



# AN INFORMATION GUIDE FOR FAMILIES INVOLVED WITH HOMICIDE

**Halton Regional Police Service**



Halton Regional Police Service  
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The entire Halton Regional Police Service is committed to supporting you throughout this most tragic and difficult time.

Know that we will do all that is possible to help your family and friends find the strength to heal in the coming weeks and months. Grief is not linear, but you are not alone. The community stands with you and will not let you down.

As a Service, we pledge to do our utmost to bring those responsible to justice.

With sincere and heartfelt condolences,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Tanner', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Stephen J. Tanner  
Chief of Police

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# WE ARE HERE TO HELP

We recognize this is a very difficult time for you. It is important for you to know that the Halton Regional Police Service is here to provide assistance to you in any way possible involving the death of your loved one.

Our duty is to bring an appropriate resolution to the case by conducting a professional and thorough investigation with the goal of identifying, apprehending and bringing to justice the person(s) responsible. In addition, we wish to remain focused on the needs and expectations of victims in our community.

During the course of this investigation, there are many things that will occur. This *Guide for the Families of Homicide Victims* will identify the phases of our investigation so you have a better understanding of the process. Included are contact numbers, resource information and what you can expect during a homicide investigation.

If there is anything you need to know that is not included in this guide, do not hesitate to ask. We are here to help.

Anyone with information pertaining to community safety is asked to contact police at 905-825-4777 or Crime Stoppers "See Something, Hear Something, Say Something" at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS), or through the web at [www.haltoncrimestoppers.ca](http://www.haltoncrimestoppers.ca).





# WHO WILL BE INVOLVED?

## Homicide Unit

The Homicide Unit is divided into teams. The Officer in Charge of the case, (referred to as the lead investigator or O.I.C.) is responsible for leading the investigation until completion and preparing the case for trial. The investigation is overseen by a Case Manager and organized by a File Coordinator.

The Officer in Charge, or O.I.C., works with other members in the Homicide Unit, along with support staff from other units within the Halton Regional Police Service and other law enforcement agencies, if necessary.

The Homicide Unit works in partnership with the Victim Services Unit. They have the expertise in addressing your practical needs and provide guidance and support throughout and beyond the investigation process.

## Victim Services Unit

The Victim Services Unit of the Halton Regional Police Service is a 24-hour crisis intervention service for victims of crime and trauma through on-scene support as well as telephone follow-up, community referrals and limited financial assistance. Some of the services that may relate to family members of homicide are as follows:

- Next of kin notifications for other family members, even outside Halton Region
- Liaison for the family with the Homicide Unit
- Assist family members in locating a funeral home
- Work closely with the Homicide Unit to enhance support for the family
- Assist the family in explaining the investigation and general process in relation to the aftermath (e.g. media, funeral, etc.)
- Discuss options for financial assistance such as the Victim Quick Response Program+ that can contribute towards the cost of:
  - Funeral expenses
  - Crime scene clean-up
  - Emergency home repairs to ensure your safety
  - Emergency child care and dependent care
  - Short-term counselling



- Support with notifying and supporting children affected by the homicide
- Provide a referral for family members to the Victim Witness Assistance Program (if an arrest has been made)
- Facilitate interpreter services for families, if required

## Coroner

In Ontario the Coroner is a medical doctor who has specialized training and is appointed to investigate circumstances surrounding a death. A Coroner is called to the scene of all homicides and is required to pronounce death of your loved one. In addition, the Coroner will also direct police with regards to the handling of your loved one.

The law requires that an autopsy be performed on all homicide victims. The autopsy, also called a post mortem, usually occurs within 24-hours of arrival at the hospital. The autopsy is critical in collecting evidence. Post mortems for deaths in Halton are usually conducted at the Toronto Centre for Forensic Sciences by a Forensic Pathologist in order to help determine the cause and manner of death. An autopsy usually includes the examination of internal organs. Materials are collected for medical evidence (e.g. hair, fibres). Blood, tissue and other bodily fluids may also be collected for toxicology testing in a laboratory.

