



HUOMA

Henkirikoksen uhrien läheiset ry

A GUIDE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE LOST A LOVED ONE TO HOMICIDE



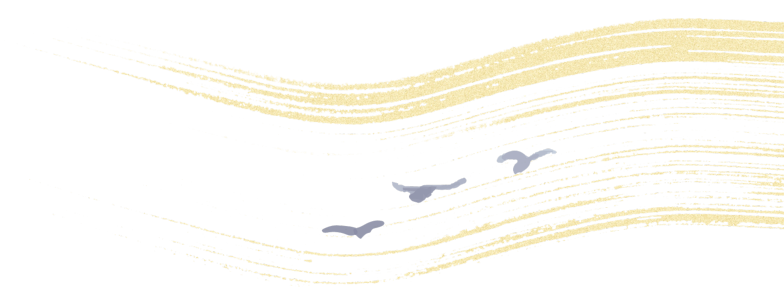
A Guide for Those Who Have Lost A Loved One to Homicide

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Dear reader,

This guide is intended for those who have lost a loved one as a victim of homicide. We are very sorry for your loss.

In this guide, we describe the practical matters you must take care of after losing a loved one as well as the main stages of the criminal procedure. We also provide information on how you can take care of yourself and your loved ones in this unexpected situation.

For your own well-being, it's important that you have someone to support you. Through the Victim Support Finland service (RIKU), you can receive the assistance of a support person who can advise you and help with practical matters and may also accompany you to court hearings.

It is advisable to hire an attorney at the early stages of the process and to carefully determine which costs will be reimbursed. Your local legal aid office can help determine whether you are entitled to free legal aid.

Toward the end of the guide, you can find contact information and more detailed descriptions of services offering support in situations following a homicide. These services are generally free of charge.

This guide can be downloaded from Huoma's website at huoma.fi.

You can also find additional information and links on the website.

Practical matters - What family members need to take care of

The sudden death of a loved one can be paralyzing, but even in the deepest grief it's necessary to take care of practical matters.

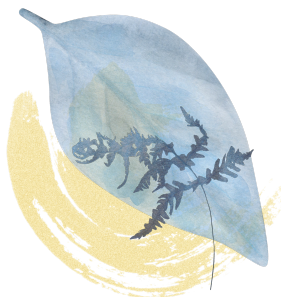
You should be prepared for the possibility that the investigation of the crime may take a long time. Handling practical matters will result in expenses, some of which may be reimbursed as the legal process progresses. It is advisable to **save all receipts**, as they will be required in order for you to receive compensation.

Close family members of a homicide victim are generally entitled to receive **legal counsel provided by the state at no cost**. It is recommended that you request legal counsel during the preliminary investigation stage and to choose a lawyer who has experience in criminal cases. Insurance companies may also compensate you for legal expenses. You should check which costs are covered by compensation in order to avoid unexpected bills, as lawyers may also offer services that will not be reimbursed in full.

Legal aid offices provide free advice on what kinds of legal matters you will face and which costs you will be compensated for. You can find the contact details of the legal aid office in your area on the **oikeus.fi**-website.

Funeral homes provide expert assistance and guidance with funeral arrangements. The arrangements can usually already begin before investigations are conducted to determine the cause of death. Information about the death is automatically forwarded to the Digital and Population Data Services Agency, and the burial may take place based on **a burial permit signed by the forensic pathologist**.

The certificate of death is issued once all necessary investigations into the cause of death have been completed. This may take several months or even up to a year.



The deceased person's mail should be redirected to the address of a close relative as soon as possible. Banks, government authorities, and many pension and insurance companies will receive information about the death through the Population Information System. When handling the affairs of the deceased, however, you should always ensure that the information has been received.

Family members must personally inform the following parties of the death:

- relatives and friends (the police notify only one close family member)
- the employer
- the school or educational institution
- the housing company or landlord
- social media platforms (such as Facebook)

An estate inventory meeting must be arranged within three months of the death, but it is possible to apply for an extension to the deadline for completing the estate inventory. You must fill in a form in which you briefly justify the need for additional time and propose a new deadline for conducting the estate inventory. You can obtain assistance in applying for an extension from a legal aid office or from your own lawyer. The estate inventory will be submitted to the Finnish Tax Administration.

On the Finnish Tax Administration's website, **vero.fi**, you can find additional information and the contact details of local tax offices.

Among other things, family members must terminate the following agreements:

- lease agreements
- electricity and water supply agreements
- direct debit agreements with the bank for the payment of bills
- telephone and Internet plans
- insurance plans, if the insurance company has not received the information from the Population Register
- newspaper subscriptions
- online services (e.g. streaming services such as Netflix)
- memberships in organizations

More detailed instructions on handling practical matters are provided in the guide entitled "**Death of a close family member**" on the **Suomi.fi** website.

