the law enforcement agency. Law enforcement officers work rotating shifts and are often out of the office. You should already have contact information for your lead officer and victim advocate. If you have misplaced it, contact the assigned investigation agency or the local county attorney's office.

It is important to notify law enforcement, the county attorney, or other involved parties of any updates to your contact information.

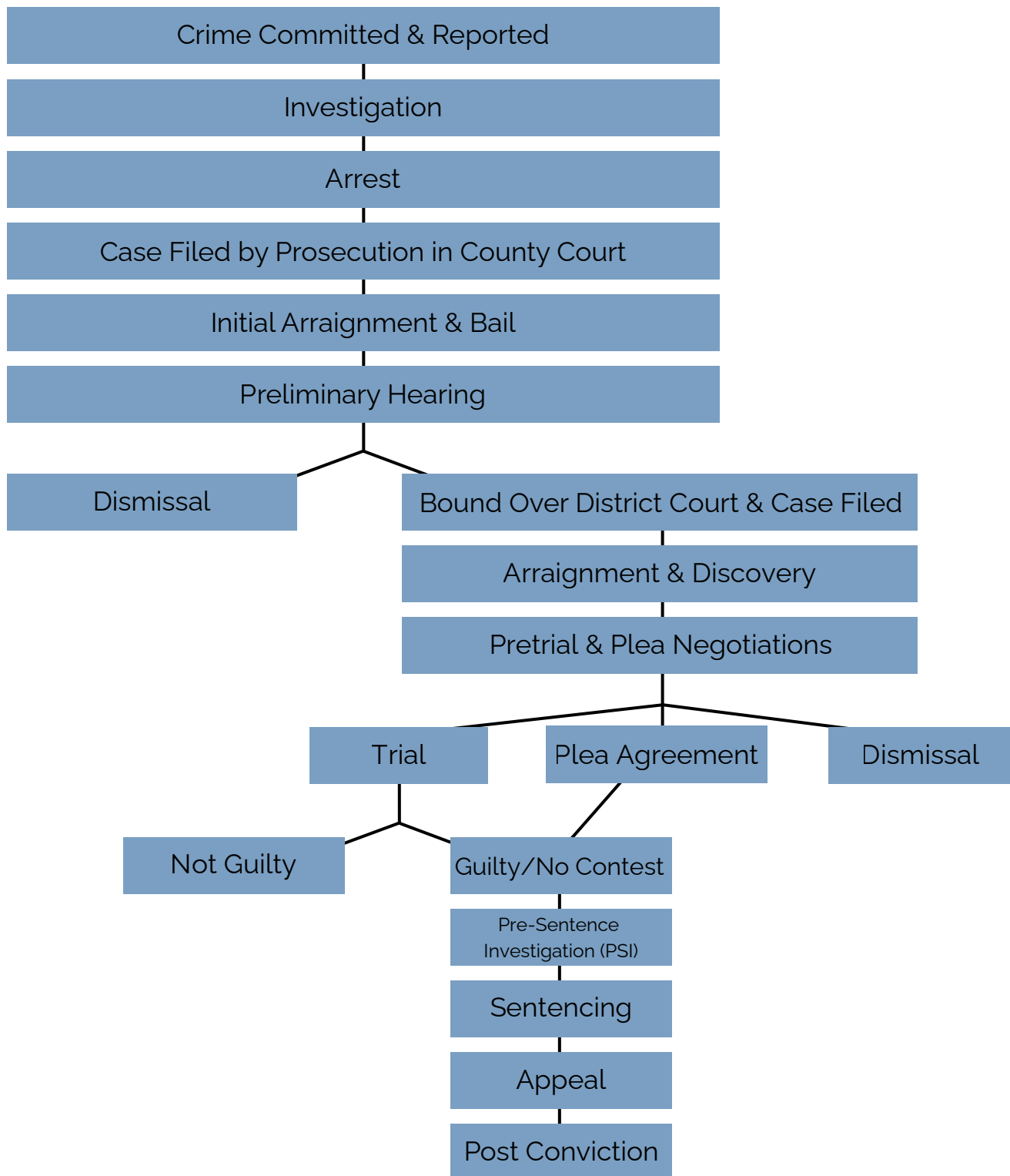
INCIDENT REPORTS

You may request a copy of the law enforcement report related to your loved one's death. It is a public record. However, it will contain very few details. Detailed reports are not public record and are not available. This protects the integrity of the investigation. Sometimes, copies of the public report are needed for insurance purposes. Typically, insurance companies will obtain the official paperwork directly from the investigating law enforcement agency. There may be a small fee for obtaining copies of the report(s).

