



# Navigating Loss

A Guide for Family & Friends



# Victim Assistance Program: How We Help

We are very sorry for the loss that you and your family have experienced. You may feel like you don't know what to do, or how to move forward. That is OK. Victim Assistance Program created this booklet to help you through the different situations that may happen in the coming days and weeks.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve the loss of a loved one. Victim Assistance Program is here to support you for as long as you need. All our services are free and confidential.

Remember that you can reach out at any time, for any reason, even if it is just to talk. Thank you for allowing us to support you and your family during this difficult time.



24-Hour Hotline: Call or Text  
330.376.0040

# Victim Advocates

Victim advocates are trained professionals who help people who have experienced something traumatic. Our team of advocates are here to listen to you, support you, answer questions, and figure out your next steps. If you have a question that an advocate cannot answer, they will help you find the person who can.

Primary Advocate: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_@victimassistanceprogram.org

Work Hours: \_\_\_\_\_

Secondary Advocate: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_@victimassistanceprogram.org

Work Hours: \_\_\_\_\_



# Building Your Team

Finding out about the death of a loved one isn't easy. In the first few days, you will probably speak to a lot of people. It is normal to not remember everything you are told.

One helpful thing to do is to begin to build your team of support that will help you get through this time. Pages 3-5 will help you keep track of your personal support system and other important people you may meet in the next 24-72 hours and beyond.

## Find Your Support People

Turn to page 3: You can use this space to write down those you trust (friends, family, maybe your victim advocate) to help with making decisions and support you.

## Keep Track of the People You Meet

Turn to page 5: You can use this space to write down the different people you talk to and their phone numbers.



# My Team: Support People

## Support People

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone#: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone#: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

### Telling Others

Once you've picked your support person or team, you can now come up with a plan to tell others. Common examples include family & friends, employers, schools, or a faith community.

I want my support people to help me share this information, or help me with these tasks: \_\_\_\_\_

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# My Team: Police Officers

A police officer will arrive on scene after someone dies to determine if someone's death was due to natural or unnatural causes. Sometimes a detective (who is also a police officer) may investigate what happened. A police officer or detective, may ask to speak with you right away or schedule a meeting later.

You can ask an advocate to be there when you speak with any law enforcement officer and they can help if you have a hard time getting in touch with them.

## Officer/Detective

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Hours: \_\_\_\_\_





# My Team: Other People

Please use this space to include any other support people on your team.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

# The First 24-72 Hours

## Medical Examiner

Now that you have built your team, pages 6-7 will explain the steps that the Medical Examiner's Office takes.

Medical Examiners are professionals who conduct medical exams post-mortem (after death). Their exam, also known as an autopsy, gives information about how your loved one died. Often, an investigator, who works for the Medical Examiner, is assigned to your family.

Take a moment to write down any information you may have gotten from the Medical Examiner's Office below. Just like with police officers or detectives, your advocate can support you if you feel nervous or scared to talk with the Medical Examiner, or if you have trouble getting in contact with them.

Summit County Medical Examiner's Office

85 N. Summit Street Akron, OH 44308

Investigator Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Hours: \_\_\_\_\_





# The First 24-72 Hours: Medical Examiner Process

If your loved one is taken to the Medical Examiner's Office, you can plan for the following:



Autopsies are usually done within 48 hours. During this time, you and your team can begin planning funeral and memorial services. Pages 9-11 will guide you through this process.



Unlike what we see on TV, the Medical Examiner's Office does not have viewings or ask families to identify their loved one. Instead, you can arrange a private viewing through the Funeral Director.



Once you choose a funeral home, let the Funeral Director know that your loved one is at the Medical Examiner's Office. Usually, you will sign a form and the funeral home will coordinate your loved ones transportation.





# Planning for a Memorial or Funeral

By this point, you have built your support team and learned about the Medical Examiner's process. Pages 8-10 will give you some tips for arranging funeral or memorial services.

