The Aftermath of Violence: Victim Offender Dialogue, Forgiveness Processes, and Other Paths to Healing

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Janet Melcher
Graduate Program in Social Work

The Ohio State University
2012

Dissertation Committee:
Mo-Yee Lee, Ph.D., Committee Chair
John C. Gibbs, Ph.D.
Gil Greene, Ph.D.
Abstract

This study was designed to learn about what is helpful to people who have lost a loved one as a result of some unlawful act (for example, murder or manslaughter). Those affected by the loss of a loved one due to violent crime are called survivors. Of particular interest in this study was the survivor’s decision to use or not to use Ohio’s restorative justice program known as Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD), a carefully structured procedure that allows the survivor to meet with the offender to ask questions and share information. To provide the context for this qualitative research, literature on forgiveness as a mental health intervention, restorative justice procedures and forgiveness, moral development with its connection to forgiveness, religious coping, and after death communications was reviewed. In this study, survivors’ views about forgiveness were explored with attention to ideas about and experiences of forgiveness for survivors who did participate in VOD and for those who did not. Participants also were asked generally what helped them after the loss and specifically what role spirituality played in their response to the crime. In addition, participants were invited to tell if they had a sense of presence of the deceased or some communication with the deceased loved one.

Research participants included: eight survivors who completed VOD and were recruited through the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Office of Victim Services; seven survivors who have not gone through a VOD process that were recruited
through various support groups in Ohio; six VOD facilitators; and key informant Ken Czillinger, one of the founders of Parents of Murdered Children. Data were gathered by conducting an individual in-person semi-structured interview designed to encourage each participant to tell her own story about the crime and how she coped. Also, VOD facilitators participated in an individual in-person interview and VOD files were reviewed. Each participant was available for a brief follow-up phone contact as well. Narrative methods were used to analyze the data.

While most survivors remained acutely aware of the absence of the lost loved one, many also reported a return to a day-to-day good emotional functioning. Positive emotional functioning was associated with achieving emotional detachment from the offender. Survivors arrived at this state by various means such as forgiveness, positive religious coping, and refusing to allow the offender to take their lives, too. Differences in the approach to healing were observed between the two survivor groups with five VOD survivors stating that they forgave the offender and no Support Group survivors claiming definitive forgiveness. With regard to communication from the deceased, overall ten participants indicated that either they or a family member had a sense of having some kind of communication or unusual experience that they connected to the deceased, mostly of a helpful nature. Finally, details of the paths to healing with an eye toward fairness thinking and empathy for the offender are highlighted along with suggestions for possible helping interventions based on the experiences of these exemplar participants.
Acknowledgments

Of course, no dissertation comes to the place of completion without many individuals contributing to the process in significant ways. This work is no exception. A number of individuals deserve recognition for their parts in bringing this research to fruition.

For this effort I was fortunate to have the sustained support and wise guidance of my Committee Chair, Professor Mo Yee Lee. Dr. Lee has always been flexible and generous with her time and encouragement. I arrive at the conclusion of this experience with fond memories, great admiration, and deep gratitude for Dr. Lee’s astute mentoring. Also, I was quite privileged to take classes on moral development and child development with Ohio State’s Developmental Psychology Professor, John C. Gibbs, and later I was pleased that he agreed to be on the dissertation committee. Dr. Gibbs taught me how to think about the challenges involved in moral development and he continues to raise thought provoking questions about the place of forgiveness in the moral realm. What I learned from Dr. Gibbs strongly influenced the approach to the topics of forgiveness and fairness discussed in this dissertation and I expect that his teachings will continue to have a profound impact on any future scholarly undertakings. Professor Amy Zaharlick was part of the dissertation committee early in the process. Dr. Zaharlick provided great feedback and sensible suggestions about how to set up the research. I am glad that I had
the opportunity to learn from this master researcher. Since Dr. Zaharlick is now retired from her university position, Professor Gil Greene stepped up to participate on the committee. Dr. Greene’s input was especially helpful for editing and bringing the disparate pieces of the dissertation together to create a more coherent whole. His perceptive suggestions based upon his great range of social work knowledge helped add quality to my final writing. Also, Dr. Susan Kline, Associate Professor in the School of Communication, kindly agreed to serve as the Graduate School Representative for the final oral exam. I appreciate her willingness to serve and I tried to incorporate answers to some of the questions she raised in the finished dissertation.

In addition to these professors who took the time to directly participate in the dissertation process, I believe that all of the Ohio State College of Social Work faculty involved in my doctoral level course work played an important role in helping me prepare for this research project. I hope this final product will be a meaningful reflection of the valuable lessons learned from all of my College of Social Work professors.

Along with the many professors who supported this dissertation work, a few Ohio State staff members deserve credit for making the final result possible. PhD Program Coordinator, Jennifer Nakayama, provided valuable assistance throughout the time I participated in the doctoral program. She was always willing to help by explaining a policy or procedure, getting a required document where it needed to be, or just generally being sure that all essential details were addressed. I certainly benefited from Jennifer’s conscientious dedication to keeping the social work doctoral students on the right path. More recently, I have been communicating with Beth Bucher, Graduate School
Administrative Associate. I thank Beth for her considerate help with navigating through the finishing steps of the dissertation process.

From the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Office of Victim Services (ODRC - OVS), I thank Karin Ho, Administrator, Mike Davis, Assistant Administrator, and Roxanne Swogger, Program Coordinator for their willingness to meet and discuss my ideas for this research. Roxanne Swogger deserves much credit for her role in getting letters to the Victim Offender Dialogue participants, getting notice to the Victim Offender Dialogue Facilitators, and finding the relevant Victim Offender Dialogue records for my review. She also directed me to the necessary contacts to have the research reviewed for ODRC approval. Obviously, I could not have done this research without the cooperation of ODRC, and the research would not have been possible without Roxanne’s substantial contribution. Also, John Chin, ODRC Social Science Research Specialist, was helpful in getting the research through the ODRC approval process and pointing me to helpful ODRC statistics. I thank him, too, for his role in granting permission to reprint the ODRC Adult Parole Authority Map in this dissertation.

I thank all of the research participants. Every participant was generous with time and willingness to tell stories or share expert observations. The survivors seemed especially brave as they conveyed narratives of deeply troubling experiences and valiant efforts to prevail in the aftermath of tragic loss. I hope that each survivor will not only be aware of my gratitude for their courageous offering, but will also feel good about the contribution they made to others who may find themselves on similarly disturbing paths.
The information each one shared certainly has the potential to meet the goal of helping others. Also, the words of the Victim Offender Dialogue Facilitators add to our understanding of the valuable restorative justice procedure and Ken Czillinger’s explanations paved the way for greater awareness of survivors’ experiences. I feel deeply honored to have met each and every participant.

Finally, thank you to my adult social worker daughter, Elizabeth, and my husband Carl. There were many times in the process of writing this dissertation that family functions were missed and my contributions to the household operations were minimal. I am thankful that their loving support allowed me to have the remarkable opportunity to carry out this research and then further develop my skills by writing about it.

I am truly grateful to all who contributed in some way to what can now be seen in this dissertation.
Vita

June 1974.................................................M.S.W.  The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
Social Work

March, 1970.............................................A.B. Ohio University, Athens, Ohio
Major-Psychology

Most Recent Relevant Employment

9/90 to Present.................................B.S.W. Field Coordinator
University of Cincinnati School of Social Work
Cincinnati, Ohio

Publication


Field of Study

Major Field: Social Work
# Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... ii  
Acknowledgments .......................................................................................................... iv  
Vita ................................................................................................................................ viii  
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................... ix  
List of Tables ................................................................................................................ xiv  
List of Figures ............................................................................................................... xv  

**Chapter 1: Introduction** ............................................................................................. 1  
  
  Context the Calls for Research .................................................................................... 2  
  
  The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions ...................................................... 5  
  
  How the Dissertation is Organized .............................................................................. 10  
  
**Chapter 2: Review of the Literature** ........................................................................ 11  
  
  Grief .............................................................................................................................. 12  
  
  Restorative Justice ...................................................................................................... 25  
    
    The Work of Howard Zehr ......................................................................................... 26  
    
    Restorative Justice Models ....................................................................................... 30  
    
    Ohio Office of Victim Services Victim Offender Dialogue Program...................... 34  

ix
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Umbreit, Vos, Coates, &amp; Brown (2003) Study</th>
<th>34</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borton’s (2008) Study</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on Forgiveness in Restorative Justice</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness, Moral Development, and the Restorative Justice Process</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Social Cognitive Development of Forgiveness</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Process Model of Forgiveness</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Process Model</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlying Assumptions</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Development</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical Support</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthington on Forgiveness: Biopsychosocial Stress &amp; Coping Theory</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach Model of Forgiveness</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Questions the Remain</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Closer Look at Moral Development</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Development and Forgiveness</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Contributions of Religious and/or Spiritual Orientations</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Death Communications</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Death Communications and Victims of Violent Crime</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Currently Known about After Death Communications</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General ADC Report Issues and Ramifications</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dream Encounters with the Deceased…………………………………152

Summing Up!…………………………………………………………………….158

Chapter 3: Guiding Framework for the Research…………………………………164

Chapter 4: Research Methods……………………………………………………171

Data Collection…………………………………………………………………….172

Participants………………………………………………………………………172

Setting………………………………………………………………………………175

Other Sources of Data……………………………………………………………177

Data Collection Method…………………………………………………………178

Data Analysis………………………………………………………………………180

What the Researcher Brought to the “Listening”……………………………85

My Own Process of Listening…………………………………………………186

Ensuring Rigor……………………………………………………………………187

Ethical Issues……………………………………………………………………..188

Chapter 5: Results .................................................................................193

Ken Czillinger …………………………………………………………………194

Victim Offender Dialogue Participants ………………………………………199

Summary of How VOD Participants’ Results

Address the Secondary Research Question………………………………….226
The Victim Offender Dialogue Facilitators…………………………………229

Comparison -Victim Offender Dialogue Facilitators and Survivors………….242

Participants Who Did Not Go Through a VOD –

The Support Group Participants………………………………………………244

Summary of How Support Group Participants’ Results

Address the Secondary Research Questions……………………………258

Primary Research Question Results………………………………………260

General Themes for Both the VOD and Support Group Participants …………..264

After Death Communications …………………………………………….267

Chapter 6: Discussion……………………………………………………………274

How the Results of the Study Relate to Existing Research…………………276

Language and Culture…………………………………………………………285

Implications for Social Work Practice………………………………………287

Areas for Further Research …………………………………………………291

Strengths and Limitations of the Study……………………………………295

After Death Communications and The End……………………………..297

Appendix A - Interview Questions ....................................................300

Appendix B – Coding & Coding Process ...........................................308

Codes: Level I ……………………………………………………………..309

Codes: Level II …………………………………………………………...318

Codes: Final Categories for VOD and Support Group Participants………366
Codes: Final Categories VOD Facilitators ........................................ 367

Some Themes that Occurred in Survivor Groups .................................. 368

Appendix C – ODRC Adult Parole Authority Map .................................. 369

References .............................................................................................. 371
List of Tables

Table 1: All Participants ........................................................................................................... 175
Table 2: Timeframes for Interviews & Follow-up................................................................. 177
Table 3: Orientation - VOD Participants ................................................................................. 202
Table 4: Orientation - Support Group Participants ............................................................... 246
Table 5: Elements Associated with Positive Emotional Outcomes for
VOD Participants .................................................................................................................... 263
Table 6: Elements Associated with Positive Emotional Outcomes for
Support Group Participants .................................................................................................... 264
List of Figures

Figure 1 - Elements Associated with Positive Emotional Outcomes for All Participants

.................................................................263
Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 1997, two of our community’s police officers were killed in the line of duty while responding to a domestic violence call. A male assailant, Alonzo Davenport, shot Officers Pope and Jeter, and shortly thereafter committed suicide with the same gun that he used to take the lives of the police officers. There was a great outpouring of community support for the police officers and their families at the time of this incident. The families were offered the opportunity to thank the community via letters that were published on the editorial page of the local newspaper. I was struck by the difference in the families’ response to the tragedy at the time and I have kept the newspaper clipping ever since. The parents of Officer Pope wrote the following excerpt:

Dan was such a loving and kind son. We didn’t realize until now that he had so many good friends. His death seemed so unnecessary and it makes us wonder, what kind of world are we living in? How are we raising our children that they would even consider doing such a despicable act? What kind of people are we if we condone law breakers or ignore them? (Pope & Pope, 1997)
Officer Jeter’s family members ended their letter with these words:

We send our love, condolences and prayers to the Daniel Pope family, for we do identify with their loss and their pain; to the Alonzo Davenport family, my prayers and condolences, grace and peace. May we all be reminded that forgiveness will release healing, and that it is a choice, (Jeter, Slocum, & Collier, 1997)

Before saying anything more, I feel that perhaps it’s a bit arrogant of me to comment on the responses at all. Fortunately, I have never had a family member taken from me in such a brutal way, so I have no firsthand experience of trying to cope with such a harrowing loss. Still, when I saw the writing, I sensed that the family who extended forgiveness might have a more hopeful road ahead. They offered their empathy/compassion to the family of the attacker. It appeared that their forgiveness choice allowed them to release the bitterness, at least toward those who were left in the wake of the violence. With the experience of these families in mind, I felt compelled to search for more information about the possible paths that victims/survivors of violence might travel as they try to reconstruct their lives. Does a path that includes forgiveness have advantages over other possible routes? My search revealed several matters that merited the attention of further research. What follows is a report of the research that was conducted in response to the questions about the experience of carrying on with life in the aftermath of violence.

**Context for the Research**

I learned that when violence occurs, the offender who committed the crime, if caught, will most likely go through a conventional criminal justice procedure that may
involve a trial and sentencing phase. The victims/survivors are likely to feel very left out of that procedure and may feel that contacts with the criminal justice structure adds more ache to the wounds of their trauma (Armour, 2006; Conrad, 1998). In some states such as Ohio, victims/survivors have the option of requesting a restorative justice meeting with the offender so that they may ask for missing pieces of information about the crime, tell the offender about the impact of the crime, or address other matters that might be important to those particular individuals (Borton, 2008; Umbreit & Vos, 2000; Umbreit, Vos, Coates, & Brown, 2003). Individuals who participate in restorative justice procedures report satisfaction with the process (Sherman et al., 2005; Strang et al., 2006; Umbreit & Vos, 2000; Umbreit, Coates, & Vos, 2006; Umbreit, Vos, Coates, & Brown, 2003; VanNess & Strong, 2002) and some speak of healing outcomes that result from the experience (Angel, 2005; Strang et al., 2006; Umbreit & Vos, 2000; Umbreit, Vos, Coates, & Brown, 2003). Even though forgiveness is not a specified objective of restorative justice (Umbreit, Vos, Coates, & Brown, 2003; VanNess & Strong, 2002; Zehr, 2002), available information indicates that the subject of forgiveness frequently surfaces during restorative justice proceedings (Armour & Umbreit, 2005, 2006; Braithwaite, 1995; Dickey, 1998; Umbreit & Armour, 2010; Umbreit & Vos, 2000; Umbreit, Vos, Coates, & Brown, 2003; VanNess & Strong, 2002). Some say the restorative justice process and meeting provides a structure that naturally fosters a forgiveness outcome (Armour & Umbreit, 2005, 2006; McCullough, 2008). Available research on psychotherapeutic forgiveness intervention models indicate that forgiveness has clear mental health benefits for the victim of the offense (e.g., Enright & Fitzgibbons,
2000; Freedman, Enright, & Knutson, 2005; Lin, Mack, Enright, Krahn, & Baskin, 2004; Worthington, 2003, 2006) and may benefit physical health as well (Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001). One might assume that naturally occurring forgiveness, that is, forgiveness that takes place without the psychotherapeutic interventions, would also have a beneficial impact on the victim’s wellbeing.

While victim participation in a restorative justice meeting with the offender appears to have potential benefits for victims/survivors of violent crime, including the possibility of a forgiveness outcome, relatively few victims ask for this type of meeting. In many states, the structure to provide this type of meeting may not be available (Just Alternatives, 2007). Using Ohio as an example, Borton (2008) found files for 349 requests for Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD), the restorative justice meeting in cases of violent offenses that the Ohio Office of Victim Services (OVS) facilitates. This number (349) was the number of requests for the restorative justice meeting that came to the attention of the OVS during the period of 1996 when the first dialogue took place through 2008. In 30% of Borton’s cases, the offense was a homicide crime (i.e., murder, voluntary manslaughter, or involuntary manslaughter). During that same period, the Ohio Law Enforcement Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) show that a total of 6,528 murders were reported to law enforcement officials in Ohio (U.S. Department of Justice FBI UCR, 2009). The actual arrest and conviction rate for these crimes are lower. According to approximate figures put out by the National Center for State Courts (2010), it appears that arrests are made in little under half of reported violent offenses. National figures reported by the Bureau of Justice based on a one-year observation period show
that 70% of those charged with murder were convicted (Bureau of Justice, 2010). According to Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) Commitment Reports (n.d.), a total of 3,478 offenders were committed to ODRC prisons for the crimes of aggravated murder, involuntary manslaughter, manslaughter, and voluntary manslaughter during the period of 1999-2008. Even though all wrongful death cases are not appropriate for VOD, the numbers suggest that perhaps more victims could benefit from such a meeting in cases where it would be feasible.

The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Given the context suggesting that VOD might provide valuable help for a greater number of victims, the process for getting to VOD and outcomes following the dialogue meeting called for more examination. Research was designed to explore these themes further. To address the questions in a manner that brought the depth and detail of the experiences forward, a qualitative study based on a social constructionist orientation (Gergen, 1999; Gergen, 2009) using narrative interpretation methods (Riessman, 2008) was conducted. The study was limited to cases where the crime resulted in the death of a loved one. In other words, the crime was a homicide. Those family members who lost the loved one will be called survivors. Generally, the purpose of the study was to learn more about the stories of those survivors of homicide who chose VOD and of those who did not use that service with attention to the place of forgiveness and factors that contribute to a forgiveness outcome in the unfolding of the story.

Some overarching topics for inquiry were held in mind as the survivors told their stories. For example, since a fundamental part of social work practice involves helping
people to make contact with services have the potential to contribute to their wellbeing, a
better understanding about what helps victims to make use of restorative justice
procedures could be useful for guiding social work interventions. This study was
designed with the knowledge that some useful information is already available on that
subject, but additional details might add to the understanding of how survivors both
access and benefit from VOD. For instance, research on the Ohio VOD program showed
that some victims wanted to have contact with their offenders (Umbreit, Vos, Coates, &
Brown, 2003) and there is available data about what subjects the victims wanted to cover
during the exchange (Borton, 2008; Umbreit, Vos, Coates, & Brown, 2003). There is
also some mention in the restorative justice literature that a number of victims are
reluctant to participate in the restorative justice procedures (Strang et al., 2006).
Information is not available about what made it possible for the victim to request the
dialogue beyond simply wanting to speak to the offender. While there is some
information about the common experiences of victim/survivors of homicide (Armour,
2006, Conrad, 1998, Stetson, 2003), not much is known specifically about how the
survivor got to the place of asking for a dialogue (Armour & Umbreit, 2005). Also,
some information is available about forgiveness associated with restorative justice
procedures, but many questions surrounding the forgiveness issue are unanswered

This lack of information in the literature raised several questions that laid the
foundation for the research. Unanswered questions related to the experiences of those
who completed VOD were:
• What were the personal, emotional, and possibly spiritual developments that might have brought the survivor to the point of making the request?

• What were the environmental factors such as availability of the information about the program, support or lack of support from significant others, or community supports that might have influenced the decision to proceed?

Added to this list are the following questions that Armour and Umbreit (2005) raised about the specific role of forgiveness in the restorative justice process:

• Do those survivors who request dialogue enter the process with a stance that is leaning more toward forgiveness than those who do not consider participating?

• If forgiveness occurred during the process, what part of the procedure facilitated or perhaps impeded the forgiveness outcome?

• What are the long-term consequences for those survivors who entered into the restorative justice process with the intention to forgive, for those who inadvertently forgave as a result of the process, and for those who do not forgive?

• What would survivors say about what motivated them to forgive or not to forgive?

To this list, I added my own question.

• Is there something short of forgiveness that comes about as a result of the VOD process that is also healing? To be more precise, does the process
facilitate a letting go of the anger and perhaps hateful thoughts directed at the offender and can this “letting go” without full-fledged forgiveness be a worthwhile outcome for survivors as well?

Additionally, perhaps learning more about those survivors who did not choose VOD could enhance the understanding about what is most helpful to survivors. There was no mention in the literature about whether survivors who did not go through a VOD process knew about that option and, if they knew about it, why they chose not to pursue it. Also, it was not known how survivors who did not go through VOD might manage in comparison to those who did go through the VOD.