PERSONAL EFFECTS

Law enforcement collects items that could be related to the crime. Typically, the items are held as evidence until the case has been prosecuted. Keep in mind that prosecution processes are lengthy, and the release of any of these items can take quite some time. The release of any property is coordinated through the local county attorney's office and the investigating law enforcement agency. Some items may not be released at the conclusion of the case.

COURT PROCESS



COMMON TERMS USED DURING PROSECUTION

BOND HEARING/INITIAL APPEARANCE/ARRAIGNMENT

An arraignment is a court appearance where the defendant is formally informed of the charges against them. The defendant may waive the hearing and instead submit a written plea of "not guilty." At this time, the judge sets bond and schedules the preliminary hearing. Arraignments occur in both county and district courts.

BOND FOR THE DEFENDANT

A bond hearing is held in county court soon after the defendant is arrested. The defendant will be brought into the courtroom for this hearing, or it will occur virtually from jail where the defendant is being held. In Nebraska, judges determine if bond will be allowed and if so, will set the bond amount. Typically, the defendant will need to post 10% of the bond to be released. Bond reviews may occur throughout the case, even after being bound over to the district court. Defendants can request bond reductions throughout the case.

PRELIMINARY HEARING

A preliminary hearing in county court occurs to determine if probable cause exists to proceed to district court. Defendants may waive this hearing to move the case forward. Limited testimony, often from law enforcement, is presented to help the judge decide whether probable cause exists and if the case should be bound over to the district court.

COUNTY AND DISTRICT COURT

Most criminal cases begin in the county court, where misdemeanor charges are handled, and preliminary hearings for felony cases are conducted. District court handles all felony cases with a different judge assigned to oversee the proceedings once the case is bound over from county court.

COMMON TERMS USED DURING PROSECUTION

STATUS HEARING/PRETRIAL CONFERENCE/PRETRIAL HEARING

A status or conference hearing is a court proceeding used to review case progress and scheduling. These hearings are often continued/rescheduled due to limited time on court calendars on unresolved pretrial matters. While continuances may feel frustrating, they are common and do not mean the case has been forgotten.

DEPOSITION

A deposition is a witness's sworn out-of-court testimony. It is used to gather information as part of the discovery process and may be used at trial.

PLEA AGREEMENT/DEAL

A plea agreement is a case resolution in which both parties agree to charges in exchange for avoiding trial, resulting in a guaranteed conviction. Plea negotiations are common and reflect efforts by both sides to reach a resolution, not the strength or weakness of the case. Plea deals can also reduce stress for victims and survivors, prevent children from having to testify, and help minimize additional trauma, while ensuring a conviction without leaving the outcome to a jury.

ATTENDING COURT

DO I HAVE TO ATTEND COURT?

Victims or loved ones are not required to attend court unless subpoenaed. Witnesses may receive a subpoena and be required to attend court or a deposition to provide testimony. Families of homicide victims may choose to attend or not attend. Attending court is a personal decision and advocates can provide support throughout the process.

Judges act as neutral decision-makers, basing rulings on the law rather than attendance. Absence will not be seen as a lack of support for a victim or the prosecution. They do expect appropriate courtroom behavior from all present and will not allow outbursts or distracting behavior. Emotions are normal and expected, but if you are unable to maintain composure, you can always step out of the courtroom.

PREPARING FOR TRIAL

It can take the county attorney's office months to prepare a case for a trial. The lead officer may not call you, but be assured, they are working on the case. Evidence must be scrutinized, follow-up information must be gathered from witnesses, and detailed reports must be written. Much of this work occurs after an arrest.

In certain situations, the Nebraska Attorney General's Office is appointed to prosecute a case.

TRIAL

The county attorney's office will determine the exact charge(s) a defendant will face. This decision will be based on the evidence and the law.