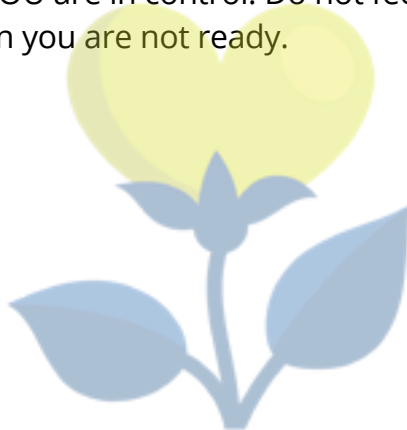
Nobody is ever really prepared to handle these tasks. Use your support team and your victim advocate to help you.

If you are feeling stuck, or having trouble making funeral or memorial arrangements, that is OK. Your victim advocate can provide you with funeral home referrals.

## Helpful Tips:

**Start with the basics:** Do you wish to have a burial, cremation, or something else? Do you wish to have a funeral, memorial, graveside service, or something else? Once you select a funeral home, the funeral director can help guide you.

**Take your time:** YOU are in control. Do not feel that you have to make choices when you are not ready.





# Planning for a Funeral or Memorial: Details

This worksheet will help you keep track of the details of the funeral, memorial, family-only viewing or other arrangements you choose. This information can be given to your support person/team who can help you share the information with others.

Name of Funeral Home: \_\_\_\_\_

Funeral Director: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City : \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

## Important Dates & Times

Date & Time of Wake/Viewing: \_\_\_\_\_

Date & Time of Funeral/Memorial/Mass: \_\_\_\_\_

Date & Time of Burial: \_\_\_\_\_

Date & Time of Reception/Gathering: \_\_\_\_\_



# Planning for a Funeral or Memorial: Details

## Burial Site and Final Resting Place

Site Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City : \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

## Reception or Celebration of Life

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City : \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

## Officiant Information

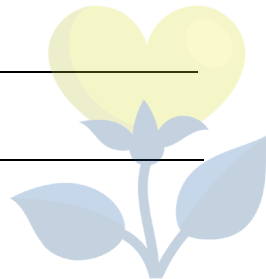
Priest | Pastor | Minister | Rabbi | Chaplain | Other

Name & Place of Worship: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #/Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City : \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_





# Helpful Resources

Although the below resources may not apply in every situation, a Victim Advocate can help you determine if these, or other resources, may be helpful to you.

## Crime Scene Clean-Up

Sometimes there are cleanup needs that are unsafe to do ourselves. Professional crime scene cleanup companies have the proper tools to do the cleaning safely.

**Crime scene cleanup is not free and is usually not covered by insurance.** Victim Assistance Program works closely with local companies who may be able to offer a payment plan or discounted rate. If this is a service that you need, a Victim Advocate can refer you to local companies.

## Victim Compensation

The Ohio Attorney General's Office has a fund to help reimburse victims of violent crimes and their families for select out-of-pocket expenses. Some examples include funeral costs, crime scene clean-up expenses, counseling services, medical expenses, and lost wages due to your loved one's death. There is an application process and decisions are made within 120 days. A Victim Advocate can help you access, complete, and submit the application.

This fund is not managed by Victim Assistance Program and certain eligibility restrictions apply.

If you have questions about the status of an application you submitted, please call the Crime Victim Services Division of the Ohio Attorney General's Office: 614.466.5610.

# Taking Care of Yourself

As you are working through the first 24-72 hours and beyond, it is so important to remember to take care of yourself.

Grief is the pain you feel when someone you love dies, and this pain can be overwhelming. You may experience all kinds of emotions, from shock or anger to disbelief, guilt, and deep sadness.

The pain of grief can make it difficult to sleep, eat, or even think straight. These are normal reactions to loss. Although there is no right or wrong way to grieve, there are healthy things you can do to get by.

Page 13 will walk you through some different reactions you may have, but remember that everyone is different. An advocate can help you come up with new ideas or share methods that have been helpful to others who have lived through a similar situation.



## 3 Things I do to Relax:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Now, challenge yourself each day to spend one hour doing at least one of these things. It doesn't have to be all at once, just one hour total. Try and continue to build a habit of adding this into your day-to-day routine.