The main stages of the criminal procedure

When a homicide occurs, the police will deliver the notification of death to one family member. The police will transfer the deceased for a forensic examination. The authorities are responsible for ensuring that the criminal process proceeds as it should.

The criminal process is unfamiliar to many people, but you don't have to go through it alone. Through Victim Support Finland (RIKU), you can receive assistance from a support person who will advise and support you throughout the criminal procedure.

During the **preliminary investigation**, the police will assign an investigation team to the case, conduct background inquiries and interviews, examine the crime scene, and prepare the pre-trial investigation report. Oftentimes, the victim's relatives will also be interviewed. A family member will usually be given the contact details of one investigator who can be contacted and who provides updates on the progress of the investigation. Information is often limited in order to safeguard the criminal investigation. A pre-trial investigation takes six months on average.

Based on the preliminary investigation, the prosecutor will carry out a **consideration of charges**. In the consideration of charges, it is determined who is charged, what charges are brought, and what evidence the prosecutor will present in court.

During prosecution, the case will be heard and a judgment issued. The court hearing may last several days. Trials are generally public, meaning that anyone may attend the hearing or order the decision documents for themselves.



Legal counsel (i.e. lawyer/attorney) is already recommended at an early stage. You should check your entitlement to state-funded legal aid from the legal aid office in your area. Legal counsel may be obtained either from a legal aid office or from a private law office.

In order for the state to cover costs, an application must be submitted to the district court for **the appointment of state-funded legal counsel for the injured party on the basis of the Criminal Code.**

It is advisable to choose as legal counsel a lawyer who has experience in criminal cases. Legal counsel can be found, for example, through the Finnish Bar Association's search service:

<https://asianajajat.fi/en/legal-advice/how-do-i-find-an-attorney-at-law/>

The district court's decision will usually be issued about two weeks after the court hearing. It will be delivered in writing as a reserved judgment to your legal counsel, who will forward it to you.

A district court's decision may be appealed to the Court of Appeal. Homicide cases are often reconsidered in the Court of Appeal, since both the family members and the offender have the right to appeal. The Court of Appeal usually issues its decision about one month after the hearing date.

The Court of Appeal's decision may be appealed further to the Supreme Court, but leave to appeal is granted only rarely.

The length of time of the different stages of the criminal procedure may vary greatly, even taking up to one and a half years altogether.

A hearing will not take place if the offender is unknown or dies before the court proceedings. If the offender is found in a forensic psychiatric examination to be criminally irresponsible, meaning that they are not considered criminally responsible due to their mental state, the court will not issue a decision for homicide. In such situations, the family members may apply for compensation from the State Treasury.

Compensation

During the trial, family members may demand that the offender pay compensation for criminal damages. Your legal counsel (a lawyer or attorney) will assist you in preparing these claims. Compensation will be collected from the offender either through an agreement or through recovery by a bailiff.

Compensation may also be applied for from the State Treasury, but the State Treasury will pay compensation only as a secondary payer. Compensation must therefore first be claimed from the offender, the insurance company of the victim's family member, or from Kela (the Social Insurance Institution of Finland), for example.

The State Treasury may compensate you for funeral expenses, medical expenses, legal costs, and loss of income or maintenance up to a maximum of €6,000.

For more information about the State Treasury and its services, see **valtiokonttori.fi/en** or contact Criminal Damage customer service at 0295 50 2736 (weekdays from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.) or by email at rikosvahingot@valtiokonttori.fi.



Media attention

The media reports on all homicide cases. Sometimes a homicide receives only a brief mention in a newspaper, but coverage may also be long lasting and intensive. Journalists may request interviews from you. It's important to remember that **you don't have to consent to interview requests**. Immediately after the event, many feel compelled to talk about what has happened. If you give interviews while in a confused state, however, you might have regrets later on.

Trial documents are generally public, which means that media representatives may also obtain detailed information about the case. Journalists may also be present at the beginning of court hearings, but they usually try to avoid taking photos of the victim's family members.

Media coverage may also influence the progress of the legal process. If you give interviews, **ask to review the article before publication**. This allows you to correct errors and request that the writer remove statements that you do not wish to make public.

Discussions about homicide cases may also take place on social media and in comment sections of news articles. Such discussions are often anonymous and may include things you find objectionable. That's why it's advisable to not read everything that people write online and to limit your participation in these discussions.

If someone writes something inappropriate or infringes on your personal privacy in their messages about the case, you can request that the website administrators remove the posts. You can also report inappropriate messages to the police through the police online tip service (poliisi.fi/nettivihje).