If the defendant intends to enter into a plea agreement, a court date will be scheduled for the plea. Otherwise, the case will be set for a trial. Homicide investigations and prosecutions are often complex and may take up to 2 years or longer to reach trial. Defendants can choose a bench trial, where the judge decides the verdict, or a jury trial, where a panel of 12 jurors determines the outcome.

After a conviction, the defendant will be scheduled for a sentencing hearing 30-60 days later. Prior to sentencing, the probation office will conduct a Pre-Sentence Investigation (PSI). The immediate family may participate in the Pre-Sentence Investigation by submitting victim impact statements, if they choose. This is an opportunity for loved ones' voices to be heard. They may read their written statements at the defendant's sentencing, but must follow all guidelines for the reading set forth by the presiding judge.

An advocate may assist your family during prosecution, informing your family of court dates and proceedings. They may provide information on Crime Victim Rights. During the prosecution, you may be contacted by law enforcement or the defendant's attorney. Understand who you are speaking with before you give a statement. You can decide whether or not you speak to anyone. Any statement you give can be used during the court proceedings.

You may be contacted by an investigator with the county attorney's office who may ask follow-up questions regarding the case. It may be helpful for you to ask any law enforcement officer who contacts you to see their badge so you know whether they are affiliated with the prosecution or the defense. Law enforcement working for the prosecution will always carry a badge showing they represent the county that is investigating the case.

AFTER SENTENCING

Following the sentencing of a defendant, they will be placed with the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS). The first stop will be the Reception and Treatment Center so that the offender can be evaluated and classified within the NDCS system. There are 9 facilities throughout the State where an offender can be placed. NDCS makes this determination.

Reception and Treatment Center-Lincoln
Tecumseh State Correctional Institution-Tecumseh
Omaha Correctional Center-Omaha
Nebraska State Penitentiary-Lincoln
Nebraska Correctional Youth Facility-Omaha
Community Corrections Center-Lincoln/Omaha
Nebraska Correctional Center for Women-York
Work Ethic Camp-McCook

Once the defendant is in the NDCS system, you will be able to find them online and track their location and other information through the Inmate Locator website: <https://dcs-inmatesearch.ne.gov/Corrections/InmateSearchServlet>

After you have located the defendant, there are some terms on the page you need to be aware of.

Projected Release Date: This is known as the jam date, or the date that the individual must be released for the current sentence.

Parole Eligibility Date: This is the earliest date the individual will be eligible for parole. Keep in mind, just because they are eligible doesn't mean they will receive parole.

Next Parole Board Review Date: The next month/date the parole board will review the inmate's file/case. This does not mean the inmate has a hearing for release.

Parole Hearing Date: The next date an inmate is set to appear in front of the parole board.

IF AN ARREST HAS NOT BEEN MADE

LAW ENFORCEMENT KEEPS WORKING

The case will remain assigned to the lead officer as long as they remain assigned to the investigative unit. Any leads will be followed, and evidence will be processed. The evidence is put into databases and compared against new evidence every day. Years could pass, but eventually the correct information may be placed into a database and identify a suspect.

Witnesses who were initially reluctant to speak with law enforcement sometimes change their minds, either because they are no longer afraid of the suspect or because they are seeking assistance for their own legal matters. Do not attempt to speak with any potential witnesses about the case as it could interfere with the investigation.

A homicide is considered a "cold case" when all leads have been exhausted. Law enforcement is dedicated to reviewing the cold cases for anything that may have been overlooked or not tried.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A FUNERAL HOME

When the coroner's office releases your loved one's body, you will need a funeral home/service to assist you through the process. The funeral director will assist you with arrangements, obituary announcements, filling out and filing death certificates, etc.

Some funeral services will require partial or even full payment prior to the service. They will work with families to plan a service within your budget. A decision will need to be made about whether to have a burial or cremation. Again, the funeral service can offer guidance in this decision. Even if you qualify for Victim's Compensation Services, the funeral home may require some payment in advance. All receipts and other payment documents must be kept in order to be eligible for possible reparations.

Vital information about the deceased that the funeral director will need in order to help you:

Full Legal Name and Address
Birthplace (County and State)
Mother's Maiden Name
Father's Name
Education Level
Social Security Number

Doctor's Name and Address
Occupation
Picture for Obituary
DD-214 (Military Discharge Document)
Clothing

VICTIM SERVICES

The Nebraska Crime Victims Reparations (CVR) program reimburses citizens who suffer medical expenses and lost wages as a result of being an innocent victim of a crime committed in Nebraska. Victims of rape, felony assault, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, and drunk driving, as well as the families of homicide victims, are eligible to apply for financial assistance.