A central research question emerged that was based on gaps in the existing literature as well as a firm resolve to be open to aspects of the survivors’ experiences that are not currently found in the literature. The primary research question that guided the inquiry was:

- What elements, that is, what experiences or viewpoints are associated with the most optimal outcomes for these survivors of homicide?

To capture the details, secondary questions were designed to highlight the subject matter of particular interest for this study. The secondary research questions for those who completed a VOD were:

- In general, what helped the survivor carry on after the death?
- How did the survivor learn about VOD?
- What helped the survivor to follow through with the intention to pursue VOD?
• What does the survivor recall about views on forgiveness related to the offender in the case prior to the VOD?
• What influenced those views about forgiveness?
• Did religious or spiritual influences enter into the understanding of forgiveness?
• Have the views of forgiveness changed as a result of the VOD?
• What happened in the VOD that affected the thinking about forgiveness?
• How has the current thinking about forgiveness or not forgiving impacted the healing process?
• Did the survivor or anyone close to the survivor have an after death communication (Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995) from the deceased victim that might have influenced views on forgiveness or the decision to request VOD?

The secondary research questions considered for those survivors who did not go through the VOD process were:

• In general, what helped the survivor carry on after the death?
• What are the survivor’s views on forgiveness as the concept relates to the offender in the case?
• Have the views of forgiveness changed over time?
• What influenced the views about forgiveness?
• Did religious or spiritual influences enter into the understanding of forgiveness?
• How has the current thinking about forgiveness or not forgiving impacted the healing process?

• Did the survivor or anyone close to the survivor have what is often called an after death communication (Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995) from the deceased victim that might have influenced views on forgiveness or the decision to request VOD?

• Has the survivor ever considered VOD?

• If so, what stopped the survivor from pursuing VOD? If not, why did the survivor not consider VOD?

**How the Dissertation is Organized**

As a starting point for the study, Chapter 1 will be devoted to a review of literature about current knowledge that contributes to the foundation for examining the posed questions. Following the literature review, the social constructionist orientation (Gergen, 1999; Gergen, 2009) used as the guiding framework for the study will be explained in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 will provide details about the research methods used to carry out this qualitative study including an account of the narrative interpretation approach. The results illustrated with many participant statements are presented in Chapter 5. In the final chapter, a discussion of the findings is put forward along with suggestions for further research. With the overview in place, the next task is to move on to Chapter 2, the literature review.
Chapter 2:  
Review of the Literature

A familiar phrase in social work is “start where the client is.” To abide by this mandate, my review of relevant literature will begin with trying to get some sense of what the client/survivor might be experiencing following the loss of a loved one due to violence. The literature on grief and the special considerations that surround trauma related grief provides a valuable depiction of the after effects of the violence for survivors. After considering the unique facets of grief when the loved one is lost due to violence, several other topics that have bearing on the research questions will be reviewed. In addition to providing the grief context, the review will cover the following topics: a) the structure and philosophical underpinnings of restorative justice methods; b) a look at forgiveness intervention models and related theoretical considerations along with the application of moral development theory to the understanding of forgiveness; c) the contribution of religious coping for responding to adversity; and d) survivors’ reports of receiving communications from deceased loved ones. Again, even though the study is not specifically about grief, the thinking about grief will be considered first to strive for a basic understanding of the survivor’s concerns following the death.
Grief

Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe (1996) set out possible ways of thinking about the grief experience in their discussion of modernist, romantic, and postmodern views (the italics are in Stroebe et al.chapter). According to Stroebe and her colleagues (1996), the modernist view conceptualizes human functioning as machine-like. With regard to grief, this means that ideally people should get over their strong disturbing feelings related to the loss and go on with life in some kind of normal way within the shortest achievable timeframe. With this orientation, the correct response to grief involves letting go of ties to the deceased. If psychotherapy is used, the focus of the therapy would be to help the bereaved loosen the attachment to the deceased and to promote a long-term recovery where the ties eventually do not exist. Stroebe et al. call the idea the “breaking bonds hypothesis” (p.33). They explain that both Freud’s and Bowlby’s theories advanced this viewpoint, and they cite a number of authors who, when writing about counseling and research in the 1960’s through 1980’s, endorse this thinking.

Stroebe and her co-authors (1996) go on to say that various ways of responding to loss show up in different cultures. Examples are given to make the point that some cultures value continued connection with the deceased and others support moving on as quickly as possible. Both reactions to the loss are considered normal given the beliefs and values of the particular culture.
Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe (1996) contrast the western view of grief that stems from modernist thinking with the romantic view of mourning that was prevalent in western culture a century ago. As they explain:

Whereas modernists hold scientific rationality as the critical ingredient of successful human functioning, romantics believed in the centrality of the “deep interior”. . . Many felt that the deep interior was occupied by the human spirit or soul, the source of love, creative inspiration, and the power of genius. (p.37)

For the romanticist, love was the central guiding principle, and using marriage as an example, the thinking was that marriage constituted a “communion of souls” (p.37). Grief that called for carrying on the connection to the deceased was considered part of recognizing the profound nature of the bond. To disconnect would be tantamount to saying that no spiritual connection existed and the spirit of the person living in bodily form had little importance in defining life. In the romantic age, after the loss of a loved one, the goal was to carry on with life even though a broken heart would weigh one down.

These authors conclude that the romanticist orientation to grief with its emphasis on maintaining the attachment to the deceased is part of modern day thinking for many adults and children. They provide a brief review of research literature which points to the conclusion that those who subscribe to the romanticist perspective appear to be at no greater risk for poor adjustment than those who gravitate toward breaking bonds. At the time these authors were writing, they were making a case for recognizing that the romanticist approach to grieving was already sanctioned in some cultures and the
approach is known to be helpful. Professional helpers are cautioned to avoid insisting
upon the modernist breaking bonds approach to grief in those instances where the broken
heart orientation is viable for the persons involved. The authors call for a postmodern
approach to understanding grief that allows for multiple views about the sufficient
handling of grief. Of course, the postmodern approach requires an appreciation of
cultural diversity on the part of the helping professional or researcher. This view is quite
compatible with the social worker’s ethical mandate to approach all professional work
with sensitivity to cultural diversity (NASW, 2008).

With that foundation for thinking about grief, the readings about grief related to
homicide can be placed into two categories. Professionals write some of the literature for
a professional audience. Some of the literature is devoted to the personal stories of
survivors. The personal stories provide useful information for both professionals and
survivors who want to know what individuals experiences following a homicide.

To begin with the professional-to-professional literature, Stroebe and Schut
(2001) discuss the different theoretical perspectives on bereavement and point out that the
way one manages grief is contingent upon the meaning given to the loss. They propose a
dual process model (DPM) that directs attention to the cognitions bereaved people use
over time to cope with the loss. This model incorporates two overarching orientations or
tasks that bereaved persons must manage in order to cope with the grief, the loss
orientation and the restoration orientation. One the one hand, the person must cope with
the loss and “grief work” with its focus on the experience of the loss (crying,
remembering the lost loved one, remembering events surrounding the death) is used as
the means of accomplishing this goal (p. 57). On the other hand, one must reorganize to function in life without the deceased one, so coping with attention to the details of carrying on occurs, too. Attention to both the loss and the restoration cannot occur at the exact same time. These authors discuss research that led them to conclude that optimal bereavement outcomes require an oscillation between a focus on positive meanings associated with the loss as well as the related upset. (By the way, spirituality facilitated the efforts to find positive meanings connected to the death.) The emphasis on the positive thinking shores up “positive psychological states” (p.65) that allow for the coping required of restoration. Strict attention to the distress connected to the loss interferes with efforts to work toward restoration, but some attention to the pain surrounding the loss is necessary to deal with the psychological ramifications of the grief as well as possible.

With a different focus, Jacobs (1999) reports on the deliberations of a consensus conference that brought grief researchers and trauma researchers together to discuss a diagnostic category that would best depict the symptom picture when grief and trauma co-occur. The conference was held at the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh just prior to the time of the author’s writing. The group decided to abandon the terms “complicated grief” and replace that language with the “traumatic grief” label because they thought that the word “traumatic” more aptly described the experience of the bereaved in these cases. In this writing, Jacobs makes a case for considering traumatic grief a disorder by quoting the DSM IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) that defines a mental disorder as
“a clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual and that is associated with present distress (e.g., a painful symptom) or disability (i.e., impairment in one or more areas of functioning) or with a significantly increased risk of suffering death, pain, disability, or an important loss of freedom.” (as cited in Jacobs, 1999, p. 21)

To qualify as a disorder, the syndrome cannot be the usual culturally sanctioned response to the occurrence. Jacobs provides the necessary elements that must be present to give the Traumatic Grief diagnosis.

Traumatic grief is a disorder that occurs after the death of a significant other. Symptoms of separation distress are the core of the disorder and combine with symptoms of being devastated and traumatized by the death. Symptoms must be marked and persistent for two months. The symptomatic disturbance causes clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. (p.24)

Traumatic Grief may be associated with violent deaths, but it can also be used to describe a syndrome in cases where the loss was traumatic to the person for any reason. The key is that the person experiences the separation as traumatic regardless of how it occurred. Just a note of explanation, the consensus group that Jacobs describes made a case for adding a “traumatic grief” diagnostic category. The diagnosis cannot be found in the current DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Armour (2006) discusses the specifics of traumatic grief when the loss is due to a homicide in a review of the literature on how survivors cope with violent death. She is
writing for social workers and other helping professionals. Her work gives such a thorough rendering of the aftermath of homicide that it is worth considering in some detail.

Armour (2006) states that grief in response to a violent death takes a different course than grief that occurs as a result of other types of death, such as deaths caused by illness, old age or natural disasters. In the case of violent death, the deceased loved one is no longer present because another person intended the harm or, in the case of a motor vehicle fatality, someone most likely acted in a negligent manner. Reassuring positive statements like “his suffering is over” or “it’s a blessing that she had a good death surrounded by family and friends” do not apply. There is not much of a comforting nature that can be said about the death. Added to a loss where no consolation can be found is the sense that the world is no longer a safe place to be. The violent death shatters the semblance of safety in one’s surroundings.

According to Armour (2006), grief reactions associated with the violent death may extend for a longer time frame and the feelings may be stronger than typically observed with other types of death. She attributes a number of physical and emotional outcomes to the shock brought about by the death. The disturbing responses may be “significant sleep disturbance, exaggerated startle behavior, phobic anxiety, intense shame, and feelings of rage, fear, horror, and guilt” (p.55). This mixture of troubling physical and emotional reactions is thought to interfere with the usual experiencing of sadness and loss and, consequently, disturbs the introspection and reflection necessary for
assimilating the loss. To put it simply, remembering the deceased can activate the trauma response, which in turn interferes with what Armour (2006) calls “recovery” (p.56).

Armour (2006) goes on to say in one paragraph that currently there is “greater recognition” that the coexistence of both a trauma and a grief response to violent death could be considered “normal” (p.56). She discusses the traumatic grief label, which in this instance, indicates that the cause of death was traumatic and separation from the deceased loved one is troubling as well. In the next paragraph, she notes that “traumatic grief is an emerging diagnostic disorder” and then reiterates that the symptoms associated with this disorder are considered normal for violent death survivors (p.56). (Notice that the line between what is considered “disorder” and what is thought to be “normal” looks a bit fuzzy.) Symptoms that persist for six months seem to put one at greater risk for longer-term psychological and physical difficulties, so six months is the suggested time allotment for assigning a diagnosis.

To underscore the tremendous strengths that survivors bring to their devastating situations, Armour (2006) refers to the survivors’ resilience as “their ability to prevail over the forces of destruction that took their loved one’s life and forces that metaphorically threaten to take theirs, too” (p.57). The menacing forces of concern might be “overwhelming rage, suicidal ideation, and depression due to . . . diminishment by the criminal justice system” (p.57). The resilient survivors are not beaten down by their damaging circumstances, at least not permanently. Instead they call upon existing strengths and find new ways to manage. The resilient ones will not only effectively handle the many challenges they face, but they may also find that the disaster served as
catalyst for personal growth. The two areas of growth mentioned are an increase in empathy for others that develops out of the survivor’s own experience with emotional turmoil and a renewed or new connection to religious beliefs or spiritual pursuits that enhance the meaning in life.

To assist survivors with the potential for growth on of this path that was not chosen, Armour (2006) advises social workers to be aware of the possible barriers that can interfere. The three main barriers are mentioned. They are the “unremitting reactions to the trauma, the impact from negative social responses, and the inability of survivors to make meaning of the death” (p.58).

With regard to trauma, Armour (2006) continues her literature review to provide a description of the symptoms experienced by survivors when a loved one is lost to homicide. Upon hearing the news of the death, survivors report responding with extreme overwhelming emotions that threaten their sense of personal coherence. They report reactions such as screaming, pacing, shaking, becoming intensely fearful, and generally having the feeling of falling apart. In the days following the death, some survivors continue to have recurring nightmares. Some have bursts of unwelcome mental images of the death and the horrors surrounding it. Another commonly reported reaction is the intense wish for payback revenge to the degree that the survivors are often quite troubled by their thoughts of retaliation. This happens to people who otherwise could not even imagine behaving in such a base manner. All that occurs in the aftermath of a murder often serves to sustain the trauma reactions that, in turn, delay the onset of effectual mourning for the lost loved one.
What may occur after the homicide is an onslaught of negative attitudes from various sources. According to Armour (2006), negative attitudes present the next barrier to supporting resilience. In the category of negative attitudes she places harrowing criminal justice proceedings, possible public exposure, and general lack of support from family and friends.

In the criminal justice system, the accused has rights, but victim’s rights are quite limited. The survivors may not have access to information about the murder that is considered evidence. In some cases the offender is never identified and charged. In other cases, there may be drawn out court proceedings. Survivors may not be permitted to attend the trial because they are chosen to be witnesses. Even if there is a conviction, appeals can be filed or parole hearings can be scheduled so that episodic crises become an enduring part of a process that is never totally put to rest.

Broadcast and print media may practice no restraint in efforts to put out information as well as speculation about the murder. Victims can be portrayed in a way that misrepresents the person who was known to the survivors, thus making the survivors feel even more out of control. Privacy is disrupted with reports that may be distorted and leave the survivors open to the judgment of the entire community.

Armour (2006) conveys the idea that social isolation occurs because the survivors’ experiences are not understood. Friendships are lost because the feeling of having little in common crops up. “Emotional distancing” is also cited as a reason for losing ties to the social environment, but it is not clear from Armour’s writing if the survivors are the ones doing the distancing or if friends want to avoid the severity of the
survivor’s emotional pain (p.71). On the topic of forgiveness, survivors may receive advice from clergy to let go of the anger and forgive, a step that often cannot even be fathomed.

Barriers to making meaning out of the tragedy can be created when there is no consistent story about what happened to the deceased. In some cases, there is not much information about what occurred. Even if the survivor has some understanding of what occurred, new pieces of information can be revealed at any time, leaving the survivor in the position of needing to reexamine the latest evidence for its veracity. To make meaning, the personal narrative about the death then has to be revised. This reworking might have to occur repeatedly. In addition, public validation of the experience and struggle provides necessary support for constructing a sense-making story. The survivor’s ability to build a meaningful account can be compromised when there is a “lack of agreed upon meaning with the public” (Armour, 2006, p.71). The lack of validation serves to encourage the move toward breaking ties with the social environment. Also, the inability to reflect on the situation due to the trauma reaction can contribute to the failure to discover some worthwhile meaning amongst the rubble of the human carnage. Many cannot find any worthwhile meaning that comes out of the tragic loss. These survivors can only see senselessness and devastation surrounding the violent act.

Armour (2006) provides useful details about interventions to address the trauma, negative attitudes, and meaning making. She cites the studies of the Ohio and Texas Victim Offender Dialogue Programs (VOD) (Umbriet, Vos, Coates, & Brown, 2003)
while discussing meaning making with the recommendation that participation is such programs can be a helpful meaning making intervention (- see next the section for VOD details). VOD programs give survivors the opportunity to get information about the crime that was not available in any other way so that a coherent story about the death can be constructed in a more permanent way. Also, meeting the offender for a civil dialogue provides a growth opportunity for the survivor. Armour was a co-author of the chapter about forgiveness in restorative justice to be cited in the next section of this paper (see Armour & Umbreit, 2005), but she does not get into the issue of forgiveness in this article. She does point to the value of using religious coping to support meaning making. The helping or hindering role of religious and spiritual beliefs will be addressed in more detail later in this paper.

Other authors writing for professional audiences echo Armour’s (2006) depiction of experiences revolving around the homicide death of a loved one. A few points are worth adding. Redmond (1996) urges survivors to take part in all aspects of the criminal justice proceedings to whatever degree possible or allowable. Participation in the process gives survivors the opportunity to stand in for their victim. Even though this process is difficult, those who do take part in the process seem to “resolve the conflicts of the tragedy in a more positive manner” (p.66).

Also, according to Green and Roberts (2008), available research indicates that those crime victims who are informed of victim’s rights and receive victims’ services fare better than those who do not receive information about rights and receive fragmented services or no services. These authors conclude that criminal justice system victims’
services do make an important contribution to reducing the negative impact of the crime. On a slightly different subject, the same authors discuss crime victims’ higher prevalence rate of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as defined by the DSM-IV (25% vs. 9.4% of victims of other trauma) and note that left untreated, many crime victims may continue to have the PTSD symptoms for years after the crime. Also, crime victims are at greater risk for a number of mental health challenges such as “major depression, thoughts of suicide, alcohol and drug problems, panic disorders, agoraphobia, and obsessive compulsive disorders” (p. 25). Finally, it’s worth noting that Green and Roberts (2008) discuss four theories of grief and, in the end, conclude that people are unique and each person must go through the grief process at their own pace in their own distinct way.

With that, I will turn to some of the information about the experience of surviving a murder from the survivor’s viewpoint. There is actually quite a bit of agreement between what Armour (2006) and other professional authors wrote and what the survivors are saying. The differences may be subtle ones. Bonnie Conrad (1998), a parent of a nineteen-year-old daughter who was murdered in 1983, wrote a book designed to let other parents of murdered children know that they are not alone in experiencing the inner and outer turbulence that follows the violent death of a child. Conrad interviewed 22 parents of murdered children from fourteen states in different regions of the United States to get varied input for what should be conveyed. There are some general messages that stand out. Early in the book, Conrad says, “Despite the efforts to help themselves and, in some cases, the efforts of kind, caring people who attempt to offer support and comfort, immediately after the murder and into the future, the parents never fully
recover” (p.4). In this way of thinking, Armour’s (2006) use of the word “recovery” would not be well received. This sentiment was expressed at the 2009 National Parents of Murdered Children Conference (POMC), too. One of the presenters there made a point of saying that she did not like the word “recovery,” rather she preferred the word “healing.” In the presenter’s mind, healing suggested that an ongoing constructive process is taking place, but there is no expected endpoint to that process (Sims, 2009).

The word “closure” is another word that survivors may despise. For example, in a project designed to give details of the individual survivor’s experiences, one mother said, “‘Closure.’ I hate that word with a purple passion” (Zehr, 2001, p.32). Among the POMC informational materials is a Bereaved Parents newsletter article taking the position that closure, meaning a point where the grief process concludes, does not occur. The author says, “‘Closure?’ I don’t think so. Acceptance-yes. Peace-yes. Hope-definitely. But putting a period behind the final sentence and closing the book on it? No! Life and love are much too complex for that” (Florian, 2009, p.3). Generally the messages about grief from survivors are in line with the romanticist position that bonds with the deceased will be maintained. There seems to be little choice in the matter.

To return to an earlier subject, the understanding that the grief process is unique for each person is worth emphasizing because of its importance to survivors. Conrad (1998) expresses that view as she says, “No two persons are alike. No two griefs are alike. There is no right or wrong way to grieve” (p.6). This is a point that permeated every presentation that I attended at the POMC 2009 National Conference. Many of the sessions at the conference were specifically aimed at helping the survivors cope with
grief (e.g., Czillinger, 2009; Sims, 2009). This stance has the effect of normalizing a range of responses to the violent death, which is a contrast to the professional language that struggles with what to call normal and what to call a disorder.

With this context of grief established, the next step will be to explore restorative justice concepts and how restorative justice practices interface with trauma, healing, and forgiveness. Since the study was conducted in Ohio, information about the Ohio restorative justice program for violent offenses will be provided.