## Physical Responses

- Trouble sleeping
- Stomach problems
- Tiredness
- Headaches
- Tight or sore muscles
- Unexplained medical conditions or existing medical conditions getting worse

## Helpful Practices

- Physical activity, even if it is a short walk
- Allow time for rest
- Drink water
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals
- Do things that help you relax and rest

## Mental & Emotional Responses

- Nervousness & anxiety
- Anger, confusion, & forgetfulness
- Avoiding people and places
- Nightmares
- Guilt & shame
- Negative worldview

## Helpful Practices

- Reach out to your support system
- Write down your thoughts & feelings if talking about them is uncomfortable
- Have a daily routine
- Seek professional help or attend a peer support group



# Next Steps: Who to Notify

There are several different places you may need to notify that your loved one has died. Pages 14-15 will walk you through this process. Your support team, including your Victim Advocate, may be able to help you with some of these steps.

Important information you may need when making calls:

Your loved one's social security #: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth & Death: \_\_\_\_\_

You can purchase a copy of your loved one's death certificate:

**Online:** [odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/home/vital-records](http://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/home/vital-records)

**In person:** Summit County Public Health  
1867 W. Market St. Akron, OH

Only a few places require certified copies of the certificate, while most others accept photocopies.

## Government Agencies

### **Social Security Administration: 1.800.772.1213**

**Reason:** You can call to report if your loved one or their children are receiving social security benefits, if your loved one is assigned as a "payee" for someone else's social security benefits, or to see if you are eligible for survivor benefits.

### **US Department of Vetran's Affairs 1.800.827.1000**

**Reason:** There are certain benefits you may qualify for if your loved one is a veteran and/or is receiving VA disability benefits. Benefits may include burial benefits, survivor benefits, and/or health insurance.

### **Summit Dept. of Job and Family Services 1.844.640.6446**

**Reason:** Those who have an active benefits case are required to report any household changes within ten (10) days to prevent delays in receiving those benefits.





# Next Steps: Who to Notify

When informing companies of a loved one's death, be prepared to submit a copy of the death certificate for their records.

## Financial Companies

- Checking, savings, money accounts and credit unions
- Utilities
- Credit card companies
- House, car, student, or other loans
- Retirement funds (401K, PERS, IRA, etc.)

## Insurance Companies

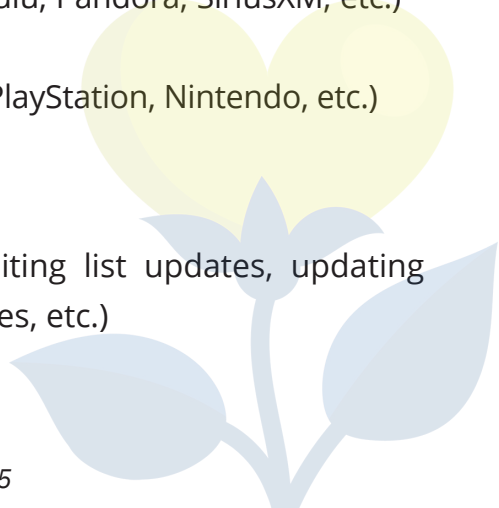
- Life insurance
- Car insurance
- Homeowner/renter insurance
- Health, dental, and vision insurance

## Memberships

- AAA (American Automobile Association)
- Gym memberships
- Streaming services (Netflix, Hulu, Pandora, SiriusXM, etc.)
- Amazon Prime
- Gaming services (X-Box Live, PlayStation, Nintendo, etc.)

## Other

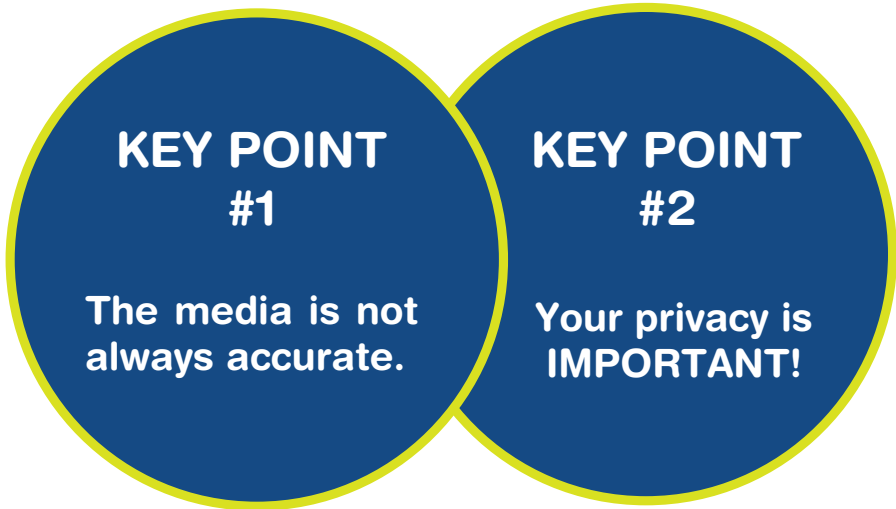
- Cell-phone provider
- Housing (public housing waiting list updates, updating landlord about leasing changes, etc.)
- Email accounts
- Social media accounts