Applying for compensation does not require you to hire an attorney. Compensation claims must be filed within two years of the date of the crime. Retain any receipts for expenses you incurred to submit for reimbursement.

WHAT MAY BE PAID?

Medical
expenses
incurred as a
direct result of
the crime

Loss of wages
while under a
doctor's care as
a direct result of
a crime

Loss of earning
power as a
direct result of a
crime

Counseling or
funeral
expenses as a
direct result of
a crime

CVR only reimburses funeral expenses paid directly out-of-pocket by the claimant. This includes when the claimant pays the funeral home themselves using funds from donations or cash contributions, as long as the payment is recorded in the claimant's name.

Your assigned victim advocate or county attorney's office may assist you with the paperwork and filing it with the Nebraska Crime Commission.

A maximum of \$25,000 may be paid for an award. Benefits are paid directly to service providers, with the exception of out-of-pocket expenses paid by the victim or claimant. There are certain circumstances that may not be eligible for reparations. Contact your victim advocate or reparations representative to determine eligibility.

The program does NOT compensate victims for damaged or stolen property or for pain and suffering.

While no amount of money can erase the trauma and grief victims suffer, this aid can be crucial in the recovery process. By paying for care that restores victims' physical and mental health, and by replacing lost income for victims who cannot work, especially for families who have lost a breadwinner, compensation programs may help victims regain their lives and their financial stability.

NEBRASKA CRIME COMMISSION: CRIME VICTIMS REPARATIONS (CVR)

301 Centennial Mall South

PO Box 94946

Lincoln, NE 68509-4946

402-471-2828

Website: <https://ncc.nebraska.gov/crime-victim-reparations>

STATE OF NEBRASKA CRIME VICTIM NOTIFICATION SERVICE

The State of Nebraska has a victim notification service (Nebraska Victims of Crime Alert Portal —NEVCAP) that notifies the victims of crime, or the families of victims of crime, when a defendant is released back into the community on bond or is released back into the community from prison once a sentence has been completed. Notification is available through text messaging or email.

Register: nevcap.nebraska.gov

NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS (NDCS) VICTIM NOTIFICATION

In order to receive victim/witness notification from NDCS, you must complete their enrollment form. This is voluntary if you wish to keep up to date with the offender's movements or parole information.

Register: corrections.nebraska.gov/news-information/victim-services

After registration, you will be notified of the following:

Placement in a community corrections center
For furloughs lasting 24 hours or more (only at community correction centers)
Death of the offender during incarceration
Escape from custody and/or return to custody
Parole hearings, release to parole, and revocation of parole
Discharge or other release

If your address changes, you must update your address with the Nebraska Department of Corrections Victim Notification.

OBTAINING A DEATH CERTIFICATE

Certified copies of death certificates may be requested by the parents, children, or spouse of the deceased. Please contact Nebraska Vital Records if your situation is different.

You must have the following information:

- Full name of the deceased
- Date and location of death
- The last address of the deceased
- The name of the funeral home
- Your relationship to the victim
- Your government-issued ID

ORDERING A DEATH CERTIFICATE

In accordance with Neb. Rev. Stat. 71-601.01, Nebraskans are able to obtain an Abstract of Death Certificate if there is a pending investigation into a loved one's death. For deaths occurring after July 19, 2024, this certificate will automatically be issued if the death certificate is attached to a pending investigation. If there is no pending investigation, a full death certificate will be issued.

The Abstract of Death Certificate will allow families to establish the fact of death and can be used to start settling estates, closing bank accounts, or transferring car titles. You may need to check with agencies or other entities to see if they accept an Abstract Death Certificate, especially out of state agencies. A full death certificate is required for life insurance policies and other processes that require an official cause of death.

There is a fee per certificate requested or issued by mail or in person. Payment may be made in cash, check, or money order made payable to Vital Records.