**Restorative Justice**

In the criminal justice literature, there are some specific calls for incorporating forgiveness into policy and practice (Couper, 1998; Dickey, 1998), but forgiveness is mostly mentioned as the outcomes of restorative justice procedures are described. Unlike mental health models that are aimed specifically at helping victims go through a forgiveness process (e.g., Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Worthington, 2003, 2006), forgiveness is not the primary goal of the restorative justice procedures (Zehr, 2002). Forgiveness often seems to naturally occur as a result of the procedure. Perhaps because forgiveness is not the primary goal, it is not clearly defined in the criminal justice literature. Most accounts indicating that the victim has forgiven the offender are anecdotal (e.g., Braithwaite, 1995; Dickey, 1998; Umbreit & Vos, 2000). No research was found that was specifically devoted to understanding the contribution that forgiveness makes in the healing process for the victim. The literature certainly suggests that the restorative justice encounters may foster the conditions that lead to forgiveness (Armour & Umbreit, 2005, 2006; McCullough, 2008; Zehr, 2002). In some restorative
justice models, the offenders generally have in person contact with victims, a condition that is not required in the mental health approaches.

In this section, the general underlying restorative justice principles will be described. Since the research participants took part in one restorative justice program, the Ohio Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD) program, two studies that have already been completed on that program will be reviewed in detail. Finally, one book chapter devoted specifically to the connection between restorative justice and forgiveness will be considered.

*The Work of Howard Zehr*

Howard Zehr (2002) is credited with being the grandfather of restorative justice because he contributed to the thinking about this method of justice and he managed the first U.S. victim offender conferencing program. Zehr (2002) provides a helpful orientation to basic restorative justice concepts in his book, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*. What follows is a summary of the ideas that Zehr (2002) sets out in that book.

The author starts by explaining what restorative justice is not. First on his list is the statement that restorative justice is not in place to promote forgiveness or reconciliation. He notes that the restorative justice structure is more conducive to creating a forgiveness or reconciliation outcome than the adversarial set up of the traditional criminal justice system. Forgiveness and/or reconciliation, however, are not stated goals of restorative justice procedures.

Also, according to Zehr, restorative justice is not mediation. In mediation, the affected individuals meet to work out their differences. Restorative measures do not
always involve a meeting with the victim and offender of a particular crime. Mediation starts with the assumption that all parties are operating from a similar basic moral framework and frequently all parties bear some responsibility for the problem. In the case of a violent offense, the victim is not to be blamed and the offender must accept responsibility for the wrongdoing. So, even in cases where a victim and offender do meet, the encounter is not based on neutrality in the matter of responsibility as the word mediation implies. Zehr suggests that words such as “conferencing” or “dialogue” are more apt descriptors for the restorative process (p.9).

Zehr makes a number of additional points about what restorative justice is not. Of these, perhaps the most relevant for the immediate purpose is that the words “restorative justice” do not indicate a specific program or procedure. Rather, restorative justice refers to a set of principles that inform the programs and procedures. The specifics may vary greatly, but all contain the essential elements of dialogue and exploration.

Zehr (2002) continues by providing some fundamental restorative justice tenets. First he explains that restorative justice ideas grew out of recognition that there are certain understood roles connected to crimes and that stakeholders in the usual criminal justice process end up with unmet needs. When a crime has been committed, the usual stakeholders are the victim, the offender, and the community. In the regular justice system, victims’ needs are overlooked partly because the crime is legally considered a crime against the state rather than a crime against an individual. Zehr notes four unmet needs that victims experience in the usual process. Those unmet needs are: a) access to information about why the offense occurred and what happened after the crime was
committed; b) the opportunity to tell the story about what happened in a way that publicly acknowledges the incident and informs the offender about the impact of his or her behavior; c) a sense of empowerment that is first lost in the experience of the violation and then continues with the lack of involvement in the ensuing criminal justice case; and d) restitution in the form of the offender trying to correct the wrongdoing either symbolically by way of the offender claiming responsibility, by an apology, or by attempting to replace actual losses. Restorative justice processes are designed to address these unmet needs.

Zehr (2002) goes on to explain that offenders in the regular criminal justice system are held accountable by getting the proper level of punishment. The system encourages the offenders to only be concerned about protecting themselves, and thus discourages the acknowledgement of wrongdoing. The focus on offender self-protection in the system also means that there is no support for empathizing with victims or for understanding the consequences of destructive behavior. The psychological defenses offenders use to keep distance from the effects of their actions, such as rationalizing their behaviors, are not questioned in the regular criminal justice process. Maintaining that kind of psychological stance along with the prison experience only furthers the offender’s estrangement from the larger society.

Restorative justice thinking holds that punishment is not true accountability. Authentic accountability entails acknowledging the harm that was done, understanding how it affected the victims, and to whatever degree possible, trying to compensate for the ill effects of the behavior. Zehr points out that restorative justice also recognizes that
offenders have needs that must get attention if they are to become productive members of society. The list of offender needs are: a) having the opportunity to demonstrate accountability for the harm that was done in a way that promotes empathy for the victims, recognizes responsibility for behaviors, and focuses on the wrongful act without attacking the human worth of the offender; b) treatment opportunities including drug and alcohol treatment, chances to address the situations in their own lives that supported offending, and opportunities to develop personal skills; c) support for becoming part of the community; and d) in some cases, restraint will be needed.

In restorative justice, the community is considered a stakeholder since communities are affected by crime and community members can take roles and responsibilities that relate to the victims, offenders, and to the community members themselves. Communities have the need to address the distress brought about by their own victim status. The community members can make a commitment to promote mutual accountability in an atmosphere where all are part of the community. The community can take on the responsibility for sustaining an environment where the well being of all members is paramount. Both victims and offenders are part of that community.

At the simplest level, restorative justice is based on the understanding that “[c]rime is a violation of people and of interpersonal relationships. Violations create obligations. The central obligation is to right the wrong” (Zehr, 2002, p.19). By way of comparison, in the regular criminal justice system the violation is against the state, violations result in guilt, and the state must verify the guilt and then establish the proper level of punishment. In restorative justice, the violation is against people and
relationships, violations lead to obligations, and “justice involves victims, offenders, and community members in an effort to put things right” (Zehr, 2002, p.21).

**Restorative Justice Models**

Van Ness and Strong (2002) describe the concept of restorative justice and give details about the many forms that it is currently taking. This section will summarize examples of two different restorative justice models, family group conferencing (FGC), and victim-offender mediation programs (VOM) along with the evaluation outcomes that are reported for each model. These examples are chosen because the word “forgiveness” appears in some of the accounts about the use of these models.

*Family Group Conferencing* – Van Ness and Strong (2002) explain that family group conferencing (FGC) is most often used in cases of juvenile offenders, but it has also been used successfully with adults as well (sometimes called community group conferences). In the FGC, family members and other supportive people accompany both the victim and the offender. Criminal justice officials may attend. A facilitator directs the meeting so that it stays safe and on task. The process begins by allowing each person to tell their experience of the crime and ask questions. Next the group considers what is needed for reparation. The group is expected to arrive at its own decisions without opinions or suggestions from the facilitator.

According to Van Ness and Strong (2002), outcome evaluations of FGC show high victim satisfaction with this approach. They report that restitution agreements are reached and completed without the need for follow-up in most cases. Repeat criminal
behavior is lower than would be expected. In some juvenile cases, the relationship between the parents and police officers improves.

Another well-known restorative justice author, John Braithwaite (1995) states that in all of the conferences he has observed, the victim essentially asks the offender to take responsibility for the harmful actions. This inevitably results in an apology from the offender and most often the victim responds with some offering of forgiveness. Braithwaite views this forgiveness as an important cue telling the offender that reintegration into acceptable society can occur.

*Victim-Offender Mediation* – In victim-offender mediation (VOM), the victim and the offender meet in the presence of a mediator for the purpose of talking about the crime and working toward some resolution about reparation. The steps in the procedure include giving each party an opportunity to talk about their experience of the crime and each may ask questions. It is during this phase that the offender may express remorse. Next is a dialogue about how to make reparation. Finally, an agreement is made with explicit details about schedules and activities for meeting the restitution requirements (Van Ness & Strong, 2002)

Van Ness and Strong (2002) report that, “restorative justice program research to date underscores the (often-unexpected) power of well-run victim-offender mediation”(p.60). VOM gives victims a chance to explain the hurt to the offender and have a role in the offender’s sentence. The offender has the opportunity to understand the consequences of the crime and is given the chance to make amends. The authors note
that the victim/offender encounters allow each to see the other as a person, not as just a wicked faceless creature (Van Ness & Strong 2002).

With regard to forgiveness, Van Ness and Strong (2002) note that because these are very brief meetings, “apology and forgiveness . . . can be offered only in a limited way” (p.59). However, some case examples that appear in the criminal justice literature suggest that the VOM encounter may be quite significant in helping the victim move forward with the forgiveness process (e.g., Dickey, 1998; Umbreit & Vos, 2000).

One type of VOM is designed to help all involved reach some more peaceful resolution after the horrors of crime in cases where no compensation is possible. Umbreit and Vos (2000) provided case studies of this particular type of VOM that are worth considering in some detail because they illustrate the type of exchange that takes place when a severe violent offense has occurred. These researchers give a moving account of the experience of three survivors who wanted to meet with two men who murdered their family members (two separate cases) before the murderers were executed. In these cases, all participants were prepared for the mediation session by meeting with a trained mediator over a period of one year in one case, and a few months in the other. In this type of VOM typically includes a preparation phase so that participants (both survivors and offenders) may work on their feelings, “their experience of the events, their reason for participating, and their hopes and fears about the upcoming session” (Umbreit & Vos, 2000, pp 67-68). Participants prepared written statements for the VOM session. In the VOM sessions described, both offenders and family members had an opportunity to tell about their experience of the crimes. The offenders told about their lives prior to the
murders. One offender told that he was a victim of childhood physical and sexual abuse. The family members wanted the contact for various reasons, but the theme of wanting a human encounter was expressed by all of them. The similarities in the offenders’ wish to have the meeting included working on their own healing and both had developed religious faith. One offender wanted to say that he was sorry and the other wanted “to help his victims heal, to offer something back for the wrong he had done” (p.72). Umbreit and Vos (2000) quote the 5 participants as they tell how they felt immediately after the encounter.

“I can’t really explain it other than some type of negative energy was kind of lifted out of me, and I was also exhausted” [granddaughter]; “I felt a sense of relief” [sister]; “I think that the growth I got that night, there aren’t any words that would adequately express what I feel, I just feel good. . . .I got back so much more than I ever could have prayed for” [mother]; “I think I’m more alive now than I ever have been at anyone point in time. . . .I feel like I’m actually living life now, instead of just existing, you know?” [Offender 1]; and “very much at peace. . . . I told [the mediator] I felt cleansed. I felt washed, freshed. . . . I felt a great burden had been lifted off my shoulders. I felt joy” [Offender 2] (p.78).

As the research would predict, all of the survivors expressed some version of the idea that they could see the offender as a human being, not as just a murderer. They believed that the in-person meeting increased the offenders’ accountability. No one was recommending that these men should be returned to society. One of the survivors had moved toward
forgiveness before the encounter and another made great strides in that direction. All felt that healing occurred. For the offenders, the healing came about as a result of feeling that they had been able to contribute in some way to the healing of the family members. All who participated recommended that others in similar situations could benefit from the mediation process. One of the family members summed up the lasting value of such an encounter by saying:

> And just because [the offender] is gone, doesn’t mean that that hatred and that anger and that rage is going to be gone, it has to be displaced, and this program helps you to take it from this place to this place and get rid of it (p.81).

And one offender gave his opinion about the possible benefits for offenders and for the larger society:

> Maybe it can open up a lot more awareness as far as opening up and learning. . .instead of working as just a straight penal facility, that it can actually become a correctional facility, that there actually can be attempts made at rehabilitation instead of just a thing of holding prisoners until their time is served (p.84).

**The State of Ohio Office of Victim Services Victim Offender Dialogue Program**

*The Umbreit, Vos, Coates, & Brown (2003) Study*

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Office of Victim Services was a pioneer in offering state sponsored Victim Offender Dialogue in severe violence cases. Only 23 other states have such programs and only two programs in the country (Iowa & Texas) were established before the Ohio program (Just Alternatives, 2007).
Because Ohio was one of the first to provide this service, Mark Umbreit (2003) and his colleagues conducted a study of the program with the intention of addressing nine questions. The first five of these questions are relevant for the focus of this study. Umbreit’s remaining questions focus on program development issues. The five pertinent questions are:

1. Who participates in the mediation/dialogue process and why?
2. What is involved in the actual process of victim offender mediation/dialogue?
3. How satisfied are victims/offenders with their experience and with mediation/dialogue?
4. What are the outcomes of mediation/dialogue for victims and offenders?
5. What are the benefits and risks of mediation/dialogue for victims and offenders? (Umbreit, Vos, Coates, & Brown, 2003, pp.39-40)

All victims and offenders who participated in the program during the period from the program’s beginning through 2000 were invited to be in the study. At the time the study commenced, only 36 cases had been referred to the Ohio program with less than 15 coming to the dialogue/mediation session by May 1998. Twenty victims/survivors and 20 adult offenders/inmates took part in the Ohio study. Over half (57%) of the offenses were homicide (i.e., murder, manslaughter, or vehicular homicide). Using an interview schedule comprised of open-ended questions, interviews were held with victims and offenders who had completed the mediation. The interviews were completed during the period of December 1998 to February 2001. Also, data were gathered by way of interviews with VOD facilitators, case record analysis, and quantitative surveys that were
given to victims, offenders, and facilitators. In all, the study reviewed 25 dialogues representing 24 crimes. The 25 dialogues took place between June 1997 and November 2000.

*History and Structure of Ohio’s VOD* – The following information about the history and structure of the Ohio program is taken from the Umbreit, Vos, Coates, and Brown (2003) report. As these authors recount the history, in 1995, Karin Ho started her time at the Office of Victim Services in the role of Director, the position she still holds at the time of this writing. Shortly after Ho arrived at the department, she had a request from a victim to meet with an offender. Over the next six months, 14 more victims asked to arrange a meeting with their offenders. With the increasing awareness that some victims felt the need to meet with the offender, Ho took carefully planned steps to establish the Victim Offender Dialogue option. The first Ohio victim offender dialogue in a violent crime case took place in May 1996 with Ho facilitating. Over the next few years some additional dialogues were completed. Eventually a commitment was made to develop the program by choosing 33 volunteer facilitators through a rigorous selection process. In March 1999, these volunteers attended a five-day training that amounted to about 50 hours of direct contact training time to prepare for the facilitator role. Co-facilitators are assigned to each case. One facilitator is a community volunteer and one facilitator is an employee of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC), but the facilitation is voluntary and not part of the ODRC employee’s regular job assignment.
The stated purpose of the program is victim and offender empowerment with facilitators providing a safe environment for the victim and offender to address questions and share information that they consider important. The subject content and time spent in the session are guided by what is relevant to the participants. The facilitators help the victims and offenders prepare for the dialogue by focusing on what each hopes to gain from the experience and by sharing information about what the other person is hoping to accomplish. Exploration of potentially disturbing issues is crucial to avoid surprises during the dialogue. The point is to process matters that might trigger an outburst so that troubling uncivil behavior does not erupt during the dialogue.

In the Ohio program, the victim must initiate the request for the dialogue. After the victim’s request is received, the inmate is contacted either by the facilitator assigned to the case or by the prison’s victim coordinator. The inmate must agree to the meeting in order for the dialogue to go forward. When the inmate agrees to consider the meeting, the volunteer facilitator next meets with the victim to get details about what the victim is hoping to get out of the dialogue. Following that meeting, one or both of the facilitators meet with the inmate to determine what the inmate wants to accomplish by meeting. At that meeting, the inmate is informed that the decision to participate will in no way affect parole or release decisions. In most instances, there are about two meetings with each participant prior to the dialogue and often there are several phone contacts. Facilitators can involve family members in the preparation if indicated. The time period for the preparation varies depending on the readiness of the participants, but a three to four month time frame for preparation would be fairly typical. Ho’s criteria for deciding
when to proceed with the dialogue are quoted in the book. She says that participants are ready to go ahead with the dialogue when they show that their emotional state will permit a safe environment and “when the victim and offender feel like they know what to expect and are prepared to deal with the other’s questions” (p.208).

The facilitator has the final say over whether a case goes to dialogue. If the facilitator does not believe that the participants’ meeting would bring about a constructive outcome for both, the meeting will not take place. In one example, while preparing for dialogue, the offender avoided taking full responsibility for his part in the crime by saying that he did not pull the trigger. The dialogue did not occur during this phase. With further work on his reasoning, the offender was able to take full responsibility for his destructive behavior. The dialogue could then happen given this change in the offender’s mind-set.

On the day of the meeting, the facilitator might give the victim a ride to the prison. Both victim and offender are permitted to have another person in the room for support. The offender might choose a chaplain or the prison victim coordinator. Victims often choose a member of the clergy or a friend. The authors mention that many times family members do not support the decision to meet with the offender so, in such cases, the family members do not agree to be available for the meeting. The support person is supposed to be present only and that person is not to contribute to the exchange. The structure of the meetings is determined by preferences of the participants. The facilitators open the session with introductions, explaining what is to occur in the session, and reviewing the ground rules. Some participants want to start by making statements with
the victim ordinarily having the first chance to speak. Some want to start with questions. The facilitators report that most participants carry the conversation on their own with very little facilitator input. The sessions generally last from about two to four hours. As soon as the dialogue session is over, the facilitators speak separately to the victim and the offender to ask about their reactions to the meeting. One facilitator may be giving the victim a ride home after the meeting which allows for further processing time. After a few days, the facilitator makes a final contact with the victim. The offender may have the final contact with the facilitator or the prison victim coordinator will follow up with the inmate. The case should be closed within the month following the dialogue.

A section in the book about the Ohio program is devoted to the issue of forgiveness. The authors say that the matter of forgiveness “seeps into the mindset of victims and offenders” (Umbreit, Vos, Coates, & Brown, 2003, p.216). They describe the range of responses that people might have to the idea of forgiveness. Some offenders are hoping to be forgiven and some do not believe they deserve forgiveness. Some victims find the thought of forgiveness abhorrent, some would like to forgive but are not making progress on that effort, and some are guided by religious convictions to see forgiveness as the only proper course. As with other restorative justice approaches, forgiveness is not a goal of the Ohio VOD program. The facilitators will work with forgiveness if the victim or offender brings it up during the preparation process. Ho said that she wants to explore whether seeking forgiveness is a hidden motivation for the offender if she thinks that might be the case. The forgiveness subject is one that is better not left as a surprise for the dialogue session.
The study results show that 95% (19 out of 20) of the victim participants were very satisfied with the preparation process. The one individual in the study who was only somewhat satisfied missed some of the preparation sessions that the remainder of his family attended. These participants talked about the helpful aspects of the preparation. According to the researchers, “The elements they mentioned included explanations of what would happen, the facilitator’s manner of relating, information they received about the offender, choices and opportunities for control, and help in clarifying expectations and goals” (p.238).

Who participates in VOD and why do victims seek contact with the offender? Of the 24 crimes reviewed in the report, 10 were either murder or manslaughter and 5 were alcohol related vehicular homicide. The seventeen victims in these 15 cases were surviving relatives including “8 mothers, 1 father, 4 sisters, 1 brother, 1 husband, and 2 daughters” (p. 222). In two of the murder cases, the family members knew the offender. In one case the offender was the murder victim’s co-worker and in one case the offender was the murder victim’s brother-in-law.

The report of what brought the victims to the dialogue process does not connect the decision to seek dialogue with a specific crime. Umbreit and colleagues (2003) say that several participants wanted to have contact with the offender before a program was in place. Of the 20 individuals interviewed, the authors state that fifteen “spontaneously decided that they would like to meet with the offender . . .” (p.230). Of these participants, six came to that decision soon after the offender was identified and nine decided to pursue dialogue after much time passed. In one case, the dialogue request was
initiated at the point when the victim was notified that the offender would be released. Two family members learned about dialogue at a Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) meeting and used this information to pursue the dialogue. The authors do not mention if these family members might have been interested in dialogue sooner if they had known about that possibility. Five of the victims representing 3 crimes reported that the offender initiated the request to meet even though this is a violation of policy. In one instance, a vehicular homicide offender got a letter out to the family, which is clearly not allowed. In the other two cases, the offender conveyed the message to the victim through another person who knew both the victim and the offender.

Various reasons were mentioned as the motive for seeking dialogue and nearly all participants had more than one reason. Most participants (10) asked for the dialogue because they wanted information such as what actually happened during the crime, why the offender targeted them or their loved one, or what transpired during the loved one’s last moments. Another frequently mentioned objective was that of finding some closure or healing after the crime (8 participants). Eight participants used language to convey that they wanted to get some understanding or sense of the offender as a human being. Seven wanted to determine if the offender was sorry for the harm that was done. Also, seven indicated some motivation that had to do with the wellbeing of the offender, such as wanting the offender know that the victim did not hate him or wanting the dialogue to help to offender as well as the victim. A need to let the offender know about the impact of the crime was mentioned as a reason to seek dialogue by six participants. Five could not give a specific reason for wanting to meet. These individuals just had a feeling that a
meeting should take place. The decision in these cases seemed to be based on an intuitive sense rather than a well-reasoned argument about the need for the meeting. Four participants wanted to offer forgiveness to the offender. Three of the forgiveness participants were from the same family. At least three participants mentioned wanting to have a dialogue for the following reasons: a) the victims wanted to make a difference so that offender would not offend again in the future; b) three wanted to assess the offender to determine whether they could go along with a release; or c) there was a need to work out a future relationship because the victim was likely to encounter the offender when the offender returned to the community.