If you are seeking peer support online, you can join Huoma's closed Facebook discussion group "Henkirikoksen uhrien läheiset" (family members of homicide victims).

If you would like help or advice on dealing with the media, you can contact Huoma at 050 401 2230 or by email at koordinaattori@huoma.fi.

What happens in the mind and body?

When a person experiences a sudden and shocking event, the mind and body may react very strongly. The mind may be overwhelmed by distressing images, hatred, bitterness, self-accusations, restlessness, or fear. Memory and concentration may temporarily weaken. Many people say that they feel as if they are “going crazy.”

There may also be physical symptoms such as headache or chest pain, fatigue, stomach symptoms, insomnia, or loss of appetite. These are normal reactions. Different people may react in very different ways. Their symptoms are related to their own personality traits and mental resources.

It's common to feel as if the whole world is crumbling and life has permanently become unbearable, but **the worst feelings will pass before long**. There will come a time when the pain changes into a gentler sorrow and longing. This does not mean that you will forget your loved one, but that the mind and body are able to accept the new situation and adapt to it. Despite this adjustment, a strong sense of grief may at times rise to the surface. For many people, holidays and anniversaries can be particularly difficult, for example.

Immediately after a shocking experience, the most important things are the support of your loved ones and mutual care. If the reactions of your mind or body persist and begin to interfere with everyday life, seek professional help through health care services.

Psychosocial support in sudden and shocking crisis situations is organized by the wellbeing services counties. In some cases, crisis support is offered immediately when the death notification is delivered, but you can also seek help yourself.

You can find crisis workers in your own wellbeing services county online by searching for the name of your municipality or wellbeing services county together with the search term “crisis service” (“kriisipäivystys”).

Don't hide the event from children

When a family faces a homicide, children also need support. Even a small child can sense that the adults around them are upset. If the situation is not explained to the child, they may start imagining their own explanations.

Children react to the loss of a loved one in their own way and according to their age. A child may begin to behave younger than their age because they need safety care. Physical aches and problems such as stomach aches and headaches are also common. The child may feel paralyzed, anxious, sad, or irritated or blame themselves. Sleep problems may also occur.

Sometimes children cling to a trusted adult or, conversely, try to be as little trouble as possible and withdraw into their own worlds. Young children may start acting silly and clowning around, trying to cheer adults up so they wouldn't feel sad.

The best support for a child is the **presence and physical closeness of a trusted adult** if the child allows it. Restoring everyday routines, such as regular mealtimes and bedtimes, to normal as soon as possible increases the child's sense of security. If the child's guardians are unable to support the child sufficiently because of their own grief, help can be obtained through social emergency services or family counselling services.

A child may process what has happened through play and drawing or may feel the need to talk about it. It's important to listen to the child calmly. If the child asks questions, answer only the specific question they ask, in this way regulating both the information given and the child's ability to cope.

A child can be helped by naming emotions, for example by saying: "I see that you are sad" or "You seem very angry about what happened." Tell the child that they are allowed to react to what has happened—they don't need to hide their feelings.

Attending the funeral and being involved in the arrangements can help the child say goodbye to their loved one and understand that others are grieving too. It's good to talk with the child in advance about what will happen at the funeral.

Returning fairly quickly to familiar routines, such as day care and school, reinforces the child's feeling that life continues on. Before the child returns, it is important that staff are given sufficient information about what has happened and what has been discussed with the child, so that they can support the child appropriately. School-age children and young people may receive support, for example from the school health nurse, the school counselor, or the school psychologist.

If a child's strong reactions continue for a long time, the need for treatment can be assessed at the maternity and child health clinic, in school health care, or at the health center.



"I sat the child down next to me. I told him that Dad had died, that another person had caused Dad's death. The child claimed that I was lying. He ran to the bathroom shouting that it was my fault. Then he came out and started to play a game. He said that he missed his dad. He cried and talked. After what happened, it's been important for both of us that we have been able to talk, be affectionate with one another, and sleep next to each other."

—Mother of a school-aged child

How to take care of yourself

The death of a loved one through homicide is a traumatic event that affects family members in many ways. The financial situation may weaken, and both mental and physical health are under stress. Oftentimes, relationships with other people also go through changes. That's why it's especially important to take care of yourself. The whole family needs support—both those who live at the family home and those who live elsewhere.