Online Application: nevitalrecords-dhhs.ne.gov

Mail Application: Vital Records PO Box 95065 Lincoln, NE 68509-5065

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RESOURCES

Following the death of a loved one, a range of legal matters may arise, including probate, financial and property issues, custody or juvenile matters, and other civil legal concerns. Navigating these processes can be complex and overwhelming, particularly while coping with grief. In many situations, securing legal representation or legal guidance may be helpful to understand options, protect rights, and manage next steps. It may be helpful to seek guidance or legal representation by an attorney with probate experience.

THE GRIEVING PROCESS

The loss of a loved one to homicide is a life-altering and deeply traumatic experience. Grief following a violent death is often intense, complex, and overwhelming. While there is no single path through grief, many individuals find that understanding common reactions can help them navigate the weeks, months, and years ahead. The information below is intended to provide guidance and reassurance during this difficult time.

THE MOST COMMON FEELINGS OF GRIEF

SHOCK

A period of numbness or disbelief is common in the early days following a homicide. Many describe feeling “foggy” or detached. This response can help a grieving person complete urgent tasks and make necessary arrangements.

TURMOIL

As shock begins to fade, emotional upheaval often follows. Memories of notification, the final moments shared with the loved one, or dreams involving the victim may arise. Sleep disruptions, difficulty concentrating, and persistent restlessness are common. Grief may surface suddenly and intensely. Anxiety, panic, or fear for one's own safety or the safety of others can also occur. Depression frequently accompanies this phase, and previously meaningful activities may feel burdensome or unimportant. Supportive, non-judgmental listening, whether from a trusted person, counselor, or advocate, can be essential during this stage.

ANGER

Anger is a natural and valid response to violent loss. It may be directed toward the offender, the justice system, loved ones, community members, or even toward one's faith. Anger can feel overwhelming or unfamiliar. Over time, with support, many people learn to manage these emotions in ways that contribute to regaining a sense of stability and control.

SEARCH FOR UNDERSTANDING

Many survivors feel a strong need to understand why the homicide occurred and may seek detailed information about the incident, the location, or the person responsible. Expectations for rapid updates or clear communication from the criminal justice system are common, though the process often moves slowly. Participation in court proceedings may be part of this search for clarity. Even so, not all questions will have answers. Survivors serving as witnesses may face restrictions on attending court prior to testimony; guidance from the county attorney may be helpful.

GUILT

Feelings of guilt or self-blame frequently emerge, often in the form of “what-ifs.” While these thoughts are a natural response to trauma, they can be painful and persistent. It is important to remember that no one can foresee the future or change past events. Self-blame can create additional harm and may interfere with healing.

THOUGHTS OF REVENGE

Thoughts of retaliation are more common than many expect, and do not mean that a person intends to act on them. These thoughts often reflect the depth of pain and injustice experienced. Survivors may feel unsettled or worried when these thoughts arise. Counseling and supportive conversations can help process this reaction without judgment.

COPING WITH THE REACTIONS OF OTHERS

Grief following a homicide is shaped by each person's individual history, beliefs, and life experiences. Because everyone processes trauma differently, reactions from family, friends, and the community can vary widely. Understanding these differences may help make sense of the responses that occur in the weeks and months ahead.

FAMILY

Families do not always grow closer after a homicide. In some cases, emotional or physical distance may develop during the grieving process. Open communication, when possible, can help maintain connection. Expressing feelings within the family or with trusted supporters may reduce misunderstandings and foster mutual support.

FRIENDS

Friends often provide early comfort but may unintentionally withdraw as time passes. Many people struggle to know what to say or fear causing additional pain. Some may avoid mentioning the homicide or change the subject when it arises. Others may not feel capable of hearing the details of the loss or may fear a similar tragedy could happen to them. These reactions can feel isolating. Individuals who are grieving may encounter friends who avoid contact in public spaces or colleagues who divert their eyes at work, unaware of how deeply this can impact someone already coping with significant trauma.

There are several ways to navigate these challenges. Some may choose to address the issue directly with friends, opening the door for honest conversation. Others may seek new connections with people who have experienced similar losses or who are willing to listen and share space. Support groups can provide understanding, validation, and opportunities to connect with others who are grieving.

COPING WITH HOLIDAYS

Holidays, anniversaries, and special dates often bring unique emotional challenges after a homicide. Traditions once shared with loved ones may now feel painful or overwhelming. Many people find that the first holiday season after the loss is especially difficult. Activities that once brought joy may seem unbearable, and celebrations may feel empty or burdensome.