*What Victims Noticed about the Offender’s Response* – Victims were given the opportunity to comment on what they observed in the offender’s behavior during the dialogue. Victims who participated in 5 of the dialogues thought that the offender was noticeably touched by the information they shared about the impact of the crime. In one case, the victim did not think the offender was particularly interested in what was happening for those affected by the crime. According to the victims, the offenders apologized in 13 dialogues and the offenders provided information about the crime in 12 of the dialogues. When asked if anything that took place during the dialogue that surprised them, nine of the victims said “they were surprised by the sincerity or level of remorse expressed by the offender” (p.248). Three of the victims did not expect the negative attitudes they encountered such as the offender’s bitterness or partial denial of responsibility for the outcome of the crime. One victim was surprised by the response of “feeling forgiving toward the offender” (p.248).
Outcomes for Victims – Twelve of the victims thought that participating in the dialogue resulted in “major positive life changes” (p. 251). They mentioned “changes in their general outlook on life for the better, view of the offender for the better, (10), personal growth and healing (10), and a positive impact on their spirituality (8)” (p.251). On the negative outcome side of the dialogue, two victims left the dialogue with a worsened impression of the offender.

With regard to the matter of spirituality, it is noteworthy that the dialogue only improved the spiritual dimension for some victims. None reported a decline in their spiritual views. Three participants felt that they had already experienced major shifts in their spiritual lives prior to requesting the dialogue. In two such cases, the victims’ spiritual views changed in direct response to the crime. Two participants mentioned that their spiritual outlook played a part in their decision to seek the dialogue.

The researchers say that 13 participants “spoke about forgiveness” (p.251). Nine of the victims said “that they had forgiven the offender” and 6 of these said that they had already forgiven before the dialogue took place (p.255). All nine informed the offender about the forgiveness. Three family members of murder victims said that they had not forgiven. One of these indicated that her goal for the dialogue was to inform the offender about the significant harm that was done and this participant thought that forgiveness would not be compatible with that goal. Two others made a distinction between letting go of hatred and actually forgiving. These two had the understanding that hatred only harms the one who is doing the hating, but they were not planning to forgive the offenders. When speaking about the dialogue experience one participant said that it
“compels a person to deal with their own willingness to forgive. And maybe forgiveness for some has to be something down the road” (p.256).

The researchers report that all participants were “very satisfied” with their involvement in the program (p.257). Fourteen participants (70%) found the meeting “very helpful” and 6 found it “somewhat helpful” (p.258). None regretted their participation. Without being asked, four participants volunteered that they would recommend dialogue to others. When speaking of the advantages of pursuing the VOD, 17 participants spoke in terms of advantages for other people. Of the advantages mentioned, fifteen thought that the process might help with closure and healing, seven thought that getting information about the crime was helpful, and four spoke about the opportunity to inform the offender about the impact of the criminal behavior. Three participants cautioned about the need to set anger and hatred aside when going into a dialogue. They warned that the dialogue would not be useful if the intention was simply to express hatred and anger.

Offenders in the Umbreit et al. Study – Since the focus of my study is on the process for the victims, the offender’s experience of VOD will not be reviewed in depth. Here I will stick with the findings that are most relevant for the questions posed in the present study. When asked about the reasons for participating in the dialogue, “[a]ll 20 offenders spontaneously reported at least some victim-centered reasons among the elements of their decision” (p. 266). The comments were centered around wanting to be helpful to the victims in various ways, such as helping the victim get what was needed or helping to bring closure. Eight offenders specifically mentioned that they wanted to
apologize. When asked about benefits for themselves, “[s]even offenders hadn’t thought of any” (p. 267). One offender thought the dialogue process would be good for the victim and for himself. The rest of the offenders (12) mentioned personal benefits that related to bringing healing and closure, moving toward letting go of the guilt, and having the chance to let the victim see something good about them. Two wanted forgiveness. The offenders reported general positive outcomes resulting from the dialogue by indicating that they had been part of something good that happened and many expressed a great sense of relief. As the researchers explain the offenders’ comments about how the experience changed their outlook on life, it appears that the encounters contributed to the offenders’ understanding of the impact of the hurtful behavior and many reported a wish to help others instead of continuing on a destructive path. Thirteen of the offenders commented on the possibility of further contact with the victim after the VOD. In five cases additional contact had already transpired (2 additional VOD meetings, 2 letter contacts plus one of these also had phone contact, and one no personal contact but restitution payments were made for what was stolen). In every case, the offender essentially endorsed the program by saying that other offenders should participate. The offenders saw the VOD experience as part of a healing process that, for some, gives the opportunity to apologize and then try to move away from the tyranny of past mistakes.
Borton’s (2008) Study

Borton (2008) conducted his dissertation research at the Ohio Office of Victim Services that consisted of an archival analysis on 212 VOD files (out of a total of 349 files). He hoped to learn more about why only one in four requests for dialogue result in a face-to-face meeting. The dissertation contains a lot of information about the stated reasons for the VOD requests, the role of those who seek dialogue (e.g., direct victim, family member survivor), and the timing of seeking the dialogue. Again, because my research was conducted with participants who took part in this same program, I will give some of Borton’s details as a way of providing additional context for my study.

Borton (2008) started with all of 349 DOV files held by the Ohio Office of Victim Services (OVS). Files for dialogue requests that were in process were excluded, as were the death row case files. The final sample of 212 files contained the completed dialogue files (n = 53) and the will-not-proceed files (n = 159). The examined files were from the period of 1996 when the first dialogue took place to 2008.

Again, in order to show the distinction between those who do proceed with dialogue and those who do not, it is important to note the reasons for not proceeding. According to Borton’s report, in 25% (n = 39) of the will-not-proceed files, the reason for the discontinuation was not noted. In 20% of the cases (n = 32) the dialogue did not go forward because the offender refused the offer. In other instances the dialogue did not happen because the OVS lost contact with the victim (n = 24), the victim decided not to proceed (n = 20), the request was deemed inappropriate for dialogue (n = 15), the offender was already on parole (n = 7), or the offender did not acknowledge guilt for the
crime (n = 7). In 9 cases, the victims did not feel the need to proceed because they were satisfied with other outcomes that did not go as far as dialogue (e.g., a letter exchange or the facilitator transmitted information between victim and offender).

In over half of the cases (58%) the request for VOD comes from persons who are not the first-hand victims of the crime. In such cases, often a family member initiates the request most likely in situations where the crime resulted in the death of the primary victim. Borton (2008) provides the following breakdown of the relationship of the family member to the crime victim. In 46.5% of the cases (n = 53), the victim’s parent asked for the dialogue. The roles of other family members who made the requests are: the victim’s child (26.3%; n = 30), the victim’s sibling (10.5%; n = 12), the victim’s spouse (6.1%; n = 7), or another type of relative (4.4%; n = 5). In 2 cases friends of the victim asked for the dialogue and in 5 cases, the relationship to the victim was not recorded.

Overall, the sample contained information about 253 crimes. About 30% of the crimes involved a death. The charges for these crimes were murder (13%), voluntary manslaughter (5%), and involuntary manslaughter (12%). Interestingly in a little over half of the cases (51%) where VOD was requested, some type of relationship existed between the victim and offender before the crime was committed. This was so mostly when the crime was a sexual offense such as rape or gross sexual imposition (43%). Borton (2008) only mentions one category where death was the outcome in his discussion of crimes where the victim and offender knew each other. In the involuntary manslaughter cases, there was typically no prior relationship between the victim and offender. No information is provided about prior relationships in murder and voluntary
manslaughter cases. Using chi-square, Borton found a significant difference between dialogues completed where there was no prior relationship between the victim and offender versus those cases where the victim knew the offender. There was a greater chance that the dialogue would go to completion if there was no relationship before the crime occurred.

Borton (2008) notes other useful findings. There were no differences in likelihood of completing the dialogue related to the offender’s race (i.e., white or non-white offenders). Cases where the victim was a male have a greater likelihood of completing the dialogue than cases where the victim was female. Persons who are not the direct victim of the crime are more likely to go forward with VOD than persons who were the direct victims of the crime. In cases where personal injury resulted, requests for dialogue came anywhere from 1 to 27 years after the crimes were committed (an average of 8 years). Only 7% of all the crimes were strictly property crimes (e.g., arson or theft). In the property crime cases, the time for a dialogue to be initiated ranged from 1 to 6 years.

Fourteen reasons for requesting VOD were identified in the records. In 30% of the files, no reason was noted. The most frequently stated reason for the request was to ask questions about the crime such as why the offender committed the crime or why that particular victim was targeted (23.5%). Eleven percent asked for dialogue to convey what Borton (2008) calls “impact of the crime” (p.61). In some of these cases, the victims wanted to tell about the harmful effects of the crime, but in some instances the victims wanted to say something about positive outcomes (e.g. victim feels like a
stronger person now). Either the wish to forgive or the opportunity to convey forgiveness was mentioned as a motive for requesting dialogue in 11% of the cases. Several other reasons were given for the request such as wanting to ask questions about what happened related to the crime (12%), find some kind of closure (11%), find out about the offender’s progress in prison (6%), find out if the offender was remorseful (7%), let go of fearing the offender (3%), have a relationship with the offender, get an apology, or a confession from the offender (4%). There was no relationship between the reason for the initiating the dialogue process and the outcome of completing or not completing the process.

In the discussion of his findings, Borton highlights some observations about his findings that are germane to the questions considered in my research. Given that the VOD program is used most by persons who are not the direct victims of the crime and within that group about half are parents, he suggests that the OVS might focus efforts on connecting with existing support groups for parents such as Parents of Murdered Children. He notices that the request for dialogue typically comes many years after the crime took place in the personal crime cases and imagines that other methods must have been used to cope with the painful aftermath of the crime before this step was tried. The particulars of the methods that were used to cope with the grief prior to requesting dialogue are unknown. Also the details surrounding the victims’ decisions to seek dialogue for reasons related to forgiveness are not known.

Other authors do provide more information on what is documented about forgiveness and restorative justice. Those details will be considered next.
Focus on Forgiveness in Restorative Justice

Armour and Umbreit (2005) provide a literature review overview of what is known about forgiveness in the restorative justice process and what is not yet known. These authors explain that the restorative justice dialogue structure allows for processes that support the natural occurrence of forgiveness. Apology, offender remorse, and empathy are discussed. The offender often offers an apology during the dialogue process. If the victim sees a genuinely remorseful offender, forgiveness is more likely to be forthcoming. There is some thought that empathy is evoked when the remorse is displayed, in part, because the offender appears to be in pain. The authors take the position that empathy for the offender is a key element in a forgiveness outcome. They summarize restorative justice dialogue literature indicating that participating victims report a decrease in negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, anger, and shame. Interesting, with the exception of fear, these are the same emotions that are positively impacted by the Process Model of Forgiveness, a mental health intervention model that Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) describe (see the Forgiveness and Moral Development section of this dissertation for a description of the Process Model).

Armour and Umbreit (2005) make clear recommendations about directions for further research in the area of restorative justice and forgiveness. I will call upon their writing to explain the types of research questions that need further exploration.

Little is known about who does and does not elect to participate in restorative justice, what their attitudes are toward forgiveness, and the impact of the mediator on the process. Specifically, what are the postmediation
outcomes for victims who forgive, who, prior to the dialogue, have already forgiven, intend to forgive, are open to forgiving, or do not intend to forgive? What events occur during the dialogue to generate or impede victim forgiveness? . . . Studies are also needed on motives for victim forgiveness for those victims who elect to forgive. (p. 498)

To add some points of clarification, the authors say that some behaviors or processes such as offender apology, empathy, severity of the offense, and intentions of the offender have been shown to affect the forgiveness decision in clinical or research conditions. The degree to which these aspects enter into forgiveness in the usual course of the restorative justice process is not known. Also, with regard to possible motives for offering forgiveness, the authors speculate that victims may want to get some relief from emotional pain, comply with religious beliefs, or work toward getting the offender’s trust so that information about the crime will be shared.

**Summary**

In summary, the restorative justice models allow the victim to hear and understand more about the circumstances surrounding the unacceptable behavior. Interestingly, in Enright and Fitzgibbons’ (2000) process model for forgiveness, the client is helped to develop this kind of understanding of the offender during the *Work Phase* of the mental health treatment (to be discussed in the next section). The in-person meeting of victim with the offender in the restorative justice models appears to expedite this process. What becomes apparent when comparing the mental health process forgiveness models and the restorative justice models is the impact that empathy for the other,
understanding the other, and being able to take the perspective of the other has on healing for all parties. In either case, when the individuals are guided to see the other as a suffering, fallible human being, some resolution appears to be hastened. To get a more complete picture of this process, the thinking about forgiveness, the related moral development theory and how the two coalesce to inform the helpful aspects of the restorative justice structure will be discussed next.

**Forgiveness, Moral Development, and the Restorative Justice Process**

In this segment, the current thinking about forgiveness as a helping intervention will be considered. Next the components of general moral development theory that influences my own thinking about forgiveness will be reviewed. Finally, the general moral development theories will be linked to the specifics of the forgiveness experience.

Before getting into details about the theories, some basic information is needed to lay the groundwork for what is to be explained. First, although there is extensive discussion in the literature about the proper definition of forgiveness (e.g., Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; North, 1998), agreement about the definition has not been reached. Each researcher uses a somewhat different definition of forgiveness. The forgiveness definitions will be provided for the theories as they are discussed.

Next, I am interested in forgiveness in cases where individuals are the victims of what forgiveness researcher, Everett Worthington, Jr. (2006) calls transgressions. Worthington divides transgressions into the two main categories of hurts and offenses. Hurts he describes as violations of “physical or psychological boundaries” (p. 31). Hurt
feelings fall into this category. Offenses “violate moral boundaries” (p.31). Some transgressions incorporate both hurt and offenses. Physical assault constitutes a violation of both physical and moral boundaries. For simplicity sake, however, the cases involving death will be called offenses.

As a way of framing forgiveness theory, the underpinnings for three ways of understanding forgiveness as a helping intervention will be discussed. The three different perspectives on forgiveness are: a) the social-cognitive development of forgiveness (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989), b) the process model of forgiveness (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000), and c) the biopsychosocial stress-and-coping theory of forgiveness (Worthington, 2006). I will draw heavily upon two main sources to describe these theories. The book, Helping Clients Forgive: An Empirical Guide for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope written by Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) presents a comprehensive review of the research and logic used to form and support the theory of social-cognitive development in forgiveness reasoning as well as theory related to the process model of forgiveness. Similarly, Worthington (2006) provides a comprehensive, up-to-date review of his thinking about forgiveness and the research he calls upon to support it in his book, Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Theory and Application. I will start by explaining the social-cognitive development of forgiveness. Next the process model of forgiveness will be described. The stress and coping theory will be considered last.
The Social Cognitive Development of Forgiveness

Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) describe their Social-Cognitive Developmental Model for forgiveness that is based upon earlier research (Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989; Girard & Mullet, 1997; Huang, 1990; Park & Enright, 1997). Before getting to a fuller explanation of the model’s theoretical foundation and the research support, it may be worthwhile to mention Enright and Fitzgibbon’s (2000) ideas about how the model can be useful to practitioners. According to these authors, people vary in their “social-cognitive developmental level of reasoning about forgiveness” (p.53), so ideally the helping professional could base the therapeutic intervention on an understanding of how the client is reasoning about forgiveness. In addition, the helper can use that understanding to assist clients’ in their efforts to advance to a more complex comprehension of forgiveness. For clients who think they have forgiven but remain stuck with anger or trapped in negative relationships, the social-cognitive development model can be used to clarify the deeper levels of forgiveness that may be needed.

To arrive at the understanding of the social-cognitive developmental model of forgiveness, the operative definition of forgiveness is essential. Especially Robert Enright has been involved in multiple forgiveness research projects and he has written extensively on the subject of forgiveness. Enright’s definition has evolved over his years of writing on the subject (see, e.g., Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991). A recent version appears in the book, Helping Clients Forgive: An Empirical Guide for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope that was written by both Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000). This definition is used for both the social-cognitive developmental
model and the process model of forgiveness that these authors describe. Enright and Fitzgibbons offer a definition that is the result of meticulous reasoning, directs considerable attention to the details of forgiveness, and is easily applied to a wide variety of problem situations. They place emphasis on the importance of accurately understanding the forgiveness definition in order to implement successful mental health interventions. Their definition is:

People, upon rationally determining that they have been unfairly treated, forgive when they willfully abandon resentment and related responses (to which they have a right), and endeavor to respond to the wrongdoer based on the moral principle of beneficence, which may include compassion, unconditional worth, generosity, and moral love (to which the wrongdoer, by nature of the hurtful act or acts, has no right). (p.24)

The definition is clarified further by an explanation of what is not required for forgiveness to occur. For example, common misconceptions might be that forgiveness means pardoning the offender, condoning the offense, reconciling with the offender, or forgetting the offense. None of these conditions are desired or required for forgiveness to take place. Many additional thought-provoking details about what is not considered forgiveness are presented in the book.

Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) conclude that there is a “social-cognitive developmental progression” in the comprehension of forgiveness that “moves from the simple to the more complex, from a lesser to a greater inclusion of a variety of people who are affected by the forgiveness decision, and from conditional to unconditional
conceptions of forgiveness” (p.54). The authors explain that in early investigations, they believed they were seeing a stage sequence that neatly followed Piaget’s theory of cognitive development and Kohlberg’s theory of moral development. Currently the authors refer to the categories as “Styles of Forgiveness” instead of stages to account for the fact that people may rely upon various styles at the same time depending on the circumstances that surround the offense. They may also revert to earlier styles or they may skip styles as they progress. The “Styles of Forgiveness Reasoning” are summarized below:

**Style 1  Revengeful Forgiveness** – Forgiveness can only happen if there is some retaliation that results in getting even for the offense.

**Style 2  Restitutional or Compensational Forgiveness** - Forgiveness can occur if there is a replacement for what was taken or the person wants to forgive to relieve guilt about negative feelings toward the offender.

**Style 3 Expectational Forgiveness** – Forgiveness takes place if the social group such as a peer group or family expects it. In this case, the offended can now take the perspective of the social group to influence the thinking about forgiveness. In preceding styles, the forgiveness decision was located in the dyad only.

**Style 4  Lawful Expectational Forgiveness** – The person feels obligated to forgive because some institutional affiliation requires it, e.g., religious affiliation.

**Style 5 Forgiveness as Social Harmony** - In this style, the offended sees the moral value of forgiving and applies this principle to many situations. Forgiveness is based upon an internal belief and does not require external influence as in the previous styles. The person believes that forgiveness should occur because it can have a positive impact on social groups and on society in general.

**Style 6 Forgiveness as Love** – Forgiveness occurs unconditionally. It is the expression of universal love that is based upon moral principle and is, also, unconditional. The person sees forgiveness as a fundamentally good act that should occur regardless of the input or behaviors of others.
The ideal clinical outcome is to help clients reach Style 6, the only style that completely matches the authors’ definition of forgiveness.

In the initial research that led to the creation of this model (Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989), forgiveness as an aspect of moral development was contrasted to the justice aspect originally set out by Kohlberg. The researchers hypothesized that there would be a relation between the forgiveness stage and the justice stage. Two studies were conducted with the second study replicating the first. In the first study, participants were comprised of 59 predominantly Catholic males and females with ages ranging from 9 to 36 years old. The five groups were separated into grade 4 (mean age = 9.83), 7 (mean age = 12.5), 10 (mean age = 15.33), college (mean age = 20.49), and adults (mean age = 36.83) with 12 participants in each group, mostly 6 males and 6 females. For the justice measure, a short form of Rest’s Defining Issues Test (DIT) was administered in groups consisting of no more than 20 participants to all participants except the fourth graders. Fourth graders were excluded because the test was designed for adolescents and adults. The DIT is an objective test used to measure Kohlberg’s concept of moral development. For the forgiveness measure, two dilemmas from the DIT were revised (Heinz and the Druggist and The Escaped Prisoner) with changes in the story’s ending. An individual interview format was used to tap the forgiveness development. Fourth graders participated in the forgiveness scale part of the study only. A second study was conducted to replicate this first study. Study 2 used 60 predominantly Catholic participants.
Overall, researchers found that the styles did cluster in developmental stages. Fourth and 7th graders were inclined to have a restitution or compensation style, adolescents tended to respond to peer influence, and college students and some adults relied on institutional expectations or a social harmony approach to forgiveness. Only adults chose forgiveness based upon the principle of unconditional love. In the first study only one adult demonstrated the unconditional love principle on one dilemma. In Study 2, “six adults reached it on at least one of the two dilemmas” (p.107). The authors report that there were no gender differences. Both studies “found significant, but modest correlations between forgiveness and justice development” (p.106). While the researchers maintain “that forgiveness is a domain related to, but distinct from justice” (p.108.), they do note that both have social-cognitive stage characteristics and both may rely on similar development of perspective taking abilities (Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989). Just a note of clarification, child development expert, Laura Berk (2003), defines perspective taking as “the capacity to imagine what other people may be thinking or feeling” (p.465) and this capacity does grow to allow comprehension of more complex information as part of the normal development of cognitive abilities.