## Victim/Witness Assistance Program

**If an arrest has been made**, the Victim/Witness Assistance Program will be notified. The Victim Witness Assistance Program provides information, assistance and support to victims and witnesses of crime to increase their understanding of, and participation in, the criminal court process, only when criminal charges are laid as a result of the death of your loved one.

**If an arrest has not been made**, the Victim Services Unit of the Halton Regional Police Service will continue to offer support and assistance. This includes providing updates on significant case changes or information.



# THE CORONER/FUNERAL PROCESS

## The Death Notification

As soon as it is known who the next of kin is, the Officer In Charge (O.I.C.) or their designate will formally notify you. In most cases, a member of the Victim Services Unit will also attend to provide emotional and practical assistance.

## Will I have to identify the body?

Maybe. If the police are unable to make a positive identification, the law requires a family member to do so. If you do not wish to take part in this or are unable to, another family member or family friend who knew your loved one can do this on your behalf. The identity of that person will need to be verified by the police before they can identify the body. If you wish to identify the body, you may bring a support person with you or ask that Victim Services attend with you.

## What happens when I identify the body?

A police officer will accompany you to the hospital and a Victim Services worker may also attend. In an effort to help prepare you, a member of the Coroner's Office will describe the injuries your loved one has received and ask if you wish to view photographs of the body. After this preparation, you will be allowed to see the body to identify your loved one. If technology supports this option, you may view the body over a video monitor to make the formal identification.

It's important to note that you may not be able to touch the body of your loved one. This is to protect any evidence collected from being contaminated or compromised.

## What if I do not want an autopsy?

The law requires an autopsy and enables the Coroner to make the final decision about whether or not an autopsy should be performed. If you have any specific concerns or are opposed to an autopsy for any reason, you can bring your concerns forward to the Coroner so they can take them into account when making their decision.



## Can I see the body?

Yes. Once the Pathologist has completed their investigation, your loved one will be transferred to a funeral home and you will be able to see them there. The timeframe can vary, depending on the circumstances surrounding the death of your loved one.

## How do I find out about the autopsy results?

Once the post mortem or autopsy has been completed, the Coroner or the O.I.C. may be able to provide you with a preliminary report on the cause of death. However, evidence cannot be shared. The toll free number to speak with the Coroner is 1-877-991-9959.

## Releasing the body

Usually, your loved one can be released to the funeral home of your choice as soon as the autopsy is complete.

## The funeral

Once your loved one is at the funeral home, you can proceed with your funeral plans.



# FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The financial burden of dealing with the murder of a loved one can be overwhelming. There are a number of possible sources of financial assistance available to you.

## Private Insurance

If you have a private insurance plan through your employer or otherwise you should first check with your insurance company to see if the plan will cover the cost of a funeral.

## Victim Quick Response Program+ (VQRP+)

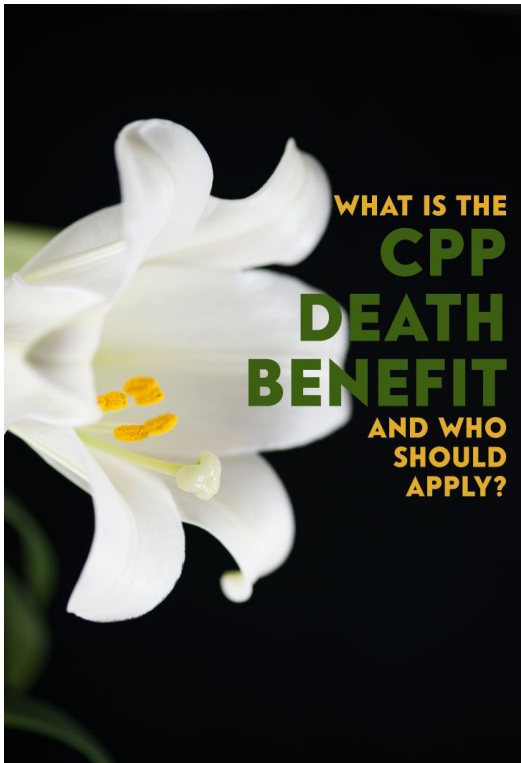
Alternatively the Victim Quick Response Program+ provides emergency funds in the immediate aftermath of a violent crime for victims who have no other financial means or resources. While it does not fully reimburse, it does contribute to the cost of:

