



Link: [Homicide Followed by Suicide | AFSP \(with video\)](#)

## **Homicide followed by suicide**

No matter how you lost your loved one to suicide, you deserve support. If you are a homicide-suicide loss survivor, you are not alone. You are part of a vast family of people who have lost loved ones to suicide. As a suicide loss survivor, AFSP offers [programs and resources](#) to help support families and communities, including [Healing Conversations](#).

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### **What is homicide-suicide?**

Homicide-suicide (also called homicide followed by suicide or murder-suicide) occurs when someone kills at least one other person before taking their own life. Homicide-suicide can cause devastating grief not only for loved ones of innocent victims but also for those who loved the person who took another life before dying by suicide.

### **What is a homicide-suicide loss survivor?**

If you are a homicide-suicide loss survivor, someone close to you killed one or more people before dying by suicide. You may be grieving for the perpetrator alone, for additional loved ones who were killed, or for people you did not know whose suffering has been caused by someone you loved.

### **Is one kind of homicide-suicide more common than others?**

The most common type of homicide-suicide involves the killing of an intimate partner, but the killing of children or other family members, friends, coworkers or even strangers can also occur. In shootings or other forms of mass violence in places such as schools, malls,

subways, or concerts, the killer may die by suicide at the scene or shortly thereafter. View the [Violence Policy Center webpage](#) for homicide-suicide statistics.

### **What are some unique challenges for homicide-suicide loss survivors?**

If your loved one committed homicide before dying by suicide, you may have some challenges that include but are not limited to the following:

- After homicide-suicide, your grief can be painfully complex. You may have conflicting feelings about the person who killed others. Survivors may feel anger or even hatred for someone they previously loved. Remembering your loved one as a “murderer” can dehumanize them and make it more difficult to access underlying grief for their loss. You may feel strongly focused on how the individual died so the last, brutal moments of the person’s life overshadow good memories of a beloved person and a life well-lived.
- If your loved one was responsible for killing people, your compassion for victims may be combined with feelings of guilt and humiliation for not being able to prevent what happened.
- You may have to manage the convergence of emotional distress with legal difficulties. If there are children who no longer have parents, for example, family reconstruction and care for traumatized children may be your priority. If your child was a minor who carried out a homicide-suicide, you may be sued or prosecuted for not preventing it. Being involved in lawsuits might make it impossible for you to join a support group because talking about your loss could inadvertently turn fellow group members into witnesses if your case went to trial. And when lawsuits arise, victims of the tragedy and family members of the perpetrator can end up in prolonged adversarial relationships that inhibit healing on both sides.
- Many feel humiliated, grief-stricken, shocked, confused, angry or betrayed by a loved one’s suicide, so it’s easy to understand the added stigma felt by loved ones of homicide-suicide perpetrators. It is difficult to accept that someone you loved has died by suicide, but it is even more difficult to accept that someone you loved became a murderer before dying. Homicide-suicide loss survivors are often viewed as family members of criminals rather than family members of someone who died by suicide. Some survivors are too ashamed to join a suicide-loss support group because murder preceded the suicide of their loved one and they fear they will be judged or rejected.
- Some of the trauma you have as a homicide-suicide loss survivor involves how you or your loved ones are portrayed in the news and how you are perceived in your

community. Biases in news reporting may twist the truth and vilify not only the perpetrator, but also anyone close to that person. Others in the community may be blamed as well so that ongoing litigation against parents, schools, mental health professionals, law enforcement, pharmaceutical companies, gun sellers and others may be pulled into a vortex of community conflict.

- Those perpetrating of homicide-suicide, are often seen as murderers and as such, their own death may be incidental to the public. Perpetrators of mass violence, for example, are generally not included in counts of the number of people who died. This can be especially hard for those who loved the perpetrators and believe that they are also victims of the tragedies they created.
- Staying in a community after a loved one's homicide-suicide can be difficult if the community doesn't offer the support needed by the loss survivor. If a child's parent or sibling is responsible for a high-profile homicide-suicide, children often change schools because, in many cases, they are asked to do so. Some survivors change their last names and move away to hide their association with a tragedy.
- If someone you love was a perpetrator of homicide-suicide, you might feel hurt when the person you cherished is called "evil" or "a monster" by the public. Knowing that your loved one is hated and that any efforts to rehabilitate their memory might be hurtful to others, there is little you can do to make vilification less painful.
- Homicide-suicides, especially those involving multiple deaths in public places, can have a ripple effect across communities. First responders or others associated with an event may experience trauma from the incident. Schools, churches, hospitals, and mental health programs can be overwhelmed with requests for help. As a loss survivor, it can be hard to comprehend the magnitude of the suffering your loved one caused.

### **Additional resources**

- *The Perversion of Virtue: Understanding Murder-Suicide* (Thomas Joiner)
- *A Mother's Reckoning: Living in the Aftermath of Tragedy* (Sue Klebold)
- **American Roulette: Murder-Suicide in the United States** (8th edition) (October 2023)
- **Murder-Suicides Perpetrated by Adolescents: Findings from the National Violent Death Reporting System**
- **Understanding Homicide-Suicide**

- [\*\*Military Versus Civilian Murder-Suicide\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Homicide-suicide and the role of mental disorder: a national consecutive case series\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Circumstances Preceding Homicide-Suicides Involving Child Victims: A Qualitative Analysis\*\*](#)