To continue, Enright & Fitzgibbons (2000) summarize similar research on the social-cognitive development of forgiveness that was conducted in Taiwan (Huang, 1990), Korea (Park & Enright, 1997), and France (Girard & Mullet, 1997) to show that this developmental pattern is similar across cultures. The Girard and Mullet (1997) research provides additional information that could be useful to consider for the current study, so the main points of that research will be recapped next.
In France, Girard and Mullet (1997) conducted a study of 236 people ranging in age from 15 to 96 years. Participants were assigned to one of six age groups to determine: a) if the propensity to forgive increases with age; b) if a condition such as cancellation of the ill effects of the transgression or a reason to forgive such as restoration of social harmony interacted with the propensity to forgive; and 3) if there is an additive effect of various conditions that make it easier to forgive such as revenge, understanding that the person did not mean harm, an apology and/or various reasons that one might forgive such as restoring social harmony or pressure from others. Both men and women were represented in the study.

The researchers devised 64 hypothetical dilemmas designed to consider six categories of information: the degree of proximity of the offender to the victim (family member vs. colleague), the degree of intent to harm, how severe the consequences of the offense were, whether there was an apology for the offense, whether the attitudes of others put pressure on the victim to forgive, and whether the consequences of the offense were still impacting the victim. The respondents provided ratings on each of the six categories and then noted their opinions about the appropriateness of forgiveness in each case.

Results concur with the Enright, Santos, and Al-Mabuk (1989) findings that the tendency to be forgiving increases with age. Age accounted for eighty percent of the variance and there were no significant differences related to gender. To highlight one point about age, it is interesting to note that twenty-two percent of the elderly respondents were unconditional forgivers (p.218), that is, they believed that forgiveness was always
the appropriate response regardless of conditions surrounding the offense. Fifty-eight percent of the unconditional forgivers in the entire study were in the elderly age range.

Other interesting findings are worth mentioning. There were significant findings for the cancellation effect, meaning that it was easier to forgive if the consequences of the offense were essentially erased, especially for the youngest group and in the very old. The researchers do not have an explanation for the age element of this finding. As expected, the attitudes of others did sway the adolescents’ tendency to forgive. Again, this finding is consistent with the Enright et al. (1989) research results. Forgiveness motivated by restoration of social harmony was more important to the adolescents than to all adults. When looking at the additive effects of information, the results of cluster analysis showed that 72% of the respondents considered two or more pieces of information when arriving at the forgiveness decision. For example, the cluster with the highest number of respondents (n=65), the Social Harmony-Cancellation-Intent-Apologies cluster, was comprised of mostly women who took the following combination of variables into account when making a forgiveness decision: a) the advantages of forgiveness for promoting social harmony, b) plus whether the consequences of the offense were cancelled, c) and if there was an intention to do harm, d) and whether there was an apology. Overall, a few factors stood out in the research results as being most important in affecting the decision to forgive. The intention to do harm emerged as an important factor that had a greater influence on the forgiveness decision than even the severity of the offense. Also, apology surfaced as an important ingredient in the forgiveness mix. It is easier to forgive when the offender has apologized.
Taken as a whole, these studies show that a social-cognitive developmental progression in the understanding of forgiveness can be observed across cultures. For example, Enright Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) report on Huang’s dissertation that replicated the Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk (1989) research where 4th graders, 7th graders, 10th graders, college students, and adults were given the hypothetical forgiveness dilemmas. Huang conducted his research in Taiwan where there is a Confucian ethic of promoting harmony in the community. A correlation of .94 was found between the mean scores of the various age groups from the Enright et al. (1989) study and the mean scores from Huang’s study (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). There is no report about gender differences in Huang’s study, but the other four studies (Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989; Girard & Mullet, 1997; Park & Enright, 1997) did not find gender differences in the social-cognitive developmental progression. When Girard and Mullet (1997) looked more carefully at factors that may influence the decision to forgive, they did see some gender differences in the most prevalent cluster of factors, with the Social Harmony-Cancellation-Intent-Apologies cluster mainly comprised of women (43 women & 22 men).

The numbers in the Girard and Mullet show a higher concentration of unconditional forgivers in France (22% of the 25-39 year olds) than Enright, Santos, and Al-Mabuk found in their U.S. sample (Study 1 -.01% of mean age 36.83 & Study 2- 10% of the mean age 33.58). This may be due to the use of different instruments in the French study, but it may indicate some cultural differences in the propensity to consider forgiveness. The French study also included much older adults than any of the other
studies (ages 40 to 55, 65 to 74, and 75 to 96). Since 58% of the unconditional forgivers were in the age 65 to 96 age range, it would be interesting to see if a similar result would be found in other cultures.

With another viewpoint, researchers interested in children’s forgiveness, Denham, Neal, Wilson, Pickering, and Boyatzis (2005), call attention to three shortcomings of the Enright et al. (1989) work. As they explain, “First, the dilemmas involve adults in adult situations, which children may not comprehend. Second, the theory does not allow for the influence of modeled behaviors. Third, advancement through the stages requires logical, abstract thought” (p.132). These authors stress the practical reasoning or intuition that will likely be called upon when children make decisions regarding forgiveness, not the formal reasoning in the Enright et al. (1989) research. They point to research showing that, like the older adolescents and adults in Girard & Mullet’s (1997) study, children also take into account factors such as the intention to do harm and apology when considering forgiveness. Even very young children, 3 and 4 year olds, can recognize that moral transgressions are more problematic than social offenses.

Dehnam et al.’s (2005) concern that the Enright et al. (1989) research is measuring formal reasoning ability and not the construct of forgiveness per say may be well founded. The hypothetical dilemmas used in the research Enright et al. (1989) research and in the Park and Enright (1997) research are either revised versions of the dilemmas that Kohlberg used to measure moral development or comparable to the ones Kohlberg used. Similar criticism has been expressed about Kohlberg’s measurement methods (Berk, 2003; Gibbs, 2010). With regard to Kohlberg’s moral development
stages, when real life moral dilemmas occur, the reasoning may fall at a lower stage than
the hypothetical dilemmas reflect and other methods are used in addition to reasoning for
working on the dilemma (e.g. discussing with a friend, relying on spiritual guidance)
(Berk, 2003). Even so, it seems that the cognitive and perspective-taking abilities that
develop with age (Berk, 2003; Gibbs, 2010; Selman, 1976; Selman, 1980) could also
enhance one’s capacity to engage in the forgiveness process.

To sum up this section on the social-cognitive development of forgiveness, I
return to the writing of Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) who say, “Our research suggests
that people vary in their level of cognitive complexity in their perceptions of forgiveness”
(p.53). Perhaps we can all agree to that point. The research results seem useful to
helping professionals because they provide information about some possible ways that
people understand forgiveness and give a framework to the forgiveness outcomes that are
most helpful. For the purposes of this research, the theory will be kept in mind as it
describes a personal element that may contribute to a forgiveness outcome. The
forgiveness intervention models shed further light on factors that come into play in the
forgiveness process. The next step will be to delve into the theory that underpins two of
the most developed forgiveness intervention models.

**The Process Model of Forgiveness**

Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) provide a detailed explanation of The Process
Model of Forgiveness in the Helping Clients Forgive book. In Everett Worthington, Jr.’s
(2006) recent review of available models of forgiveness, he agrees that “Enright and
Fitzgibbons provide the best overview of the process model to date” (p.22). Worthington puts out the following critique of the process model:

Enright’s model is comprehensive and thorough. Its weaknesses are a failure to connect basic research with the clinical theory, a failure to articulate theory of change on which the intervention is based, and generally assuming too much power and universality in the clinical application of the model. Nevertheless, Enright’s is the current gold standard against which all other research models and clinical models must be measured. (p.22)

With Worthington’s thoughts in mind, I will first provide a summary of the model, then discuss the way the model was developed, and finally consider the research that supports the efficacy of the model in clinical practice.

*The Process Model*

The process model described by Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) is organized into four phases and twenty components. The first is the *Uncovering Phase* that is primarily devoted to helping the client to become aware of how the offense affected psychological functioning. There are eight components that could potentially be important to explore in this phase. The components allow the client to connect with and give expression to the psychological pain attached to the transgression. Helping professionals see some clients who are well aware that they have been hurt and they know that the wrongdoing is having a direct impact on their lives. Others may not make such a clear connection between the hurtful behavior(s) and their current difficulties. As these authors conceptualize the process, some clients may use psychological defenses to disconnect from the anguish
related to the wrongdoing. The client may experience symptoms that seem baffling. The authors give the example of an adult female suffering with generalized anxiety, but not linking this symptom to the sexual abuse that was perpetrated by her father when she was a child. She may be using denial of anger or repression as a means of disengaging from the overwhelming psychological pain associated with the offense. In such instances, where the client was actually treated unfairly, the first step is to help the client identify what happened and that he/she was wronged. These authors recommend framing the wrongdoing as unjust. After the recognition that some injustice occurred, seven more components may be brought into the helping discussion if they apply to the client’s circumstances. The client can be encouraged to: a) express anger, b) acknowledge shame, c) recognize that focusing so much on the offense is resulting in depleted energy, d) notice any “cognitive rehearsal,” that is, obsessive thoughts that are the manifestations of a preoccupation with the offender and the hurtful situation, e) discuss clients less fortunate situation as compared to the offender when the client brings this concern to the attention of the helper (the authors say therapists shouldn’t encourage a client to think this way by bringing it up), e) concede that a permanent change, perhaps a permanent injury has occurred, and f) be aware that the view of a safe and dependable world may be shattered by a trauma and a more pessimistic view of life may ensue.

Next, the Decision Phase is devoted to helping the client decide whether forgiveness is an acceptable problem-solving option. As clients realize that the strategies used to cope with the transgression have been ineffective, they may want to consider other ways of responding. In this form of therapy, the therapist introduces forgiveness as
a possible solution. This method is different from other models that rely upon the client
to suggest forgiveness (Malcom & Greenberg, 2000). Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000)
clearly acknowledge that this is not a value-free approach. They caution practitioners to
remember that the client must be allowed to accept or refuse the forgiveness option. In
this phase the components include providing discussion of the definition of forgiveness.
If the client chooses forgiveness, the decision to forgive is made at this juncture. This is
a cognitive act that entails making a commitment to abandon resentment meaning that,
except in therapy sessions, the victim will not speak unkindly about the offender nor will
revenge seeking behaviors be considered. The affective part of the process will take
additional time.

When the client chooses forgiveness, the Work Phase commences. There are four
components of this phase that focus upon a) reframing, b) developing empathy and
possibly compassion for the wrongdoer, c) “bearing/accepting the pain”, and d)”giving a
moral gift to the offender” (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, p.68). A large part of this
phase is asking the client to focus on understanding the offender. With what the authors
call reframing, the client is asked to think about such matters as how the growing up
years might have been for the offender, what might have been happening for the offender
at the time of the offense, and that the offender is part of the human community. These
questions address the cognitive changes that lay the groundwork for the later affective
changes. They are designed to help the victim see the personhood of the offender separate
from the offender’s objectionable acts. To develop empathy for the offender, the client is
asked to imagine how the offender might feel by stepping into the offender’s shoes.
According to these authors, compassion develops automatically in conjunction with empathy. The mechanism for bringing compassion forward is a mystery. After the therapist actively encourages empathic understanding, nothing further is required on the part of the therapist for compassion to emerge. Next, by bearing the pain, the authors are not meaning to imply that the client must remain angry and depressed forever, but rather this component speaks of an acceptance that allows one to become free of entrenched negative patterns and to move beyond hurtful ways of being. This does not mean that fairness cannot be sought. It does mean that the proceedings around seeking fairness are less acrimonious, and therefore less troubling. Finally in this phase, the “giving a moral gift” involves some form of expressing the beneficence that is now extended to the offender (p.84). This does not necessarily mean reconciliation with the offender. The authors give examples of one incest survivor who was able to speak more openly to her children about the good things her father did, or one incest survivor did decide to care for her father in the hospital when he was ill. Part of this phase may involve going back to earlier phases, for example to review the definition of forgiveness or to express some of the painful emotions associated with the offense.

The final phase is The Deepening Phase. The various components of this phase may appear earlier in the process. One component of healing entails finding meaning in the suffering. The therapist can ask questions designed to encourage the discussion about how the client understands suffering. Some clients can see or work toward making benefits come out of the experience with the offense. During this phase, the client might re-enter earlier phases to deepen the forgiveness of the offender. Also, new
understandings about the offender might be applied to other situations where forgiveness could be considered. The therapist may lead the client to think about times when he/she engaged in some wrongdoing where others did or did not forgive. Recalling how it felt to be forgiven or not can inspire a person to forgive. Having successfully moved through this process, some clients eventually want to find some way to share their learning with others who may face similar difficulties. By going through this phase, the client can experience a cognitive and emotional release from the negative impact of the offense and a greater sense of wellbeing emerges. There is no set time frame for the phases to be completed, so clients may vary greatly in their process of moving toward forgiveness.

**Underlying Assumptions for the Process Model of Forgiveness**

Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) say that forgiveness therapy can be added to existing treatment methods such as psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, or family systems to strengthen the interventions when indicated. They discuss seven assumptions of forgiveness therapy that may vary from more traditional ways of approaching emotional recovery. First, forgiveness therapy focuses much of the attention on the offender. The client’s cognitive and emotional status is reviewed as a means of getting to the offender. The primary problem is seen as the injustice, with troubling emotions mounting as the secondary result of unresolved reaction to unfair treatment.

The second assumption is that in cases where the client has truly been victimized, the primary emotions could be bitterness or resentment. Over time, secondary emotional problems that appear in the form of anger, anxiety, depression, or lowered self-esteem may grow if the primary responses of bitterness and resentment are not addressed. The
lingering of these secondary emotions often brings the client to the therapy situation. The therapy should concentrate on addressing the bitterness or resentments first. As compassion for the offender develops and beneficence takes the place of bitterness, the secondary emotions are expected to dissipate.

The remaining five assumptions are a bit less complex. The third assumption is that forgiveness therapy should be offered in those cases where, as the forgiveness definition states (see page 55), there is a rational determination of unfairness. Some people have such a sense of entitlement that unfairness may be seen in any situation where the person doesn’t get what is wanted. The authors say it’s not helpful to support this stance with forgiveness therapy. Fourth, “forgiveness therapy is explicitly moral . . . The therapist must be ready to not only help the client focus on the offender but also to do so with the language of morality – fairness and unfairness, mercy, even love” (p.107). Fifth, in this approach the therapist brings up the idea of forgiveness therapy. Clients would be unlikely to think of forgiveness and may have confused notions about the meaning of the word. It is up to the therapist to introduce the option and educate about it. Sixth, forgiveness has the potential to move the client from a self-identification of victim to a survivor identity. There is the potential for transformation with regard to how one views self in relation to the offender. The seventh and last assumption is that the forgiveness learned about specific unfairness may be generalized as a way of managing responses to other unfairness that crops up in the course of daily living.
This summary of the Process Model of forgiveness raises question about Worthington’s (2006) charges that the model fails “to articulate the theory of change” (p.22). To think more carefully about Worthington’s assessments of the model’s weaknesses, it seems that a good definition of theory is needed. For that purpose Kazdin’s (2003) definition acceptable as he states:

Theory, broadly defined, refers to a conceptualization of the phenomenon of interest. The conceptualization may encompass views about the nature, antecedents, causes, correlates, and consequences of a particular characteristic or aspect of functioning. Also, the theory may specify the relations of various constructs to each other. (p.124)

The process model described above outlines a conceptualization of “how people go about forgiving” (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, p.66). In other words, the model explicates a set of constructs that describe the possible responses to unfair treatment and then shows the steps involved in moving from harboring resentment to a state of forgiveness? The authors have conceptualized the pathway to the potential benefits of arriving at the forgiveness state as well? All of the elements needed to qualify as a theory seem to be in place. Perhaps some explanation of how the process model was developed would further clarify the point.

Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) explain the procedure that was used to develop the process model. In 1985, some professionals were just starting to write about forgiveness, but no scientific work appeared in the literature. A study group was formed
at the University of Wisconsin – Madison for the purpose of working toward an understanding of how people forgive. Based on their investigations of the subject partly using existing non-scientific literature, the study group developed the beginnings of the process model. Denton and Martin (1998) took the model to 101 experienced clinical social worker members of the North Carolina Society of Clinical Social Work to ask if the model fit with their experience of the way forgiveness occurred. After getting confirmation from the social work group, the model was taken to people who had encountered some form of unfairness to get input about personal experiences of the forgiveness process (Baskin & Enright, 2004). The model has been refined over the years as researchers recognized that additional components would more accurately describe the forgiveness process. The approach incorporates an understanding of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of human functioning. The process model has been researched in clinical settings and the research support for the model will be considered next.

Empirical Support for the Process Model

At the time Enright and Fitzgibbons’ (2000) book was published there were four empirical research studies (Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995; Coyle & Enright, 1997; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Hebl & Enright, 1993) to show scientific support for the process model. Studies were conducted with both men and women that ranged in age from young adults to elderly adults. Different problem areas were studied using different clinicians, with some interventions occurring in a group setting and others taking place in individual sessions. Results of the studies show such outcomes as statistically significant
increases in forgiveness, hope, self-esteem and decreases in anxiety, depression, and anger compared to control participants who did not receive the specific forgiveness intervention.

More recently, Baskin and Enright (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of the published research on forgiveness interventions available at that time. Nine studies were categorized into decision based group interventions (4 studies), process based individual (2 studies) or process based group (3 studies) interventions (total N = 330). The decision-based models center exclusively around the cognitive aspects of forgiveness. Essentially clients are educated about forgiveness and asked to make a decision to forgive. All of the decision-based interventions took place in a group format with two of the interventions lasting for a single one-hour session. One decision based group consisted of four sessions and one lasted for eight sessions. With one exception (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997), the process interventions were based on the process model described in this paper. A key distinguishing feature of the process models is the inclusion of both cognitive and affective components. The person makes a decision to forgive and then moves toward feeling some forgiveness with empathy toward the offender contributing a critical element to the process. When looking at measures of forgiveness and emotional health measures, compared to control groups, “the decision-based interventions showed no effect, the process-based group interventions showed significant effects, and the process-based individual interventions showed large effects” (p.79). In part the greater effect of the individual interventions is attributed to the length of time in treatment. Two of the process groups met for eight sessions and one
group met six times. Individual interventions consisted of twelve meetings in one study and fifty-two or more sessions in another study.

In the most recent update on the process model, Freedman, Enright, and Knutson (2005) report that several additional studies showing support for the model have been completed. The studies cover such diverse age groups and problem definitions as cancer patients facing end of life issues, young adolescents (ages 12-14) with anger issues, adolescents forgiving when parents divorce, and forgiveness as an intervention to strengthen marriages. An example of the way the research is typically conducted can be found in Lin and colleagues (2004) report on their study of 14 individuals in a residential substance abuse treatment facility. When comparing the forgiveness treatment (FT) where there was no focus on educating about substance abuse relapse vulnerabilities with regular substance abuse treatment where such education did take place, the researchers found that:

The FT group demonstrated significantly greater improvement from pretest to posttest according to one-tailed \( t \) tests of changes in forgiveness, composite anxiety, trait anxiety, composite anger, depression, trait (but not state) anger, self-esteem and vulnerability to drug use. . . At 4-month follow-up, . . .the two groups exhibited significant differences in regard to improvements in forgiveness, anxiety (and trait anxiety), depression, self-esteem, and vulnerability to drug use favoring the forgiveness condition. (p.1117)

The authors caution that these results are based on a very small sample, so results cannot be generalized to other populations. However, the significant results do point to the
usefulness of FT with substance abuse treatment when resentment about unfair treatment is a factor.