- **Funeral expenses** - Up to a maximum of \$5,000.00. This may include transportation of the body, basic service fees, casket and burial, and/or cremation.
- **Crime scene clean-up** – This may include cleaning up the presence of bio-hazardous materials.
- **Emergency home repairs**
- **Emergency child and dependent care**
- **Short term counselling**

The VQRP+ Program is offered through the Victim Services Unit of the Halton Regional Police Service. To reach the VQRP+ Coordinator, you can dial directly at 905-825-4810.



## Canada Pension



In some cases, financial assistance for funerals may be obtained through the Death Benefits Program of the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), but only if the deceased was a contributor to the CPP. Further information can be obtained by calling Service Canada on their toll-free number at 1-877-454-4051.

*Note that VQRP+ does not cover the offences of dangerous driving causing death or impaired driving causing death. If your loved one has died as a result of an offence involving a motor vehicle, you may be eligible for compensation, through an automobile insurance policy (the offender's policy or the victim's). If there is not automobile insurance available, you may be eligible for compensation through the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Fund (MVACF). For further information, you can contact them at 1-800-268-7188.*

Please contact the Victim Services Unit for detailed information, direction, and emotional support.



# ABOUT HOMICIDE INVESTIGATIONS

## **What can I expect after the case is assigned?**

Once the case has been assigned to the Homicide Unit, a comprehensive and detailed investigation must take place. This includes examining and processing physical evidence and conducting interviews with witnesses, persons of interest, and family members.

You will be contacted and interviewed regarding your loved one. This is both normal and necessary. The investigator needs to learn all that they can about the victim. This information is extremely important when investigating a homicide.

At times, the questions asked may be sensitive and may make you feel awkward. Please be assured that we are not “digging up dirt” or making judgments about your loved one’s behaviour and/or lifestyle. You may be requested to provide information about your loved one’s habits, friends, places frequented and/or their personal belongings. This information is very important to the investigation, and it is information that often only you can provide.

## **Why can't I be told all the facts about the case?**

Depending on the circumstances regarding the death of your loved one, investigators may not be able to provide the nature, extent, and results of the investigation.

This information may be withheld for a variety of necessary reasons. For example, if you or other family members will be required as witnesses at the trial, it would compromise the case to share certain information with you that will be used as evidence.

## **Why won't the police return government identification to the family?**

Government identification, such as a driver’s licence, birth certificate and/or passport, is the property of the issuing agency and must be returned to them.



## **What if someone has information about the crime but does not want to go to the police?**

The police always encourage individuals to come forward and personally provide any information they may have concerning a crime; however, they can provide information anonymously to the Crime Stoppers tip line. Crime Stoppers is a civilian (not police-based) non-profit organization that brings together police services of a community, the media, and the community in the fight against crime. Crime Stoppers provide citizens with a way to anonymously provide the police with information about a crime or potential crime they have knowledge of. Callers are given a "code number" which is used in all subsequent calls so callers do not have to identify themselves. Crime Stoppers is evidence that cannot be used in court. Contact Crime Stoppers of Halton at 1-811-222-8477 (TIPS).

## **What about releasing vehicles?**

Sometimes vehicles are impounded at the scene and are held as evidence. These vehicles are generally held at an authorized pound and may be released after any necessary processing is complete.

## **How do I get the property of my loved one?**

The Officer in Charge (O.I.C.) is responsible for deciding on, and arranging, the release of your loved one's property. Some items may need to be retained as evidence and cannot be returned until after the court proceedings, including the trial and any appeal periods. It is also important to note that some items may have been exposed to dangerous materials or biological hazards such as blood. These items will often have to be destroyed.