Creating new traditions or spending time away from home during certain holidays can be helpful. Donating to a charity, performing acts of service, engaging in activities that honor the loved one's memory, or gathering with family may bring loved ones comfort. There is no "right" way to approach holidays while grieving. Allowing space for sadness and recognizing grief as a natural part of healing can be an important step.

COPING WITH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Many survivors are unfamiliar with the criminal justice system before losing a loved one to homicide. The process can feel slow, complex, and emotionally draining. It is not uncommon to experience frustration when it appears that an offender has more rights than the victim or the victim's family. While survivors often hope for swift justice, investigations and court proceedings require time, accuracy, and careful preparation.

Not all cases result in convictions. Some cases remain unsolved, some are dismissed for procedural reasons, and some result in appeals that extend the legal process for years. It is common for survivors to feel as though they are the ones living with a lifelong burden while the system moves forward at its own pace.

Support can make this journey more manageable. Victim/witness advocates and victim assistance professionals are trained to guide survivors through each stage of the process, explain legal procedures, and ensure that families receive information and support. These services are available through county attorney offices, law enforcement agencies, and community advocacy programs.

GLOSSARY

ADVOCATE

A trained professional who provides information, emotional support, and guidance to victims and families throughout the criminal justice process.

APPEAL

A legal request asking a higher court to review a conviction or sentence for potential errors made during the original trial.

AUTOPSY

A medical examination of a deceased individual that is conducted to determine the cause and manner of death.

BLOODBORNE PATHOGEN

A microorganism present in blood or bodily fluids that can cause disease; often considered in crime scene safety and evidence handling.

BOND

A financial or non-financial condition set by a judge to ensure a defendant appears for future court hearings.

COLD CASE

A criminal investigation that remains unsolved for an extended period and has no active leads.

CORONER

An official responsible for determining the manner of death, often working closely with law enforcement and forensic specialists.

COUNTY ATTORNEY

A prosecutor who represents the state or county in criminal cases and is responsible for filing charges and handling prosecutions.

COUNTY COURT

A lower-level court that handles preliminary criminal proceedings, misdemeanors, and certain civil matters.

CRIMESTOPPERS

A community-based program that allows the public to anonymously report information about crimes and receive potential rewards.

DEATH CERTIFICATE

An official document issued by the state that records a person's death, including cause, manner, and identifying information.

DEFENDANT

An individual formally charged with a criminal offense and subject to prosecution in court.

DISTRICT COURT

A higher-level trial court that handles felony cases and appeals from lower courts.

FORENSIC PATHOLOGIST

A medical doctor specializing in determining cause and manner of death through autopsy and forensic examination.

INCIDENT REPORT

A written record created by law enforcement documenting the details of an event, crime, or complaint.

PRE-SENTENCING INVESTIGATION (PSI)

A pre-sentence investigation (PSI) is a detailed examination of a defendant's background conducted after conviction but before sentencing to assist the judge in determining an appropriate sentence.

PRE-SENTENCING REPORT (PSR)

A formal report prepared for the court that provides background information about a convicted individual to determine an appropriate sentence.

SENTENCING

The court's determination of the punishment a defendant receives following a conviction.

SPEEDY TRIAL

A speedy trial is a legal right that ensures a criminal defendant is tried within a reasonable time to prevent undue delay, protect liberty, and preserve the integrity of evidence. The defendant may waive the right to speedy trial.

NOTES

[illegible]

NOTES

[illegible]

NOTES

[illegible]

NOTES

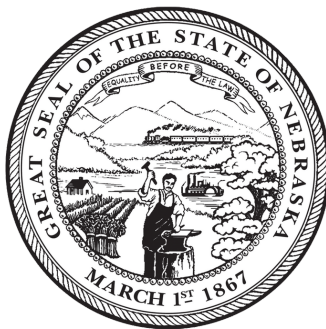
[illegible]

NOTES

[illegible]

NOTES

[illegible]



NEBRASKA ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE

AGO.Nebraska.gov
1445 K St. Lincoln, NE 68508
402-471-2682



NEBRASKA
DOMESTIC ABUSE
DEATH REVIEW TEAM