# Next Steps: Managing the Media

Sometimes a reporter may ask to speak with you or your family about the death of your loved one. This choice is yours to make. If you do choose to speak to the media, a Victim Assistance Program advocate can help.



## Your loved one's social media accounts

Facebook and Instagram allow users to delete or memorialize an account. Memorialized accounts are a place for friends and family to gather and share memories. Memorializing an account also helps keep it secure by preventing anyone from logging in.

**Memorialized Facebook Account:** Search 'how to memorialize a Facebook account' on Google and follow the link to Facebook's Help Center.

**Memorialized Instagram Account:** Search 'how to memorialize an Instagram account' on Google and follow the link to Instagram's Help Center.

**Twitter/ X allows users to deactivate an account:** Search 'how to contact Twitter/X about a deceased family member's account' on Google and follow the link to Twitter's Help Center.



# Moving Forward

Special days can be hard when you have lost a loved one. This section will help you navigate and prepare for how to handle birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries.

**It's okay to be up front about what you need.** Let your friends and family know if you need support or if you need space.

**Traditions may change.** You may feel differently about special days or family traditions without your loved one there. Consider some of these ideas to remember your loved ones while making new traditions:

- Cook a loved one's favorite food on holidays.
- Set aside time to share memories of your loved ones with your support people.

Each year, on the first Monday of December, our agency hosts the Victim Assistance Program **Angel Tree Ceremony** for surviving family members of those who have died due to violence. This event is free to attend.

You can submit a picture of your loved one to be displayed during the event and throughout the month of December on the Wall of Remembrance to [info@victimassistanceprogram.org](mailto:info@victimassistanceprogram.org) - please include your loved one's name with the photo.

Invitations for the Angel Tree Ceremony will be sent out through email. Ask a Victim Advocate for more information.

**To Go or Not to Go?** How you spend your holidays is up to you. Don't stress yourself out with decisions about whether to go to a social gathering. Consider telling the host that holidays can be difficult for you, and that you might need to decide whether to attend on the day of the gathering.

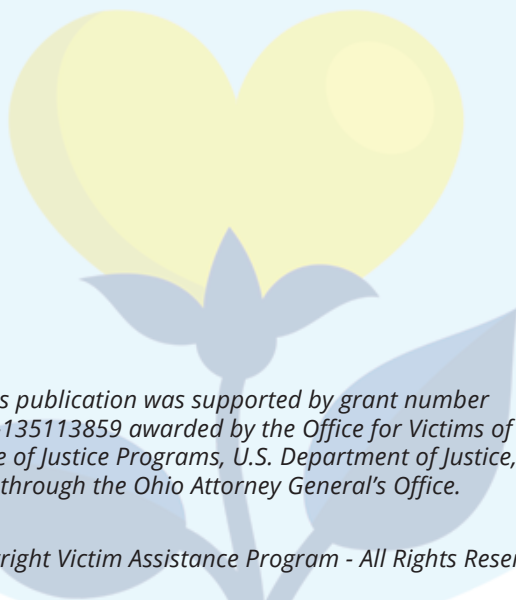


The path to healing may be one of the most difficult things you ever do. As you go on this journey, remember, it's okay to feel what you feel. You are not alone. Victim Assistance Program is here for you every step of the way with 24/7 support. Do what feels right to you; you are worthy of compassion and dignity, no matter what.

**24-Hour Phone & Text Hotline**  
**330.376.0040**

**24-Hour Website Chat**  
**[victimassistanceprogram.org](https://victimassistanceprogram.org)**

**“Grief is not a disorder, a disease, or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical, and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve.”**  
**- Earl Grollman**



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