## **When should I expect an arrest?**

Every case is different. Some cases take days, while others take months, and sometimes years, to complete. There is no statute of limitations (time limit) on murder investigations. There are many factors involved, such as a reluctance on behalf of witnesses to cooperate with the investigation because they are afraid of the perpetrator(s), dislike of the police, cultural reasons, and/or just do not want to get involved.



## What happens after the accused has been arrested?

Once police have determined they have enough evidence to make an arrest, the police may lay charges. Charging a person means that the police have enough evidence to believe that the person committed the crime.

It's important to remember that even though the police are responsible for laying the charge(s) against the accused(s), the Crown Attorney will review all of evidence before deciding whether or not to proceed with the matter. The Crown Attorney will proceed with the case when there is a reasonable chance of convicting the accused and prosecuting the accused is in the public interest.

## What will the accused be charged with?

Each case is different and the charges laid will depend on a number of factors. You should speak with the O.I.C. of the investigation or the Crown Attorney assigned to the case to find out why specific charges were laid. In most cases involving a homicide, the accused will be charged with one of the following offenses:

### **Murder** (first or second degree):

- The accused will be charged with murder if the evidence shows that:
  - The accused intended to cause the death of the victim; or
  - The accused intended to cause bodily harm to the victim, which they knew was likely to cause death and was reckless as to whether death occurred.
- The accused can be charged with **first degree** murder or **second degree** murder
  - Generally murder is **first degree** when it is planned and deliberate, or when the murder takes place while the accused is committing certain other offences (e.g., sexual assault, kidnapping), or when the victim was a police officer or someone working in a prison.
  - Murder that is not first degree is **second degree**. When an accused is charged with murder, it is possible in certain circumstances that they will be convicted of a lesser offence at trial (e.g., second degree murder or manslaughter instead of first degree murder).

### **Manslaughter**

- The accused will be charged with manslaughter when the evidence shows that they caused the death of the victim by means of an unlawful act or through criminal negligence, but the evidence does not show that they intended to cause the death.



## What happens if someone is charged?

After an arrest is made, the judicial (or court) process begins. There are a number of possible resolutions or dispositions of a criminal case.

In most cases, the preliminary inquiry/hearing at the Provincial Court level will take place in the jurisdiction of the murder. A trial will be held at the Superior Court level.

## Will the police close the file if an arrest has not been made?

No. Under the Criminal Code of Canada, there is no time limit (referred to as statute of limitations) on murder investigations or the laying of charges of murder. This means the case will remain open, but it is not considered an active investigation. If the O.I.C. leaves the Homicide Unit, the case will be reassigned to another officer and they will contact you if/when there are any changes.

## Who will help me with the criminal justice process?

In Ontario, the Victim Witness Assistance Program (VWAP) is available. This is a court-based program that provides information, assistance and support for certain victims and witnesses of crime including families of homicide victims. These services begin as early as the laying of charges and continue until the conclusion of the court case.

VWAP can answer questions about the justice process, provide you with a courtroom orientation, offer emotional support and help with arranging special assistance for you while in court such as providing a translator. Workers also provide information about the court dates, hearing outcomes, and copies of bail or probation orders.

The VWAP offices are located in the courthouses at:

