

## **Helping victims and survivors deal with the media following violent crime**

### **Media attention**

The necessity of dealing with the media is an additional source of stress for many people impacted by violent crime, but especially in homicide cases. There will be pressure on the family members to make a statement when the victim's body is found, or to make an appeal for information to help the police make an arrest, and reporters will also want interviews.

Intrusive and insensitive media practices are common and survivors often need protection from, and guidance on, dealing with the media. The media can often seem to know more about the incident than family members do.

### **Tips for victims:**

- Only one person should speak to the media. Choose someone you all trust.
- Decide beforehand what you will say.
- Be consistent with your information.
- It is ok to say "I cannot answer that at this moment."
- Remember to choose your words carefully – try to resist making statements in the heat of the moment.
- Make the media work for you – ensure they tell your story.
- Get the media on your side – they may have information you have not been told. Ask them what they know.
  
- When possible, ask a reporter to email questions to you and answer them by email. Remember you have more control over what you write than what you say. Read and re-read your statement before pressing send.
  
- When writing an obituary, remember that any names or places mentioned will attract media attention. Keep in mind that it is difficult to control misinformation. Again, try to be consistent.

### **Media impact on victims/survivors**

Media portrayal can interfere with memories of the victim because there is a preference for stories of "innocent victims" and stories reflecting "cherished social values", and that when deaths do not fit into these categories that the murder may be reported less sympathetically. Once the victim's life and death are in the public domain, the memories that their family has may become spoiled or obscured.

Victims commonly feel besieged by the media and that their loved one has become "public property", that they had no control over the representation of the murder.