Everyone has their own ways and means of coping with difficult situations, but here are some general suggestions:

- Make sure you eat and drink enough, even if you don't feel hungry or thirsty.
- Rest is important, but a sleepless night here and there isn't harmful. If the insomnia lasts for a longer period of time, consult a doctor.
- Breathing and relaxation exercises can help calm the body and reduce anxiety.
- Spending time outdoors or doing light physical exercise is good for the body and offers the mind a chance to rest.
- You can apply for sick leave if your ability to work has decreased. For some people, going to work is in itself therapeutic.
- Ask professionals for help with everyday life and with the different stages of the criminal procedure; no one has to cope alone.
- Peer support helps you keep going—many people have experienced the same thing you are going through.

How to support coping and recovery

If distressing thoughts are preventing you from being at peace, consciously directing your mind elsewhere may help. You can practice this, for example, by focusing on a hobby, doing handicrafts or listening to music, spending time in nature, or taking care of a pet.

Remembering the victim in a positive way, for example by looking at photographs of shared happy experiences, has been shown to be an effective way of preventing a post-traumatic stress disorder from emerging.

For many people, the workplace is the best place to focus on other matters. People working in care professions should take an appropriate amount of time off before returning to work, though.

It's advisable to participate in peer support groups only at a fairly late stage in the process, after about a year has passed since your loss. At that point, the mind is usually able to bear hearing the stories of others.

If anxiety and intense sadness continue for a long time, you can seek treatment. It's advisable to begin seeking help through your local health center or occupational health care. You may be referred to a psychologist, for example. For psychotherapies for different time periods, financial support may be available from Kela, insurance companies, hospital districts, or the State Treasury.

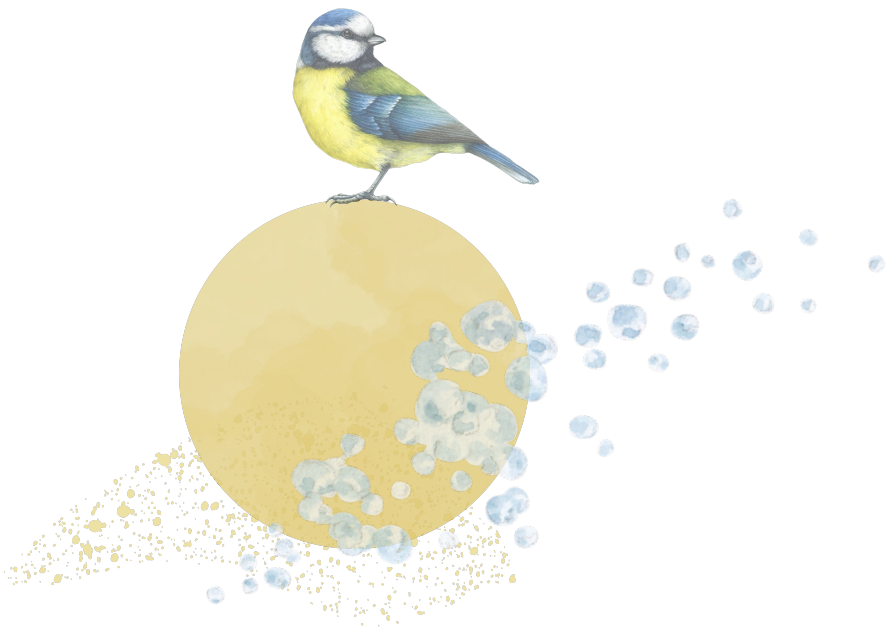


How to calm yourself physically

Controlled breathing techniques can help relieve anxiety and stress. Breathing out slowly affects the nervous system in such a way that the body and mind can calm down. There are many techniques for calming your breathing, including the following:

Place your hands on your stomach. When you breathe in, you will feel the movement in your abdomen, not in your chest. Breathe in while counting to 10, then breathe out while counting to 10. Repeat this 10 to 15 times to deepen your relaxation.

(Soili Poijula, Surun Itsehoito [Self-Help for Grief] – translation: TellWell Translations)



Support services

Crisis services and healthcare

Wellbeing services counties provide mental support for people faced with an acute crisis. Sometimes the police bring crisis workers with them when they come to notify someone about a death, but you can also seek help yourself. The contact details of your local crisis services can be found online on the website of your wellbeing services county or municipality by searching for “crisis service” (kriisipäivystys).

You can seek help for anxiety, sleep problems, and other psychological and physical reactions through your local or occupational health services. These services can connect you with a doctor, a mental health nurse, or psychologist’s services.

Victim Support Finland (RIKU)



Victim Support Finland provides support for the victim of a crime, their relatives, and witnesses on the phone, online, and face to face. Information about RIKU’s services can be found on the website **riku.fi**.