Again, back to Worthington’s (2006) “failure to connect basic research with the clinical theory” (p.22) criticism, it does appear that Enright and his colleagues are making efforts to conduct the research to test the model. Interestingly, in one of the earlier studies with college students who identified parental love deprivation (Al-Mabuk, Enright, and Cardis, 1995), the model was enacted only up through the Decision Phase in a four-session group. The forgiveness group differed from control group members on Hope and Willingness to Forgive, but scales used to measure attitudes toward parents showed no differences. This was a sign that the participants had not actually forgiven the uninvolved parent. Using a similar participant sample, a second study was completed with a six-session group that included the reframing, empathy, and bearing the pain components of the Work Phase. With the addition of these components, the experimental group measures indicated improvements in “forgiveness, trait anxiety, self-esteem, hope, and attitude toward parents” (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, p.99). This shows some attempt to determine what components in the model are crucial for the desired outcomes.

In the current progress update of the process model, the authors conclude that based on the research completed thus far, “The state of forgiveness intervention work using Enright’s process model is sound” (Freedman, Enright, and Knutson, 2005, p. 404). Before moving on from this theory, there is one more part of Worthington’s (2006) criticism that deserves attention. He claims that Enright’s assertions about the power and universality of the model are overstated. In the list of research on the process model
I see participants who are 12-14 years old, college age, adults, and older adults. A variety of problem situations have been studied. I do not see participants who are early childhood or childhood age, nor do I see adolescents from about age 15-18. I see studies where the interventions have been carried out with individuals, couples, and in a group format. I do not see studies where the intervention is used with a family or in other larger system arenas such as a community. So the available research does suggest that the intervention has widespread applicability, but information about its efficacy in certain formats is lacking.

Worthington also has a distinct viewpoint about how the forgiveness process occurs. Since Worthington’s thinking about forgiveness provides another way to understand the process, his model will be reviewed next.

**Worthington on Forgiveness: The Biopsychosocial Stress-and-Coping Theory**

As mentioned earlier, Everett Worthington, Jr. (2006) reviews his current thinking about forgiveness in his most recent book, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Theory and Application*. His book starts with an explanation of how he will be distinguishing his work from others in the forgiveness field. Others construct models comprised of concepts that are put together. In Worthington’s view, a theory brings several models together to, in this case, supplement our understanding of human behavior. His ambitious list of explanatory models include: “The biology of stress, the justice motive, coping theory, positive psychology, emotion- motivation models, the social psychology of predicaments and accounts, intergroup relations, and societal interactions” (p. ix). To this list he adds clinical models that he will use such as “psychodynamic theories,
emotion-focused therapy, integrative behavior therapy, hope-focused relationship enhancement, and solution-focused therapy” (p.ix). Worthington provides a comprehensive account of his theory in the 2006 Forgiveness and Reconciliation book.

For the purposes of my research, a few relevant points from that book will be highlighted here.

Worthington (2006) explains that one possible response to a transgression is unforgiveness, a word that he defines as

. . . a stress reaction in response to an appraisal of threat, or sometimes challenge. . . Emotional unforgiveness is . . . a complex of emotions experienced at some time later than a transgression. . . Those emotions involve resentment, bitterness, hostility, hatred, anger, and fear. They arise from perceiving that one has experienced a transgression. (p. 49)

An entire chapter of Worthington’s (2006) book is devoted to the research supporting the idea that unforgiveness is a stress reaction.

Generally, when people perceive threats, a number of possible strategies can be called upon to cope with the disturbance. With a problem-solving coping strategy, the focus is on trying to change some external arrangement. In the case of an offense, efforts may be made to bring the offender to justice. Both emotion-focused and meaning-focused strategies involve attempts to impact the inner world by trying to control emotions or by attributing a more tolerable meaning to the offense. Worthington cites research showing that the problem-solving focus works best for stress relief when it is possible to affect some environmental change. When external change is not feasible,
emotion-focused strategies are better. The strategies that are used for coping with threat may be called upon to reduce unforgiveness. For example, the victim may make small external changes like not seeing the offender or internal changes like trying to curb the ruminations about the offender before they escalate.

Worthington’s (2006) different definitions of forgiveness make sense in the context of his view that that forgiveness is a coping mechanism. He specifies two aspects of forgiveness. Decisional forgiveness is “a behavioral intention statement that one will seek to behave toward the transgressor like one did prior to the transgression. One decides to release the transgressor from the debt” (p.56). Emotional forgiveness is the emotional juxtaposition of positive other oriented emotions against negative unforgiveness, which eventually results in neutralization or replacement of all or part of those negative emotions with positive emotions. The positive emotions that lead to emotional forgiveness have been identified as empathy, sympathy, compassion, romantic love, and altruistic love. (p.58)

Some changes will probably follow the decision to forgive as a result of having the intention to be more positive about the situation. The emotional reactions may change as a result of the decision, but not necessarily. Emotional forgiveness is a necessary part of the forgiveness process. For emotional forgiveness, Worthington (2006) does not advocate suppressing negative feelings, but rather he recommends making a conscious effort to add a more positive emotion when a negative emotion surfaces. The positive emotion has the effect of neutralizing or eventually may replace the negative one.
Essentially, in this process, one is moving away from unforgiveness as positive emotions deactivate the negative ones. In time, a person becomes less unforgiving and may ultimately arrive at forgiveness. Forgiveness is understood as having either a neutral or positive emotion toward the offender. Any number of factors may set off the emotional forgiveness such as a change in the offender’s behavior, a decision on the part of the victim, or some opportunity for the victim to express emotions related to the offense. Worthington believes that emotional replacement is always the mechanism that underlies emotional forgiveness regardless of what gets the process started.

Again, Worthington (2006) devotes an entire chapter to reviewing the research support for his emotional replacement theory. Perhaps the most compelling corroboration comes from Fredrickson’s (2001) *Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions*. Fredrickson (2001) explains that negative emotions such as fear, anger, or disgust are known to narrow the thinking about potential actions. Such emotions call for actions that are adaptive for survival. So, for example, if fear is a signal that warns about the need to escape, decisive action is required to seek safety. Physiological changes occur to assist with the necessary emergency action associated with these negative emotional states. In contrast, the broaden-and-build theory holds that “certain discrete positive emotions— including joy, interest, contentment, pride, and love—although phenomenologically distinct, all share the ability to broaden people’s momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources” (Fredrickson, 2001, p. 219). Positive emotions allow one to broaden the thinking about alternatives for
acting and, thus, contribute to the creation of resources that can be used in the present moment and also can be stored for future use. In this way, positive emotions serve to facilitate long-term adaptation. Fredrickson believes that positive emotions can “undo” the effects of negative emotions. She discusses her research where participants were placed in an anxiety producing speech situation and then watched one of four films showing positive emotion, neutral emotion, or sadness. The cardiovascular effects of the negative emotional state were undone for the participants who watched the positive emotion films (joy and contentment). Fredrickson believes that positive emotion can be encouraged and developed as a way to cope with negative emotion for the purpose of enhancing psychological and maybe physical wellbeing.

Worthington does provide an intervention model that is based on the biopsychosocial stress-and-coping theory. He calls the model REACH. A synopsis of the REACH model will be provided next.

**REACH Model of Forgiveness**

The summary of the Worthington’s REACH model is taken from the same 2006 book that described his most current thinking about theory related to forgiveness. Worthington (2006) says that the intervention begins before the first step in the model takes place. The therapist has established some rapport with the client. When a client brings a situation that calls for coping with what he calls a justice gap, both decisional and emotional forgiveness are defined. As the REACH Model is outlined, the comparable units from the Process Model of Forgiveness (PMF) discussed earlier will be placed next to the REACH units to compare the two models.
**R = Recall the Hurt**- (Similar to Uncovering Phase in PMF) Clients express emotions associated with the transgression.

**E = Empathize with the Person Who Hurt You** – (Empathy unit in Work Phase of PMF). Clients are helped to cultivate the “positive other-oriented emotions” of empathy, sympathy, compassion, or love for the offender (p.170).

**A = Give an Altruistic Gift of Forgiveness** – (“Giving a moral gift to the offender” in Work Phase of PMF (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, p.68)) Clients are encouraged to think altruistically about the offender and give the forgiveness based on that altruistic attitude.

**C = Commit to Emotional Forgiveness That Was Experienced** – In this step “the person makes a public commitment to the progress made” (p. 171). The commitment may be made just to the therapist. The step has some similarity to the “giving a moral gift to the offender” unit in the PMF. In the PMF, “giving a moral gift” means, in part, giving expression to the fact that forgiveness is occurring.

**H = Hold onto Forgiveness When Doubts Arise** – This step is designed to help clients maintain gains and apply forgiveness to other transgressions that may develop. One of the assumptions in the PMF is that the learning from going through one forgiveness process will be generalized and applied to other situations of unfairness that may appear.

While the REACH model can be added to psychotherapy interventions with individuals, couples, and families, the research on the model is based on psychoeducational groups comprised of members who were not in psychotherapy (Worthington, 2006). A good overview of the research on the model can be found in Wade, Worthington, and Meyer’s (2005) meta-analysis of 27 studies of groups designed
to encourage forgiveness. These authors pull the data on the REACH interventions out of their overall analysis to look more closely at the outcome details of this particular model. Thirteen REACH treatment groups were studied. Four of the groups used the full REACH model. Participants in those groups were helped to reduce unforgiveness and the intervention was more effective in producing the desired outcomes than the no-treatment control conditions. In two of the studies, the outcomes did not differ from comparison groups where, for example, general communication skills were the intervention focus. Nine treatment groups that used an earlier version of the model with only the REA units were reviewed. These authors note that there were some “small” gains (effect size .12 - .40) in forgiveness even in the 1 or 2-hour intervention sessions, but “modest” gains that “may be more clinically significant” can be found with the 6 to 8 hour intervention (p.431). Full treatment also produces greater effect sizes (.35 - .95) indicated by pre-treatment to post-treatment measures. This analysis was only looking at measures of forgiveness and did not take measures of overall wellbeing or physical health into account. The authors note that “from this research, it is still not clear whether the specific forgiveness interventions are more effective than comparison treatments” (p.431).

**The Questions that Remain**

As a way of wrapping up, a review of the biggest questions that remain after looking at all of this material about forgiveness is in order. Two central questions stand out. Is it possible to heal following an offense in ways that do not involve forgiveness? Also, what is the role of empathy in the forgiveness outcomes?
With regard to the question about options for healing, no mention was found in the Enright and Fitzbibbons’ (2000) work about the possibility that one could have improved mental health by a psychological disengaging from effects of the offense. Worthington (2006) makes a hardly noticeable statement that the stress of unforgiveness might be managed by “accepting and letting go” if forgiveness does not work (p. 160). Highlighting this other possibility, Malcolm and Greenberg (2000) more clearly contend that psychological resolution about the hurt may occur without forgiveness. These researchers developed a forgiveness model that was constructed over time from a series of recorded observations made during psychotherapy contact with individual clients. In an example, they compare the therapeutic process of a client who forgives to the process of a client who arrives at resolution by holding the offender accountable, but not forgiving the offender. The client who did not forgive also did not show evidence of feeling empathy for the offender. Instead, as the client felt stronger, the offender was no longer viewed as a threat. Malcom and Greenburg (2000) note that additional research is needed to examine the differences in psychological well being between clients who resolve hurts by forgiveness and those who arrive at a resolution without forgiveness. I have not seen any mention of research devoted to the psychological and physical well-being of people who resolve hurts by essentially letting go, but not forgiving.

When thinking about the question regarding the role of the empathy components of the interventions, the work of psychologist, Martin Hoffman (2000) comes to mind. Hoffman believes that human beings are empathic by nature and, because empathy supports behaviors that are adaptive for group survival, empathy remains part of human
nature through the process of natural selection. Interestingly, the forgiveness interventions that focused on empathy had successful forgiveness outcomes and those that focused strictly on the forgiveness decision were not as effective (see Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997 for comparisons of both types). In Wade, Worthington, and Meyer’s meta-analysis report (2005), the authors say that existing research suggests that no method of forgiveness intervention seems to be superior to other methods. Their analysis, however, points to the possibility that “empathizing with offenders, committing to forgiveness, and overcoming feelings of unforgiveness, are more effective components” (p.435).

It is possible to imagine that one would have to make a commitment to forgiving in order to dive into the painful process of trying to understand the offender. Then repeated efforts to let go of unforgiveness would be needed to sustain the gains that might have been made as a result of the empathic response to the offender. This course of events is likely to be promoted by the process model.

Worthington’s emotional replacement model does not seem to require empathy as such. Worthington (2006) states, “A person does not have to empathize with the offender for emotional forgiveness to occur. However, if the person does empathize, forgiveness will probably occur” (p.178). As well as I can determine from Worthington’s (2006) writing, the E step in his model can call on any of the positive emotions such as sympathy, or compassion for the offender for emotional replacement purposes. In Worthington’s possible exercises for the E step, he does include an exercise that involves asking the victim to understand what might have contributed to the offender’s behavior
such as pressures, background factors, or provocations. He offers a list of exercises to promote empathy, but does not specify that these exercises are required. By way of contrast, in the process model, the reframing component is required and strategically placed before the emotional component requiring the victim to “step inside the other’s shoes” (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, p.81). If Hoffman’s (2000) theory is correct and it is human nature to have an empathic response, then knowing more about the offender’s situation and trying to understand the offender’s experience, could indeed be keys in facilitating a change in the victim’s perception.

It seems possible that Worthington’s emphasis on emotional replacement could keep the victim somewhat self-involved rather than directing attention to the offender’s circumstances. If one is concentrating on having or not having an emotion, the focus is on the self and only indirectly on the other. Worthington (2006) reports on his own research comparing interventions directed at telling participants the personal benefits of forgiveness (self-enhancement) to interventions that “appeal to people’s altruistic motives by promoting empathy and a focus on giving a gift of forgiveness to the perpetrator” (pp.228-229). In the very brief groups, the gain in forgiveness seemed to be about the same between the self-enhancement and altruistic intervention groups. After working on forgiveness for at least two to four hours, the altruistic motives groups that work on empathy “produce much large effects than do self-enhancement groups” (p.229). This suggests that there is something about understanding the offender that contributes to the healing process.
As already mentioned, stories about unexpected healing that result from understanding the offender are recorded in some restorative justice literature (e.g., Angel, 2005; Braithwaite, 1995; Dickey, 1998; Umbreit & Vos, 2000). This unanticipated result draws attention to the significance of empathy and raises question about what elements are required for healing. Is emotional replacement sufficient for healing to move forward or is empathic understanding of the offender a crucial component of healing and/or forgiveness? To add a layer of context to this and other matters that will be discussed further, moral development theory will be considered next.

**A Closer Look at Moral Development**

The subject of moral development theory is complex and well beyond the scope of what can be addressed in a comprehensive way for the purposes of this writing. Here I will try to point out some key processes that appear to relate to the foundation of forgiveness outcomes. As a starting point, perspective-taking ability will be addressed.

All of the information presented thus far indicates that an ability to understand another’s experience is a key component in reaching a peaceful, productive resolution when an offense has occurred. The resolution may be an internal, psychological one, as fostered by the forgiveness models, or it may include interpersonal corrections. Conversely, the inability to accurately take the perspective of the other can contribute to aggression and antisocial behavior (Gibbs, 2010). Again, Berk (2003) defines perspective taking as “the capacity to imagine what other people may be thinking or feeling” (p.465). Robert Selman (1980) is credited with notable research and
development of theory about social perspective taking. Selman (1980) explains that his theory about social perspective taking is structural-developmental, meaning that there is . . . an interest in describing an invariant sequence of cognitively based stages, or qualitatively distinct ways of organizing and understanding a certain domain of experience, through which all children pass. . . . [T]he emphasis is on the structure rather than on the content of thought, on universal patterns of thinking rather than on emotions or behavior (p. 23).

The theory is built upon Mead’s social conceptual model, Piaget’s structural model, and Kohlberg’s theory of moral development. Some of Selman’s research was conducted by first reviewing results of 100 interviews of research participants who were instructed to share their reasoning about hypothetical moral dilemmas by Kohlberg and his colleagues. One hundred additional interviews were conducted using new dilemmas devised by Selman and Kohlberg to be more relevant to the everyday social experiences of children and adolescence. Selman explains that moral dilemmas were particularly well suited for the task of understanding perspective taking because “the child in a general sense structures and understands his or her social environment through perspective taking, and the child’s moral reasoning will depend in part on his or her perspective taking” (Selman, 1980, p. 36). Also, the moral development dilemma interviews require participants to consider various points of view. The interviewer may follow up with inquiries about the “interviewee’s theory of human relations, his or her beliefs about individuals, motives, and feelings, and his or her strategies for resolving human conflict” (p. 36). As a result of
this undertaking, Selman (1980) arrived at five levels of social perspective taking that account for the “individual’s understanding of the interactional character of the relation of self to other at the same time as they describe changes in the child’s theory of what constitutes an individual, be it self or other” (p.36). The five stages are:

Level 0: Undifferentiated and Egocentric Perspective Taking (about ages 3 to 6)
At this stage, the child does not differentiate physical and psychological characteristics. There may be recognition that others have different thoughts and feelings, but the child confuses his or her own thoughts with the thoughts of others (tends to think that others see things the way he or she does). Differences between action and feelings, or intentional and unintentional behavior may be confused.

Level 1: Differential and Subjective Perspective Taking (about ages 5 to 9)
At this stage, the child is able to differentiate between the physical and psychological characteristics of people. The difference between intentional and unintentional acts can be discerned and there is recognition that each person has an individual, subjective psychological life. Differences between self and other are recognized at a very simple level. Understanding of perspectives occurs in what Selman calls “one-way, unilateral terms” and gives the example, “a gift makes someone happy” (p.38). Children at this stage typically do not see two-way reciprocity in the interaction unless it involves some very simple axiom such as, if you are hit, hit back. Action requires similar action in response.

Level 2: Self-reflective/Second-person and Reciprocal Perspective Taking (about ages 7 to 12)
At this level, children can reflect on their own thinking and actions and they realize that others can also do so. They can understand that a person can have multiple thoughts or feelings, but these states are viewed as being weighted or sequential, for example, “mostly curious and happy and a little scared” (p.38). The difference between intentions and actions can be understood, so it is recognized that a person can do something that was not intentional. Also, children at this level can be aware that people display social appearances that may be different from a hidden, private self (with this awareness comes the recognition that others can deceive). Reciprocal relations at this level means that children are capable of putting themselves in the other person’s shoes and they grasp that the other person is capable of doing so as well.

**Level 3: Third-person and Mutual Perspective Taking (about Ages 10-15)**

At this level, adolescents see people as “systems of attitudes and values fairly consistent over the long haul, as opposed to randomly changeable assortment of states at Level 2” (p.39). Selman (1980) goes on to say that at Level 3 the person is able to take a third person perspective. He explains that at Level 2 there was a constant going back and forth between perspectives of self and other. At Level 3, the adolescent can step outside of the interaction and at the same time “consider the perspectives (and their interactions) of self and other(s)” (p.39). According to Selman (1980):

> Subjects thinking at this level see the need to coordinate reciprocal perspectives, and believe social satisfaction, understanding, or resolution must be mutual and coordinated to be genuine and effective. Relations are viewed more as ongoing systems in which thoughts and
experiences are mutually shared. (p.39)

**Level 4: In-depth and Societal-Symbolic Perspective Taking (about 12 to adult)**

At this level, the person understands that actions, thoughts, and feelings may have psychological underpinnings, but the individual self may not understand these psychological motives. This is the recognition of some unconscious influences. Also, at this level, the person can take a “generalized other” perspective (p.40). That is, the person can move beyond the face-to-face interaction of the immediate social group and see that there are a number of societal or moral perspectives that all individuals may share. According to Selman (1980), “Each self is believed to consider this shared point of view of the generalized other or social system in order to facilitate accurate communication and understanding” (p.40).

This structural-developmental model is based on the assumption that children are not passively receiving information about social expectations from parents, teachers, or others in authority. In this view, children interpret social situations at the level that makes sense to them cognitively. They rely upon their own constantly developing cognitive structures to understand their social worlds and they are moved to grow to the next developmental level when they have some experience that cannot be explained by their current understanding. Selman (1980) gives the example that young children, ages 3 to 6, tend to think that they can only have one friend at a time. The friend is the one that the child is seeing at the moment. As the children have different experiences that contradict the original belief, (in this case they observe that they can have more than one friend at a time), they take this new understanding (accommodation) into their belief.
system, and thus are interpreting a greater degree of complexity in their social experience.

Berk (2003) highlights additional relevant information about social perspective taking in her summary of the research on that topic. She notes that “[c]ognitive development contributes to advances in perspective taking” (p. 466). As Selman (1980) originally theorized, social cognition does appear to stand apart from “cognitive structures applied to social contexts” (Selman, 1980, p. 35). According to Berk’s (2003) review, children are apt to accomplish Piagetian concrete operational and formal operational tasks earlier than the associated social perspective-taking level (Levels 1 or 2, and 3 or 4 respectively). Berk (2003) further notes that children of the same age have different levels of skill at social perspective taking and she attributes the differences to variation in opportunities to learn about a range of viewpoints from peers and adults.