### **Milton Court House**

491 Steeles Avenue East

Milton, Ontario

L9T 1Y7

### **Burlington Court House**

2051 Plains Road East

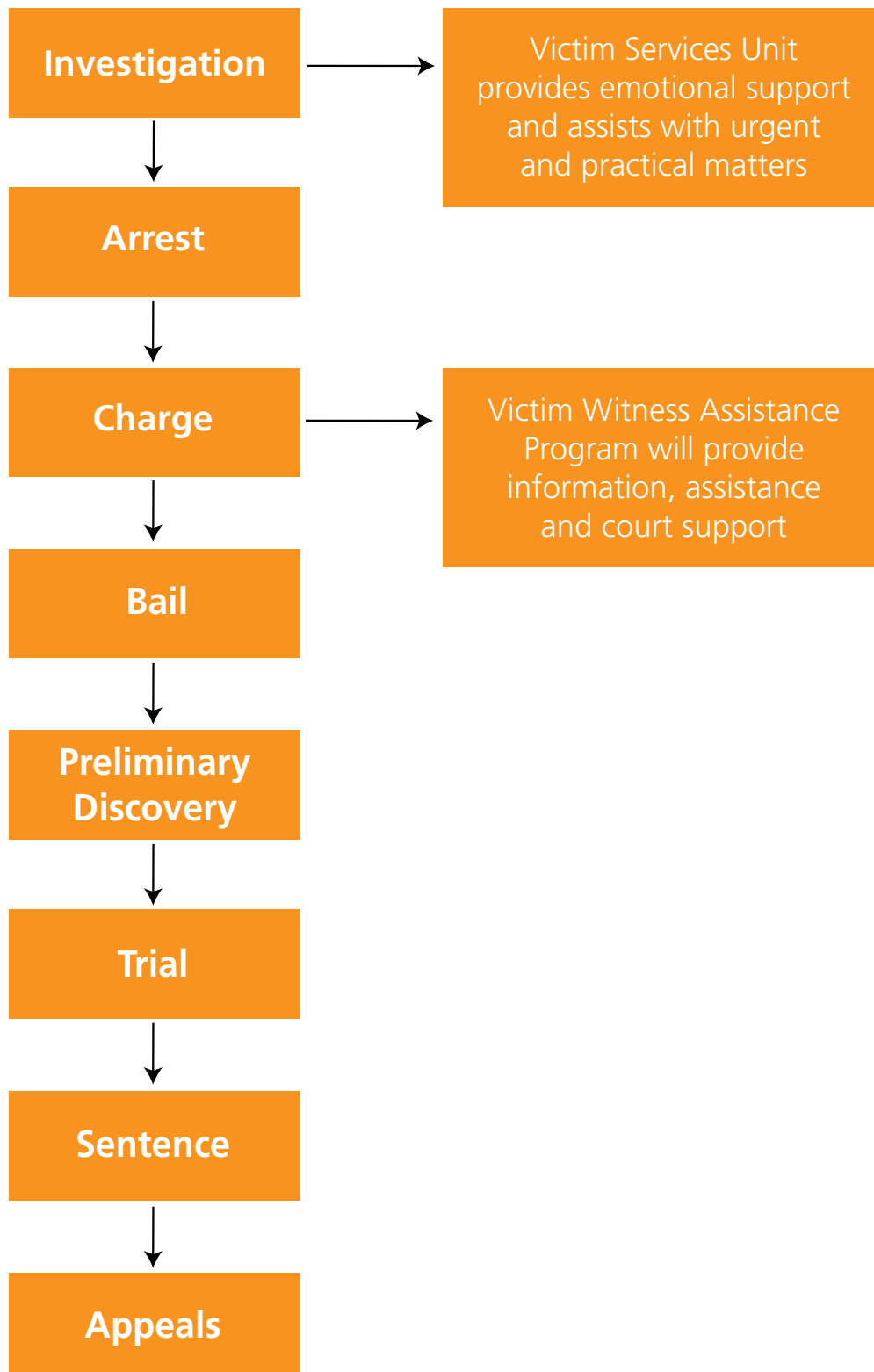
Burlington, Ontario

L7R 5A5

If you have any further questions about the court process and your involvement within it, you may wish to contact VWAP at 905-878-6292 or through the website at [www.ontario.ca/victimservices](http://www.ontario.ca/victimservices).