Through RIKU, you can request a support person who can assist you with practical matters related to the criminal procedure. The support person may accompany you to court hearings, for example. If necessary, RIKU can also help you get other forms of assistance. Services are free of charge and can also be accessed anonymously.

Website: riku.fi

Victim helpline: 116 006 Mon – Thu 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. and Fri 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. in Finnish

Service in English can be requested on an online form at www.riku.fi/en/contact-information/contact-request/

More information: Victim Support Finland (RIKU) at <https://www.riku.fi/en/>

MIELI Mental Health Finland

The English-language Crisis Helpline operates at 09 2525 0116 on several days of the week. Help is also available in other languages. Please check the languages and opening hours online.

Written support is available through MIELI's Chat or Write services. The Sekasin Chat for young people is mainly in Finnish, but it is also possible to chat in English.

Discussion Support at Crisis Centers

Crisis centers provide low-threshold confidential discussion support for difficult life situations and crises. At crisis centers you can receive discussion support individually, together with your spouse or family, or in peer support groups. You can book an appointment with a crisis worker at the crisis center in your area or for a remote appointment. The discussions are free of charge and no referral is required.

Book an Appointment online or by phone

You can book an appointment yourself for a remote session or at the crisis center in your area.

Links and phone numbers for all MIELI services can be found at:
mieli.fi/en/support-and-help/

Church counselling services

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland provides counselling support by phone, online and face to face at church facilities. Participation does not require church membership. Information about counselling services can be found on the church's websites and on local parish websites.

Counselling helpline

0400 221 180 every day from 6 p.m. – 12 a.m.

Counselling chat (in Finnish)

kirkonkeskusteluapu.fi Mon – Sun from 4 p.m. – 8 p.m.



Huoma – Henkirikoksen uhrien läheiset ry (Association for Families and Friends of Homicide Victims)

What is Huoma?

Huoma provides peer support to people whose loved one has died as a result of intentional violence, such as manslaughter or murder. The aim of Huoma is to offer hope, enable people to share thoughts with others who have experienced a similar loss, strengthen coping, and provide resources. Huoma also offers help and guidance on practical matters.

The association operates throughout Finland. Its activities include peer support groups, “Yhteinen polku” (Shared Path) peer-support weekends and peer support over the phone. Huoma is politically and religiously independent, and most of its services are free of charge.

Support provided by Huoma

Huoma’s crisis coordinator offers guidance, counselling, and support to families of homicide victims. The coordinator can help you find other appropriate services and forms of support if needed. Huoma’s support is confidential and, if desired, anonymous.

The crisis coordinator receives registrations for peer support groups and events and directs people to phone peer support when necessary. There may not be a peer group running in your area, but there may be potential for starting one, so you may want to contact Huoma and ask about this.

Huoma organizes weekend-long peer support meetings in different parts of Finland. It is advisable to attend these meetings only once about a year has passed since your loss. The small-group discussions during the weekends are facilitated by mental health professionals.

Huoma’s groups and weekend events are mainly conducted in Finnish, but in some groups part of the discussion may also take place in English.

Other Grief associations

Nuoret Lesket ry

This is a peer support organization for widows, widowers and their families. The association organizes peer-support activities and provides counselling on matters related to bereavement. The main forms of support include peer support groups, peer support weekends and events, online peer support, and a peer-support helpline. Activities are open to anyone who has lost a spouse or partner, regardless of the duration of the relationship or family situation.

Phone: 044 751 3179

Email: toimisto@nuoretlesket.fi

Website: nuoretlesket.fi

Käpy Lapsikuolemaperheet ry (Child Death Families Finland Käpy ry)

Käpy Lapsikuolemaperheet ry is a peer support organization that provides support primarily for parents and families whose child has died at a later stage of pregnancy, in infancy, in childhood, in adolescence or early adulthood. Support is also available for grandparents and for the siblings of the deceased child.

Support number: 045 325 9595

You can send a request for support via WhatsApp or text message to 045 325 9595.

Email: tuki@kapy.fi

Website: kapy.fi

Surunauha ry

Surunauha is a national peer support organization whose aim is to support people bereaved by suicide and to promote openness in discussing suicide. The peer supporters are trained volunteers who themselves have lost a loved one to suicide. Surunauha organizes events and peer support groups and provides peer-support phone services and trained support persons. In addition, Surunauha offers online peer support.

Phone: 044 751 9916 or 044 977 9428, weekdays from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Email: toimisto@surunauha.net

Website: surunauha.net



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**Huoma – Henkirikoksen
uhrien läheiset ry**
Association for Families and Friends
of Homicide Victims

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www.huoma.fi

Victim Support Finland (RIKU)

116 006

**National
Crisis Helpline**

09 2525 0111