There are many benefits related to being a good perspective taker. People who anticipate the experience of those around them are more likely to get along with others, to display sympathy, and empathy, and they are more effective at working with difficult social situations. With all of these attributes, their peers tend to like them. Berk (2003) does point out that good perspective taking ability does not necessarily result in prosocial behavior. The person’s temperament is an additional factor in determining behavioral outcomes. Children who are better at regulating their emotions are also more likely to engage in helpful, productive problem solving behavior.

To see the connection between social perspective taking and forgiveness, I will return briefly to the *Styles of Forgiveness* that Enright and Fitzgibbon’s (2000) discuss.
Interestingly, like Selman, Enright and his colleagues used the reasoning about moral dilemmas to arrive at these styles (Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989). A direct correspondence can be observed between the Styles of Forgiveness and Selman’s social perspective taking levels. For example, Selman’s Level 3 requires third person perspective taking and in forgiveness Style 3, Expectational Forgiveness, forgiveness occurs if the immediate social group, such as family or peers, expects that response. The adolescent has to be able to comprehend the perspective of the social group in order to act according to their norms. Similarly, the person who engages in Lawful Expectational Forgiveness, theoretically would have to be at the level of societal or generalized other perspective taking in order to be aware of the societal or institutional expectations, and consequently, to act based on that awareness.

The ability to take the perspective of others is obviously an attribute that is necessary to forgive others in the way that Enright and Fitzgibbon’s (2000) recommend. Also, as already mentioned, taking the perspective of others is an ingredient in constructive problem solving in complex social situations (Berk, 2003). Before leaving the subject of perspective taking, I would like to briefly consider the opposite extreme, those who have limited ability to take the perspective of others. These individuals who have difficulty taking the perspective of others are the one’s who may need forgiveness for antisocial behavior. As Berk (2003) states:

[C]hildren and adolescents with poor social skills- in particular, the angry, aggressive styles. . . .have great difficulty imagining the thoughts and feelings of others. They often mistreat adults
and peers without experiencing the guilt and remorse prompted by another’s point of view (p.468).

With this basic information about perspective taking in place, I will turn to John C. Gibbs’ (2010) conceptualization of moral development as explained in his book, *Moral Development and Reality*. As a starting place, it is useful to understand the distinction between pragmatic reciprocity and ideal reciprocity. Gibb’s discusses Piaget’s observations that as cognitive development progresses, more and more aspects of the complexities of a situation can be held in mind and coordinated simultaneously. The conservation task is provided as an example of this point. If a 3-6 year old child watches water being poured from a short round container to a taller, more slender round container, the child is likely to say that there is more water in the taller container because the tallness is the salient feature that can be observed. The tallness stands out for the child more than the fact that he/she observed the same amount of water being poured into the differently shaped container.

By childhood age (starting at age 7), the child’s cognitive capacity develops so that the child now recognizes that the same amount of water landed in the taller container. Even though the container is shaped differently, the amount of transferred water remains the same. This understanding is based on logic. Logic also informs the comprehension of fairness or justice in the moral realm. At this point in cognitive development, the child can comprehend a simple fairness based on evenness and equality. This means that an “eye for an eye” is the fair type of response for an offense and “if you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours” is the correct way to respond to an act of kindness. Gibbs (2010)
explains that Kohlberg called this type of reciprocity “pragmatic” (p.36). It is based on the assumption that one behaves in a particular way to insure that others will do the same. For example, one does favors for another because there may be a need to have a favor returned. The Level 2 social perspective taking ability of the childhood age (7-12) contributes to this beginning approach to morality because youngsters are now capable of grasping what others might be experiencing and they can recognize that other people make assessments of them.

To continue with Gibbs’ explanation (2010), as the child grows older and cognitive capacities increase further, social perspective taking capabilities increase as well. With the onset of early adolescence (no earlier than age 11), a qualitative change takes place in cognitive functioning that permits the young person to move from strictly concrete thinking to include hypothetical reasoning in the response repertoire. Level 3, third person perspective taking can then emerge with these new found capacities for abstract thinking. At this level, the young person can psychologically step outside of an interaction and have some understanding of what each party may be experiencing along with the context that drives the experience. With this increase in ability to take in the intricacies of a situation, the young person is also capable of moving toward ideal reciprocity in moral reasoning.

According to Gibbs (2010), a “Golden Rule, do as you would be done by” approach guides the ideal reciprocity stance (p.38). Perspective taking at this level takes in the “moral point view,” meaning that the Kantian criteria of mutual respect and reversibility are contained in the reasoning about the behavior under consideration (p.2).
Quoting Baier, Gibbs (2010) sums up the concept of reversibility by explaining that, “the behavior in question must be acceptable to a [mentally and emotionally healthy, adequately informed, etc.] person whether he is at the ‘giving’ or ‘receiving’ end of it” (p. 2). So, the victim of an offense functioning at this level of ideal reciprocity would not simply retaliate in kind, or treat someone else in a similarly offensive manner, as might be the likely response at the level of pragmatic reciprocity. From the standpoint of social cognitive perspective taking, the victim responding out of ideal reciprocity could take into account the context of the offense and could consider treating the offender in a respectful manner even though the offender did not give the victim similar consideration. For Gibbs (2010), this kind of response would reflect mature moral judgment. In his words, “Moral judgment is mature insofar as it appeals to the intangible, ideal bases (mutual trust, caring, and respect) and moral point of view (ideal reciprocity, How would you or anyone wish to be treated?) of social life” (p.72).

Gibbs (2010) expands the understanding of mature morality by adding the necessary element of empathy. According to Gibbs, the cognitive attributes address the fairness aspects of moral functioning, but the depiction of moral functioning is incomplete without the addition of caring. Empathy for the other sparks a caring response and, by this means, empathy drives the affective component of moral functioning. Gibbs discusses Martin Hoffman’s (2000) thinking about the connection between empathy and moral behavior to give a thorough rendering of human behavior in the moral development domain.
Because Hoffman’s thinking about empathy provides a crucial framework for what might impact forgiveness generally and for explaining why forgiveness often occurs unexpectedly in the restorative justice process, I too, will turn directly to Hoffman’s (2000) writing. Hoffman (2000) points out two common ways of defining empathy as “(a) . . . the cognitive awareness of another person’s internal states, that is, his thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and intentions. . .; (b) empathy is the vicarious affective response to another person” (p.29). Hoffman’s work is devoted to the affective side of empathy, which he believes is a facet of human biology that has been sustained through natural selection because of its usefulness for supporting life.

To point out the part that empathy plays in moral behavior, Hoffman (2000) starts with his concept of empathic distress. He explains that one observes another person in “discomfort, pain, danger, or some other type of distress,” the empathic response also contains some distress (p. 30). In many instances, this distress motivates the observer to try to help. Exceptions to this motivation can be found in situations where the cost of helping may be too high for the individual observer. When empathic distress is set in motion, helping behavior decreases the empathic distress. Conversely, the empathic distress is likely to continue if the one in need is not helped. In short, empathic distress provides an impetus for prosocial behaviors.

In Hoffman’s (2000) framework, empathic functioning comes into being through five “empathy-arousing modes” (p. 36). He explains that the first three of these modes are “primitive, automatic, and, most important, involuntary” (p.36). Mimicry is the first empathy-arousing condition that Hoffman describes. Using his review of the research,
Hoffman makes the case that mimicry comes about by means of an automatic, involuntary two-step process that involves imitation and feedback. First there is the automatic tendency to physically imitate what is being observed in the emotional displays of others. As Hoffman explains, “people tend automatically to imitate the emotional expressions of people around them – their facial expression, vocal expression, and probably their posture” (p.39). So, for example, a 10-week-old infant will make beginning attempts to imitate the caregiver’s facial cues that show anger or happiness and this type of response continues through adulthood. Through what Hoffman calls afferent feedback, the facial expression automatically influences the emotional experience that one has. According to the Webster’s New World Dictionary (Guralnik, 1982), afferent is a physiology term that means “ bring inward to a central part; [specifically], designating nerves that transmit impulses toward a nerve center” (p.12). Hoffman makes the case for facial expressions conveying specific emotions that are universal. While the expressions may be refined by cultural and social influences, existing information supports the premise that there are inborn emotions that are displayed through universally recognizable facial expressions. Putting all of this information together, Hoffman concludes “that mimicry is probably a hard-wired neurologically based empathy-arousing mechanism whose two steps, imitation and feedback, are directed by commands from the central nervous system” (p.44). This conceptualization of mimicry explains the quickness of the response as well as the natural tendency of infants to react empathically (e.g., automatically cry if a cry is heard) even though they may not have prior experience with an observed expression of the emotion that is involved.
The second primitive empathy-arousing mode comes about through classical conditioning. Hoffman believes that the classical conditioning mode is particularly important in the preverbal early childhood years. This mode comes into play when something in a situation prompts the observer to experience distress at the same time that they are seeing someone else in distress. So, for example, if a mother is feeling especially anxious and upset, she will be likely to convey that upset to her baby in a variety of ways such as the expression on her face, the tone of voice, and a tense tightness in her body. The body tension affects the baby who is being held and the baby experiences upset as a result. The mother’s anxious body signals are the unconditioned stimulus. The upset facial expressions and tone of voice cues are the conditioned stimulus that becomes paired with the baby’s resulting upset in connection with the body signals. Eventually, the baby experiences distress just at the sight of the mother’s anxious upset facial and verbal expressions. There is no need for the physical discomfort to occur in order to generate the distressed response. This mechanism becomes generalized so that the baby can experience upset when anyone expresses anxiety and upset by facial and verbal means. Classical conditioning applies to positive encounters as well. So the feeling of comfort brought about by a warm welcoming cuddle from the mother with a smile on her face can eventually be brought back with the stimulus of just seeing the mother’s smile.

The next primitive empathy-arousing mode is direct association. This means that when the observer notices the victim’s experience, the observation elicits feelings associated with that type of experience based on a previous encounter with a similar
situation. In other words, the observer associates what the victim might be experiencing with his or her own reaction when confronted with comparable circumstances. Direct association allows for a broader range of empathic responding than classical conditioning because this pathway does not depend upon the pairing of one’s own experience with that of others. The cues given by the victim must simply remind the observer of what it is like to be in such a situation.

Again, Hoffman (2000) clearly states that in a face-to-face situation, the observer will be moved to experience empathic distress because mimicry will occur. Empathic distress may be further intensified by the influences of conditioning and direct association. He reiterates that these responses are passive and involuntary. Clearly these are primitive modes in the sense that they can only happen in the confines of a face-to-face encounter and these modes only detect simple emotions. Empathic capacities expand with the addition of cognition and language.

The fourth empathic arousal mode is called mediated association. In this mode, the sufferer uses language to convey distress to the observer. The observer’s empathic distress is provoked as a result of grasping and interpreting the meaning of what is put into words. In this way, language becomes a mediator that allows the observer to have some experience of the sufferer’s emotions. The observer may then connect what is put out in the verbal communication to something in his or her own experience. Also, the sufferer may use words that create pictorial representations of the experience so that the observer translates through visual or auditory images. In this instance, Hoffman believes that the more primitive modes of mimicry or direct association are induced through the
use of words. Words have the advantage of conveying information about the sufferer’s motivation, so in a face-to-face encounter, the observer can get a sense of whether the words are congruent with the variety of cues that set off the primitive responses of mimicry, conditioning, and association. Taken together, these two types of information allow the observer to arrive at a more precise empathic assessment when the words match the sufferer’s facial expression, tone of voice, and posture. If these cues that prompt the primitive responses are dissimilar from the words, the observer can assess that mixed communication as well.

The fifth empathic arousal mode relies on cognitive capacities to enact what Hoffman (2000) calls role-taking. This is the cognitive process that Selman (1976/1980) called social perspective taking. To follow Hoffman’s terminology here, the role-taking process entails imagining what it might be like to be in the other person’s situation. Hoffman explains that role taking that comes into play with empathic responding can be either self-focused or other-focused. In self-focused role taking the observer imagines how it would feel to have the sufferer’s experience. If the observer has had a similar experience, empathy for the sufferer might be magnified by means of association. That is, coming into contact with the sufferer’s similar situation could activate the observer’s emotional response that was set off by a comparable experience. With other-focused role-taking, the observer’s attention remains strictly focused on what the sufferer might be experiencing. Along with the basic primitive empathic arousing modes, information about the sufferer’s personal qualities or thoughts about how other people might react to similar difficulties can serve to augment the other-focused empathic response. Hoffman
(2000) believes that self-focused role-taking generates “more intense empathic distress than other-focused role-taking” because the self-focused stance prompts the first-hand internal experience of the relevant emotion (p.55).

So, to note some general features of Hoffman’s theory, clearly there is a developmental progression to the empathic capacity with the primitive modes coming into play at or shortly after birth. As cognitive capability increases, a progressive differentiation between self and other develops along with increasing abilities to comprehend the complexities in a situation. The empathic assessment of the other’s experience can gradually become more exacting as language and cognitive skills advance.

In addition to the developmental aspects, Hoffman (2000) discusses two other facets of empathy that are important to consider for the subject at hand. First, there is an in-group bias associated with empathy that, from an evolutionary standpoint, is thought to have endured because of its value for sustaining the human species. In-group bias means that it is easier to empathize with a member of one’s own group, such as one’s own family members and friends, than with others outside that circle of familiarity. Also, Hoffman (2000) indicates that empathy is affected by a here-and-now bias. That is, when a sufferer’s situation is in the observer’s immediate view, the primitive empathic arousal modes come into play so that an empathic response is more likely to occur. This facet of empathy adds to the in-group bias because group members are likely to have regular contact with each other. If the sufferer is distanced by time or space, empathic arousal is not as likely to occur.
Moral Development and Forgiveness

Some theory put out by Enright and his colleagues (1991) several years ago gives a good starting point for thinking about how these moral development tenets relate to forgiveness. The authors explain that there are philosophical tensions between justice and mercy. Justice is aligned with reciprocity (“giving back in proportion to what is given”) and forgiveness is associated with mercy in the form of “self-sacrificial love, benevolence, [and] beneficence” (“giving something for nothing”) (p.124). According to these authors, granting forgiveness is morally superior to a solution that relies strictly on justice because, from the forgiveness standpoint, the offender is viewed as an equal human being worthy of respect. With this ethic, justice undertakings can move forward without the rancor and hate that often surround such proceedings.

In a later article, Enright and the same colleagues (1994) provide additional analysis of the cognitive process that lies beneath forgiveness. These authors discuss Piaget’s view that forgiveness begins to surface in late childhood when the child moves beyond heteronomous reasoning into the autonomous moral reasoning stage. (Heteronomy means “rules from others” [Gibbs, 2010, p. 20]). Preadolescents “see forgiveness as morally superior” to an eye for an eye approach (p.67). Enright et al. (1994) point out that Piaget did not necessarily see forgiveness as superior to justice. When autonomous reasoning develops, the child can appreciate the intentions of behavior and there is a capacity for understanding the flexibility of rules. Justice at this stage is seen as mutual respect. These authors go on to discuss Piaget’s views on reciprocity and note that, in Piaget’s framework, both justice and forgiveness stem from ideal reciprocity.
and the reasoning that is required for both would be at the same cognitive developmental
stage. They argue that there is a distinction to be made

. . . between the principle of equality underlying justice and the
principle of beneficence underlying forgiveness. The latter does
not suggest equality, even in its ideal sense, because in beneficence
we go beyond equality toward self-sacrifice. The forgiver, in other
words, gives more than the one who offended. (p.68)

The rationale holds that the forgiver is not motivated by a wish to be treated in a
forgiving way. Rather the forgiver is offering a gift of what is good for the offender with
no focus on the self.

Enright and his colleagues (1994) further assert that the cognitive operation
providing the proper understanding of forgiveness is that of identity. They explain that in
the nonsocial arena, Piaget demonstrated that the concrete operational child could
recognize that a row of 7 candies and 7 pennies did not change numbers (identity) when
the items were changed to make a longer row. In the social sphere, they make a case for
identity being responsible for the “unconditionality” that is required for forgiveness
(p.42). That is, regardless of the surface features of behavior, the inherent equality and
worth of all human beings can be recognized. (In this regard, forgiveness fits well with
the social work value recognizing the inherent dignity and worth of all human beings
[NASW, 2008]). The concept of identity also explains why mutual respect is not
necessary. Even if the offender does not show respect, the offender is worthy of respect
simply because he/she is a human being. Before formal operations, children may be capable of having an intuitive comprehension of unconditionality. The more loathsome the offensive behavior and intentions were, the more difficult it is to keep unconditionality and inherent equality in the forefront of reasoning. So, children at the level of concrete operations would be more drawn to the salient features of the offense, less able to filter situational factors, and therefore, more inconsistent in their ability to apply the underlying identity principle in the form of unconditionality and inherent equality. The case is made that abstract identity is needed (i.e., functioning at the level of formal operations) in order to be a consistent forgiver (Enright et al., 1994). In both the 1991 and the 1994 writing, Enright and colleagues refer to the Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk (1989) research to substantiate their reasoning. As noted earlier (see pages 54-63), that research provides the underpinnings for the Social Cognitive Developmental Model of Forgiveness that Enright & Fitzgibbons (2000) also described in later writing.

This early theorizing gives a useful frame of reference to begin thinking about the cognitive and other possible mechanisms involved in the forgiveness process. Now these many years later, and thinking about homicide cases in particular, I can see a somewhat different way of explaining what takes place when forgiveness occurs. To begin, consider the idea that justice is linked to equality and that justice reasoning comes out of ideal reciprocity. While it may be true that justice reasoning is based upon mutual respect in many instances, in the cases where there has been a crime related death, the survivors may rely upon the conventional criminal justice system to deliver a sentence that is more in keeping with a pragmatic reciprocity solution. An example is found in
Debra Puglisi Sharp’s (2003) writing about her hopes for the sentencing of Donald Flagg, the man who murdered her husband, abducted her, and tortured her for several days. She says, “I still believe that Nino [her murdered husband] deserves the ultimate retribution, and I console myself by remembering that this is a death-qualified jury. During jury selection they all pledged that they could recommend capital punishment . . .” (p. 260). This language does not suggest anything about respect for the offender because he is a human being. The word payback or revenge could be substituted for retribution. This fairness resolution can come out of the “eye for an eye” thinking of pragmatic reciprocity.

The ability to maintain a cognitive stance that the offender is a human being worthy of respect just by virtue of being human regardless of how heinous the crime is a reflection of ideal reciprocity thinking. That is, even though the offender did not treat the victim with respect, the victim can still operate from the moral position of reversibility (treat others as you would wish to be treated). As already mentioned, this position relies on the cognitive ability to see the offender as a human being rather than simply focusing on the more salient information about the monstrous nature of the offender’s behavior.

While this cognitive component is crucial in the forgiveness process, existing research suggests that empathy is also a necessary component of a forgiveness outcome (Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995; Baskin & Enright, 2004; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Wade, Worthington, & Meyer, 2005; Welton, Hill, & Seybold, 2008; Worthington, 2008; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002), and there is some
indication that empathy is distinct from and more important than the cognitive skill of perspective taking (Welton, Hill, and Seybold, 2008). Gibbs’ (2010) thinking about the need to add the empathy component to provide a complete picture of moral functioning has noteworthy relevance for the course of forgiveness as well. Enright and colleagues (1991) point out that forgiveness is not grounded in fairness, but instead comes out of mercy, benevolence, or beneficence. Following Gibbs’ (2010) line of reasoning about moral development, the values of mercy, benevolence, or beneficence do not stem from a fairness orientation. Instead, they grow out of an understanding of what it means to be caring. In Gibbs’ formulation, empathy is the pivotal component of the caring aspect of moral behavior and empathy motivates moral behavior when unfairness has been observed. In the case of forgiveness, it seems reasonable to conclude that mercy, benevolence, or beneficence emerges from an affective empathic response rather than a logical fairness point of reference.

With regard to the restorative justice procedures, the face-to-face meeting is likely to generate some empathic distress in the victim, especially if the offender presents in a genuine manner (words match affect). In the exchange, the victim may forgive spontaneously as the primitive empathic arousal modes are augmented with information about the offender’s circumstances. In one possible scenario, forgiveness may become the helping intervention that the victim has to offer the offender. Forgiveness provides relief from the victim’s empathic distress.