# CRIMINAL CASE PROCESS REFERENCE GUIDE





# MEDIA

It is highly recommended that you be cautious when speaking to the media without first contacting the Officer in Charge because it could impact the Halton Regional Police Service's ability to properly investigate the death of your loved one and bring the person(s) responsible to justice. Instead, work with the Officer in Charge, who will, in turn, coordinate with the media through proper channels.

It is the practice of the Halton Regional Police Service not to release the names of victims or deceased persons without first making every attempt possible to contact the closest Next of Kin (N.O.K.). However, the Halton Regional Police Service may not be able to prevent the name of the victim or person responsible from being released to the media. The N.O.K. would be the parents, siblings or adult children of your loved one. It is important to remember that the media has access to social internet sites where sensitive information may have been posted. This access is beyond the control of the Halton Regional Police Service and, in some cases, has hindered investigators' efforts to contact families or bring the responsible person to justice.

## Options for speaking to Media

A homicide investigation draws a lot of media attention but the choice to speak with media is yours to make. It's also important to note that you can decline a request to be interviewed in any fashion, or only provide a written statement if you prefer. If you choose to be interviewed there are a few things to remember:

- Nothing is "off the record"— everything you say to a reporter can be reported
- If you are unsure about what information can be released, you can check with the O.I.C. of the case
- You can appoint a media spokesperson to handle all media inquiries. This can be a family member or trusted friend.
- Prepare a statement in advance
- You can ask for the interview questions ahead of time, giving you an opportunity to review them first
- You can ask for interview questions to be sent via email, eliminating the face-to-face encounter
- You can stop the interview at any time
- You can request a specific reporter if that increases your comfort level
- You can ask the reporter what angle the story is going to take
- You can choose to provide a favourite picture of your loved one to release, or choose to provide none at all. Note: if you choose not to respond to media requests, they will likely find one through alternate means.



## Social Media

It is important to note that anyone can post information to social media sites, some of which may be difficult to see and read. If you as a family member encounter sensitive information or photographs on social media that you find harmful, please feel free to contact the Homicide Unit or the Victim Services Unit. While we cannot stop people from posting information and personal opinions, we will do our best to mitigate the risk of emotional harm to the family. We recommend you avoid getting drawn into social media posts.

## Crime Stoppers

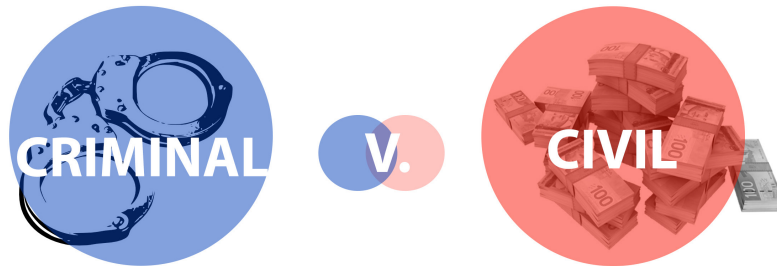
Frequently, the police ask the media to help with active investigations. Sometimes this can generate new leads or identify new witnesses that may come forward with useful information about the investigation. The media also assist police investigations with such non-profit organizations such as Crime Stoppers. Anonymous information is shared and rewards are granted for helpful information in return. For more information visit [www.haltoncrimestoppers.com](http://www.haltoncrimestoppers.com) or call 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).





# CIVIL PROCESS

## How can one seek a civil remedy for financial loss?



A civil court case is different from a criminal court case. In criminal court, the government/state brings charges against an individual to provide relief to the general public and punish this individual for their crime. Civil cases, on the other hand, can be used by anyone to enforce, redress or protect their legal rights through court orders and monetary awards. The two types of trials are very different and have separate procedural rules and practices.

If you wish to engage in the civil process, it is recommended that families of homicides speak with a lawyer that you trust and who is going to represent you effectively and seek only fair compensation. We recommend taking recommendations from trusted friends and family members, or visiting the website of The Law Society of Upper Canada, which regulates legal professionals in Ontario. (<http://www.lsuc.on.ca/find-a-lawyer-or-paralegal/>).

