

Home after Homicide

How do children and young people experience home following bereavement through intimate partner homicide?

A practitioner resource, Oliver Eastwood



About This Resource

This resource summarises key findings from a qualitative study exploring how children and young people experience home following the death of a parent through intimate partner homicide (Sakthiakumaran et al., 2026; IPH). It is intended to support practitioners in understanding the home-related support needs of this group and to prompt critical reflection on their practice.

Study Overview

Interviews were conducted with 22 people from Australia and the United Kingdom who had experienced the death of a parent through IPH when they were a child. Interview transcripts were then analysed using thematic analysis to better understand and support people with this experience.

More details about the study's methodology can be found here:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10826-025-03245-2>



***“I’m kind of like a guest in your home”*: Home as Unfamiliar**



Most young people were abruptly removed from their family home after the homicide and placed in foster care or with extended family. In this physical displacement, familiar experiences and meanings of home gave way to a sense of jarring unfamiliarity.

We were forced to say goodbye to everything that we had known without any say in it whatsoever. All of our belongings, all of our memories in that home, the routines that we had, the walking to and from school, the knowing the person at the local shop, the neighbours that we had...

Young people described difficulty adjusting to new home environments, sometimes identifying as ‘outsiders’ in new homes where customs differed and belonging was fragile. They shared experiences of being denied access to belongings from previous homes due to crime scene restrictions, uncertainty about their placement, or simple oversight, which could compound feelings of disconnection and loss.

Young people were rarely consulted about where, and with whom, they would like to live. This lack of agency resulted in separation from siblings, reduced contact with extended family, and disrupted relational dynamics. One individual recalled their relatives arguing over where they and their siblings would go to live on the day of their mother's murder.

Who would have this one? Who would have that one?... We're not a litter of puppies... we were children. We were brothers and sisters.

"Am I just gonna be in some perpetual state of motion?": Continued Instability and Violence in the Home



Experiences of unstable care placements, repeated upheavals, and ongoing danger in the home were commonly shared post-homicide experiences. For example, some young people were returned to the care of their perpetrator father after serving short prison sentences.

We lived in a tent for three months... my father sexually abused my sister. And I witnessed that... we never really had stability."

I just was never really sure what was gonna happen... I always knew there was a possibility of violence in some way.

Silence around the homicide was a more insidious form of uncertainty and violence in home. In this context, home environments were often experienced as places of secrecy, stigma, and shame, rather than refuge, comfort, and healing.

She (grandmother) never spoke about my mum, she never spoke about my dad... and so then we felt like we couldn't talk about it. And then that created a very odd atmosphere... me and me nan, literally until I moved out, we had no relationship whatsoever.

Some young people highlighted a tension between the outward appearance of their physical home and their internal experience. Social workers and others sometimes dismissed children's distress based on the perceived material comfort or appearance of their home.

“I found a community of people who were more accepting of my difference”: Redefining and Journeying Home



These individuals were not passive victims of these experiences. Many worked actively to reimagine and reconstruct meanings of home across their lives. As adults, several people described intentionally building communities that embodied qualities absent in their childhoods.

I've sort of done the opposite. I'm really surrounded by an amazing community of people who are all very supportive and communicative and open... my home situation in my life now is, like, so, so different than what I grew up with.

Implications for Practice

These findings highlight the importance of understanding home as both a physical and psychological space. The following implications are drawn from these results and may be relevant to practitioners in this space (e.g., social workers, child protection workers, lawyers, counsellors, and psychologists).

For Social Service Workers

- Prioritise children's agency and voice in placement decisions. Actively consult with children and young people about where, and with whom, they wish to live. Be mindful of loyalty pressures from maternal and perpetrator kin that may constrain their capacity to express preferences safely.
- Work to keep siblings together where possible and if safe to do so. Sibling relationships can provide connection to shared history, identity, and belonging amidst disconnection from the home.
- Facilitate access to belongings from the pre-homicide home. Actively consult with children about meaningful objects (e.g., toys, clothing, photographs, parent belongings) and work to retrieve these where possible.
- Do not assume that the IPH marks the end of risk once immediate housing needs have been met. Placement decisions must account for children's physical and emotional safety, and risk should be regularly assessed across development.
- Interrogate personal and systemic biases about experiences and ideas of home. Engage in reflective practice to challenge assumptions about need and safety based on outward appearances and dominant narratives about home.

For Mental Health Care Workers

- Consider attending to the loss of home as a distinct therapeutic focus. Children bereaved by IPH have not only lost a parent, but also their home, routines, community, and relational world. This warrants explicit clinical attention alongside grief for the deceased parent.
- Use age-appropriate methods to explore home-related distress and grief. Objects, imagery, drawing, and storytelling tasks can support children in processing what has been lost and how meaningful elements of home might be reimagined or carried forward. Evidence-based therapy models (e.g., Traumatic-grief focused cognitive behavioural therapy; TGF-CBT) can offer structured frameworks to support this work.
- Involve new caregivers therapeutically where possible and safe. Caregivers can play a critical role in facilitating healing and should be supported to understand and respond to children's home-related needs.
- Support the process of active meaning-making and reconstruction. Practitioners can facilitate this by helping bereaved persons reflect on what home means to them, what has been lost, and what might be found or rebuilt.

Questions for Reflective Practice

The following questions are intended to support individual or group reflection for practitioners working with children and young people bereaved by parental IPH.

Home as Unfamiliar

1. In my recent work with a bereaved young person, how was the question of placement decided? Was the young person meaningfully consulted?
2. Were efforts made to help the child access belongings from their pre-homicide home? If not, what were the barriers, and could they be addressed?
3. How did the placement process account for the child's sibling relationships, friendships, school community, and other relational ties bound to their prior home?
4. What assumptions, if any, did I or my colleagues make about this child's needs based on the apparent stability or comfort of their new home? What impact might these have had on our care?

Continued Instability and Violence in the Home

1. How have I assessed and monitored the ongoing safety of this child's placement? Have I considered risks beyond the immediate post-homicide period?
2. Is there evidence that the child feels unable to speak about the homicide or their grief in their current home? How might I work with the caregiver to open that space?
3. Are there loyalty pressures from either the victim or perpetrator side of the family, that may be affecting this child's sense of safety or agency? What sort of things might indicate this?
4. If the child has experienced multiple placement changes, how have I understood and responded to the cumulative impact of this instability on their sense of self and belonging?

Redefining and Journeying Home

1. Have I attended to the young person's own efforts to find or construct a sense of home? In relationships, communities, or imaginative spaces?
2. How might I help this young person identify what qualities they associate with 'home' and how those might be cultivated in their current context?
3. For adult survivors reflecting on childhood experiences: how has their understanding of home changed across their lifespan, and what does healing look like for them now?
4. Am I supporting this person as an active agent in their recovery, rather than positioning them primarily as a victim of their circumstances?

References

Sakthiakumaran, A., Eastwood, O., Marinkovic Chavez, K., Kurdi, Z., Devaney, J., Conroy, R., Joy, K., Frederick, J., Houghton, C., Morrice, H., & Alisic, E. (2026). Home after homicide: How do children and young people experience home following bereavement through intimate partner homicide? *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-025-03245-2>

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Further information

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