The disbursements of financial awards can be extremely complex and involved. This is true in both criminal/provincial case proceedings as well as for those investigations where charges were not applicable. Even if there are criminal court proceedings, this does not mean that the family of involved parties cannot also seek civil remedies.

This is not a comprehensive list of all support that is available to you through Victim Services. If you have any other questions or concerns not identified, please do not hesitate to contact us. If we do not know the immediate answer, we will do everything we can to find it out on your behalf. You can contact us at 905-825-4777 ext. 5239 during regular business hours, or contact the Officer in Charge to get in touch with us.



# MISCONCEPTIONS AND MYTHS

## 1. **Don't "investigate the investigation".**

When a loved one dies it is natural to expect that your case should take priority and be investigated quickly. Officers want to ensure they complete a thorough investigation. Sometimes that means taking a lengthy period of time to do so. A homicide investigation is not just about establishing a theory about what happened, it is about gathering scientific evidence. Allowing the police to conduct their investigation without interference helps to ensure they have the ability to assemble all of the facts.

## 2. **Don't play the "blame game".**

It is a common reaction to be angry as a result of the death of a loved one. When this happens, family members can sometimes rush to judgment in an effort to hold someone accountable for causing so much pain and loss. It is important to step back and allow the police to conduct their investigation, to take the necessary time to gather all of the evidence, interview all of the witnesses, and present the facts that may help you to understand how and why your loved one died.

## 3. **Be careful about retaining a lawyer too early in the process.**

Criminal prosecutions always take precedence over civil actions. Family members always retain the right to consult legal counsel; however, when to do so is not as clear. Police cannot provide legal advice and the police investigative report will not be available for release for a civil action until the conclusion of any criminal matters. Please consult your O.I.C. if you have any questions.

## 4. **Television is not reality.**

While television provides entertainment, it is important to remember that it does not always reflect reality, particularly as it relates to policing and investigations.

# GRIEF AND LOSS

The death of someone close to us is one of life's most stressful events. Coping with the changes it brings to our lives is vital to our mental health and well-being.

There are no stages of grief. Do not let anyone establish timelines for you. These are some of the normal emotions you may experience:

- Shock – numbness, disbelief
- Sadness – feelings of being overwhelmed
- Panic – fear of the future, uncertainty
- Loneliness – emptiness, feeling displaced
- Anger – due to lack of support, inadequate medical care, with the deceased for leaving you
- Confusion – memory loss, inability to concentrate
- Guilt – things you wish you had done or said
- Loss – dreams, finality

## Coping Mechanisms

- Give yourself permission to grieve and accept the reality of your loss. Allow yourself to cry, get angry, sleep, eat or whatever you need to do without going to extreme.
- Be patient with the process – there is no “normal” time line for feeling better
- Get plenty of rest – your body needs to recover from the stress
- Reach out for help – do not be afraid to ask for support through your family members, friends, doctors, clergy, funeral director, and/or counsellor.





# CONTACT INFORMATION

## Victim Services Unit

|                  |             |                |
|------------------|-------------|----------------|
| Name:            | Position:   |                |
| Business Phone:  | Cell Phone: | Email Address: |
| Office Location: |             |                |
| Notes:           |             |                |

## Homicide Unit - Officer in Charge (O.I.C.)

|                  |             |                |
|------------------|-------------|----------------|
| Name:            | Position:   |                |
| Business Phone:  | Cell Phone: | Email Address: |
| Office Location: |             |                |
| Notes:           |             |                |

Reminder: Have you provided your updated contact information to the Officer in Charge and your VSU contact?

## For more information, please contact:

### Victim Services Unit

Halton Regional Police Service  
95 Oakwalk Drive  
Oakville, Ontario  
L6H 0G6



**Telephone(s):** 905-825-4747 ext. 5239 / 90-825-4810 / 905-825-4805

**Website:** <https://www.haltonpolice.ca/en/services-and-reporting/victim-services.aspx>