Some support for an increase in caring related responses can be found in existing research on restorative justice proceedings. Strang (2006) and her colleagues conducted
interviews with 210 victims of various types of offenses from four very different locations (Canberra in Australia and London, Thames Valley, and Northumbria in the United Kingdom) after the restorative justice encounter took place. In Canberra, cases were randomly assigned to the conventional criminal justice procedures in that area or to the restorative justice option. In the English locations, the restorative justice procedure was added to the usual criminal justice proceedings. The crimes committed included various property or violent crimes (Canberra & Northumbria, Thames Valley), juvenile property or violent crimes (Northumbria), and more serious level robbery or burglary (London). Domestic violence and crimes involving sex offenses were excluded in all locations. Victims were from diverse social environments and they varied in age and race. Both male and female victims participated. In all locations victims reported that fear was reduced, anger was reduced considerably, and sympathy for the offender was increased as a result of participating in the restorative justice conference. The increase in sympathy was especially noticeable in the serious offense cases, but sympathy was also elicited in cases where the crime was considered less serious. The authors go on to say that increase in sympathy is worthwhile because it may pave the way to the forgiveness that is known to be beneficial to victims.

In another report of restorative justice outcomes based on 100 violent crime cases and 173 cases of juvenile property crime in Canberra, along with 125 cases of serious robbery cases and 216 cases of serious burglary cases in London, researchers found that 38% of the Canberra victims felt forgiving toward the offender and 75% of the London victims were forgiving (Sherman et al., 2005). These researchers point out that it is
interesting to notice the higher percentage of forgivers in London given that the London crimes were more serious than the Canberra crimes. They hypothesize that the differences may be due to the impact of the offender’s apology. In London apology was offered in the restorative justice session in almost all cases. In Canberra, some apologies (29%) were offered in the hallway after the formal restorative justice procedure concluded. Given the existing data suggesting that victims are looking for emotional repair and seem to value this aspect of healing over material compensation (Strang, 2002), sincere apology may be a key ingredient in a satisfactory restorative justice encounter that tilts the victim’s options for responding toward the forgiveness direction.

Now, to return to one of the intervention models discussed earlier, recall that Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) are encouraging an emphasis on understanding that the offender is a human being in the Work Phase of the Process Model when they ask the victim to reframe the thinking about the offender. That step addresses the cognitive components of forgiveness. The next step in the Model entails promoting empathy for the offender by way of what Hoffman (2000) calls other-directed role-taking. The victim is asked to imagine how the offender feels. Compassion for the offender emerges automatically when empathy is experienced. The time involved in going through this process in a therapeutic setting can vary greatly. These cognitive and affective elements can also be found in the restorative justice procedures that use a face-to-face encounter. The timeframe for the healing outcome appears to be accelerated in this intense situation where the structure seems to naturally include the opportunity for the victim to hear first
hand how the offender feels and what human foibles might have influenced the offensive behavior.

There is a lingering question about all of this good news about the healing potential of forgiveness and the great promise that restorative justice procedures hold for promoting corrective outcomes for all affected by the crime. If this process is so great, why aren’t we routinely doing more of it? Perhaps McCullough’s (2008) theories about the importance of revenge for human survival can shed some light on that question. In long-time forgiveness researcher Michael McCullough’s (2008) book, Beyond Revenge, he lays out the convincing theory that the capacities for both revenge and forgiveness are parts of human nature that were preserved through natural selection because both contribute to the survival of the human species. Perhaps this explains why the homicide victims’ loved ones have that disconcerting otherwise foreign, but extremely powerful urge to retaliate against the offender (Armour, 2006; Conrad, 1998). According to McCullough, revenge could possibly serve three main adaptive functions: a) to dissuade harm doers from proceeding to commit further harmful acts; b) to pose a protective threat so that harmful acts would not be committed in the first place; and c) to persuade every member of a social group to contribute to the needs of that group by threatening retaliation to the unhelpful.

Forgiveness has obvious advantages for maintaining a cooperative society. Continuous revenge would result in ongoing individual and group alienation, and in the case of repeated retaliation through killings, revenge has the potential to eradicate entire social groups. Forgiveness is a mechanism that allows a wrongdoer to return to
cooperation with the group after an offense has occurred. Just as Hoffman (2000) observes that empathy is more prevalent among in-group members, McCullough believes that forgiveness is more likely to occur among close associates such as family and friends because forgiving helps to maintain the cooperative course of the social group. Also, as Hoffman (2000) pointed out that empathic distress is relieved when help is offered to the sufferer, McCullough (2008) notes that anxiety and tension are relieved when an offense is forgiven and highlights the point by saying, “Know forgiveness, know peace. No forgiveness, no peace” (p.129).

Working from the premise that the human biological heritage comes with the predisposition to respond with both revenge and with forgiveness, McCullough recommends setting up social structures that appeal to the forgiving rather than the vengeful side of our nature. In a paragraph that encapsulates major elements of forgiveness conditions, McCullough (2008) explains:

The kind of mind that can forgive is a mind that has come to perceive an offender as someone who is careworthy, valuable, and safe. A mind that has had its vengeful impulses satisfied (at least a little) by knowing that an offender has been punished or otherwise made to suffer may also be ready to forgive. People who want to be forgiven try to create these psychological conditions by apologizing, engaging in self-abasing displays, and trying to compensate their victims. (p.181)

This author highlights the restorative justice approach as one social structure that puts all the forgiveness conditions in place, and with this format the revenge reaction is
minimized. Empathy for the offender is fostered, the offender shows debasement in the apology process, and there is recognition that the victim suffered a violation. The conference arrangement shows the offender in “a submissive position” where “emotional suffering” can be readily observed (p. 177). McCullough believes that the combination of the offender’s behaviors (admission of guilt, offering an apology, showing shame, being in a submissive and emotionally painful position) constitutes signals that point to a move toward repair rather than a need for continued retaliation. Referring to the work of Sherman and colleagues (2005), McCullough sums up by saying, “Crime victims who participate in conferences with offenders who have robbed, burglarized, or assaulted them are 23 (!) times more likely than typical crime victims to feel that they’ve received a sincere apology from their offenders, 4 times less likely to experience a lingering desire for revenge, a 2.6 times more likely to report that they have forgiven their offender . . .” (emphasis in original, p. 177).

With that being said, the question about how survivors bring themselves to the point of requesting a restorative justice procedure still remains (Armour & Umbreit, 2005). Strang and her colleagues (2006) found some victims of violent offenses in Thames were hesitant to participate in a restorative justice process while victims of property crimes and violent crimes in Canberra, Australia mostly agreed to participate. The researchers hypothesize that the Canberra victims were perhaps more willing because of a cultural expectation that one performs civic duty or maybe because the Canberra participants were not asked if they wanted to participate, but were only asked when would they like their appointment for the restorative justice procedure to be scheduled. Since it is not the
current practice to issue formal invitations to participate in a VOD in Ohio, it’s important to be open to other possible factors that might motivate and individual to make the phone call to the Office of Victims Services. Umbreit and his colleagues (2003) found that some participants in the Ohio study were prompted to seek dialogue as part of their spiritual understandings and, in some cases, due to spiritual growth that took place as a result of the offense. Given that spirituality can have a significant role in the adjustment after homicide (Armour, 2006), that religious and spiritual views influence thinking about forgiveness (McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Tsang, McCullough, & Hoyt, 2005), and that spirituality brings some survivors to make the plan for VOD (Umbreit, Vos, Coates, & Brown, 2003), the role of religion and spirituality for coping will be discussed next.

The Contribution of Religious and/or Spiritual Orientations

The National Association of Social Worker Code of Ethics (2008) calls for the social workers to understand the client’s religion as an expression of cultural diversity. The Council of Social Work Education (CSWE, 2008), the body that accredits baccalaureate and master level social work education programs, agrees that social workers should know about religion as a feature of cultural diversity. CSWE adds that social workers should know theories of spiritual development as one aspect of human development. Since social workers are instructed to include understandings of religion and spiritual development in social work practice, the links among forgiveness, religious and/or spiritual life, and restorative justice practices merits further attention.

In survivor’s personal accounts of coping with the loss of a loved one due to violence, the word “forgiveness” often appears in conjunction with some religious or
spiritual viewpoint (e.g., Bishop, 2004; Pelke, 2003; Zehr, 2001). Pargament and Rye (1998) explain that even though there is a tendency for professional helpers to highlight the psychological, secular aspects of forgiveness, their research suggests that truly disconnecting forgiveness from the spiritual may be difficult. Forgiveness is categorized as one possible way to engage in religious coping.

For this research, I wanted to learn more about the association between religious/spiritual life, forgiveness, and VOD. Do those participants who are guided by their religious/spiritual lives have a more favorable view of forgiveness than those who have little or no grounding in a religious/spiritual faith orientation? What does the religious/spiritual life have to do with whether or not the survivors will choose VOD? With those questions in mind, this section will be devoted to what the professional literature typically calls “religious coping” (e.g., see Pargament, 1997, 2011).

Psychologist, Kenneth Pargament, is well known for his research and theory development in the area of religious coping. To encourage helping professionals to consider religious coping, Pargament (1997) explains that both psychology and religion look into the realm of self-control. Psychology is devoted to addressing the personal resources that one may bring to gain a sense of more power and control to life’s circumstances. Religion holds out the idea that human beings have limitations and there is something beyond personal resources that affects the human condition. In Pargament’s words, “... the psychological world helps people extend their personal control, while the religious world helps people face their personal limitations and go beyond themselves for
solutions” (p. 8). In the case of murder, obviously the survivors are faced with a death that was beyond their control along with all of the related after effects.

Before going into the specifics of religious coping, some clarification of terms is necessary. In Pargament’s (1997) writing he discusses the possible distinctions between what is considered “religious” and what is called “spiritual”. He says that scholars most often connect religion with “institutionally based dogma, rituals, and traditions” while the word “spiritual” is used to describe “an inner, more personal process” (p. 38). This author minimizes the difference by pointing out that there is a strong spiritual component within the religious practices for most individuals. Also, many individuals who identify themselves as only spiritual belong to groups that support their particular ways of expressing spirituality.

While Pargament (1997) minimizes the importance of distinguishing between worldviews that are fostered within religious organizations vs. those that claim a more personal spiritual way, later writing suggests that the distinction is important. For example, while writing about posttraumatic growth, Shaw and colleagues (2005) call for further research on the difference between religious coping and a spiritual solution saying that some religious beliefs are shattered as a result of trauma. A more general spirituality may become increasingly beneficial when the known religious thinking no longer works. As a result of their review of the literature, these authors note that even though the social support found in religious communities may be valuable, spirituality may be more important because the emphasis on purpose and meaning provides fertile ground for growth to emerge out of the trauma.
Shaw and colleagues (2005) found definitions of religion and spiritual that contain all of the elements of interest for the purposes of this research. Citing Sacks, they say that religion is conceptualized as “a system of beliefs, practices, customs and ceremonies rooted in a culture; a view of the individual’s relationship to the universe; a moral and ethical code; and a community of adherents providing social relationships” (as cited in Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, p.7). Calling upon Siporin’s definition, they say that spirituality centers on the search for “transcendental values, meaning, experience, and development; for knowledge of an ultimate reality; for a belongingness and relatedness with the moral universe and community; and for union with immanent, supernatural powers that guide people and the universe for good or evil” (as cited in Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, p.7).

There is one more point of clarification to be made. Throughout this next section, the word God will appear several times. For my part, the use of this word is not meant to place a limit on other understandings of what is divine or ultimate in the universe. I use the word God when that word appears in the literature being discussed. The word God is consistently used in the literature I reviewed. Now that the clarification is in place, some literature on religious coping will be considered.

Pargement and his colleagues (1990) conducted a study with 586 Christian church members to determine how religious coping might be used when negative life events occur. Participants were from 10 midwestern churches representing different denominations, locations (urban, suburban, and rural), sizes, and levels of stability. The type of reported negative events from the past year included: a friend or family member...
had a serious problem, for example, illness (25%), a family member or friend died (18%), interpersonal difficulties (14%), work-related problems such as losing a job (8%), or personal illness or injury (8%). The participants were asked to respond to various written scales designed to measure the appraisal of the negative event, religious coping activities, nonreligious coping activities, and outcome of the event, including mental health status, the general outcome, and the religious outcome. The general outcome scale measured how well the participant handled the event and whether they were in some way stronger or better as a result of the experience. The religious outcomes were about “perceived changes in closeness to God, closeness to church, and spiritual growth in response to the event” (p.806).

The researchers reported many interesting findings. A few of the results that are most relevant for the topic at hand are worth highlighting. Overall, “more favorable outcomes were reported by more indiscriminately proreligious, women, poorer, and older members” (p.807). What these researchers call spiritually-based coping activities “related most strongly and consistently to positive outcomes” for all three outcome measures (mental health, general outcome, and religious outcome) (p.809). A main component of spiritually based coping is “an emphasis on the intimate partnership between the individual and God in coping” (p.802). With this type of coping, the individual’s relationship with God provides some emotional support and a sense that there will be guidance for problem solving. This form of coping also encompasses positive reframing of the problem and allows one to have some peace about the uncontrollable aspects of the situation.
Other categories of religious coping associated with positive outcomes were, *Good Deeds, Religious Support, and Religious Avoidance*. Coping through good deeds entails finding ways to live a better life, perhaps a more religiously grounded life, instead of concentrating on all the damage brought about by the negative event. Religious support is the social support one receives from being a part of a religious community. Religious avoidance means that the person avoids a focus on the negative event by incorporating some religious activity or way of thinking such as Bible reading, prayer, or thinking about a promising afterlife.

Significant findings were also associated with how the individual appraised the negative event. When the negative event was thought to be God’s will, positive general and religious outcomes were found. Conversely, when the event was thought to be indicative of God’s punishment, poorer mental health and general outcomes were noted.

Nonreligious appraisal and coping strategies made a small to moderate contribution to understanding the variance in outcomes (R squares from .06 to .20). For example, seeing the negative event as an opportunity for growth was related to positive outcomes in all outcome categories. The nonreligious coping categories of *Focus on the Positive* and *Problem Solving* were associated with positive outcomes. In the nonreligious category, *Avoidance* is connected to being unhelpful for mental health and general outcomes. By way of contrast, the religious coping category of *Avoidance* (Bible reading, praying, etc. to avoid focusing on the difficulty) was found to be helpful. When adding the religious coping variables to the nonreligious coping variables in a hierarchical regression analysis, the religious coping variables added small amounts to
the understanding of the general outcome variance and mental health variance (R2=.07 and .03 respectively) and a larger amount to the variance in religious outcome (R2=.26).

Pargament, Smith, Koenig, and Perez (1998) designed another study to look more carefully at both positive and negative religious coping patterns along with health outcomes related to each pattern. Participants for the study were comprised of members of two Oklahoma City churches affected by the Oklahoma City bombing (N=296), college students dealing with stressful negative life occurrences (N=540), and individuals over the age of 55 hospitalized with serious medical illness (N=551). The researchers also wanted to measure the coping patterns. The Brief RCOPE, a 34-item inventory delineating either positive or negative religious coping, was in the process of being developed as part of this research. Various measures were used to assess health related outcomes. Using factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis, the researchers found positive and negative patterns of religious coping that were consistent across all three participant groups.

The positive pattern included: “seeking spiritual support, religious forgiveness, collaborative religious coping, spiritual connection, religious purification, benevolent religious reappraisal and religious focus” (Pargament et al., 1998, p. 720). To clarify some of the terms, seeking spiritual support essentially means finding support from the belief that there is a loving caring God involved. Collaborative religious coping is a coping style that entails working in partnership with God to face difficulties. The individual shares responsibility for solving the problem in collaboration with a supportive
God (Pargament, et al., 1999). Benevolent religious reappraisal refers to the use of religion to reframe the problem or stressor as having potentially beneficial aspects.

Negative religious coping methods consisted of: “spiritual discontent, punishing God reappraisals, interpersonal religious discontent, demonic reappraisal, and reappraisal of God’s powers” (Pargament et al., 1998, p. 720). With negative coping, the individual becomes displeased with God (spiritual discontent), the clergy, and religious community members (interpersonal religious discontent). The stressor may be viewed as the work of the devil or as God’s punishment.

This study confirmed the researcher’s prediction that positive religious coping is used “considerably more” than negative (p.720). Mental health outcomes were also tied to religious coping orientations. Those with positive coping had fewer psychological problem symptoms and they reported that the stressful event ultimately resulted in both psychological and spiritual growth. Those who relied upon negative religious coping reported depression and other troubling psychological symptoms. Also, the ones who used negative coping were described as having a “callousness towards others” (p.721). Interestingly, poor physical health indicators including PTSD symptoms, were linked to “higher levels of both positive and negative religious coping” (p.721). The researchers suggest that the experience of illness or other troubling life events prompts the religious coping response. (Also, see Stetson, 2003 for a discussion of positive and negative religious coping that parents of murdered children experience.)

Another typical religious coping reaction involves the individual’s conception of responsibility for problem solving including how much control is assigned to the
individual and how much is assigned to the transcendent. Pargament and colleagues identified four responsibility-control coping methods and noted outcomes associated with each method. The coping methods are *self-directing*, *collaborative*, *deferring*, and *pleading* (Pargament, 1997, Pargament et al., 1999). In the self-directing approach, the person believes that God provides all the resources to solve the problem, but he/she must act independently to manage any difficulty. Self-directing individuals see themselves as having the responsibility for their own problem solving. As already mentioned, with the collaborative coping the individual works in cooperation with a supportive God to affect desirable solutions. In the deferring style, responsibility and control for solutions to problems are handed over to the divine. The pleading method involves asking for divine intervention. In one sense, pleading is passive because the individual does not have or is relinquishing control of the situation. On the other, the individual is petitioning for divine assistance, which is an effort to actively intervene.

When comparing these coping methods with measures of general competence, a connection with over-all problem solving styles is observed (Pargament, 1997). Those who choose a self-directed style tend to feel that they have some personal control and they exhibit a sense of self-esteem. Those who call upon a collaborative approach also experience a sense of personal control and self-esteem, and they are less likely to feel that control happens by chance. The deferring style is associated with “a lower sense of personal control, a greater sense of control by chance, lower self-esteem, less planful problem solving skills, and greater intolerance for difference between people” (Pargament, 1997, p.182). Mixed results are found with reports of pleading.
Pargament (1997) explains that the effectiveness of the styles seem to change when related to specific troubling events. Those who use a self-directing style have consistently negative outcomes while those who use a deferring style move into a positive range. The collaborative coping style consistently shows positive outcomes in studies of specific negative events (e.g., Pargament et al. 1999). Pargament (1997) hypothesizes that deferring may be most efficacious in situations where one can actually exert little or no control because at least there is a feeling that a benign higher power is in charge. The collaborative style has the advantage of bringing personal influence to the part of the situation that can be controlled along with a sense of backing from the divine to affect the parts that cannot (Pargament et al., 1999).

To explore the role of religious coping when there is a child death, Anderson and colleagues (2005) studied general coping styles, religious coping, and grief reactions for 57 mothers who experienced the death of a child due to murder (n = 34) or an accident (n = 23). The grieving mothers completed various inventories measures (Revised Grief Experience Inventory; Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations; Religious Coping Activities Scale) and supplied demographic information for the study. The researchers found a negative correlation between years since the death occurred and grief scores suggesting that the level of grief decreases with the passage of time. After adjusting for years since the death, results showed a connection between emotional coping (i.e., focusing on strong emotions that result from the death) and higher grief levels. Conversely, lower grief level scores were linked to avoidance coping (distracting oneself
from the unpleasantness). Lower levels of grief were observed when task coping (trying to master the situation through action) and positive religious coping were used together.

DeYoung and Buzzi (2003) report on a qualitative study of parents’ coping strategies when a child has been murdered or abducted and continues to be missing. Among this small sample of parents (4 in each category), faith was mentioned as “both a source of comfort and distress” (p.354). Participants who believed in a spiritual being before the loss of their child, continued to believe after the loss. Particularly the parents of murdered children recommended learning to forgive as part of productive coping. The parents of murdered children also mentioned that their own advocacy efforts allowed them to develop some sense of meaning out of the tragic loss.

Changing focus a bit, some useful information appears in the literature about the specific connection between religious practice and forgiveness (Worthington, 2008). In an often-cited review of the literature on the connections between forgiveness and practice of the major monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), McCullough and Worthington (1999) found existing research indicating that religious people highly value the concept of forgiveness, but their religious involvement does not predict that forgiveness will occur when faced with a real offense. These authors speculated that the finding might, in part, be due to a weakness in the measurement methods.

In later writing, Tsang, McCullough, and Hoyt (2005) address the measurement concern and add another explanation to account for the uncertain association between religiousness and forgiveness of a specific offense. Basically the authors questioned
whether previous studies might have been affected by recall bias. When asked to recall any offense, participants may have the tendency to remember the most salient offense, which would likely be one that was not forgiven rather than one that was forgiven and perhaps forgotten. Also, factors other than religiousness, such as seriousness of the offense, may have entered into the forgiveness decision. When these researchers introduced a more structured recall request into the study, that is, “a serious interpersonal transgression within two months prior to the study” (p.793), intrinsic religiousness was related to a lower interest in seeking revenge at the time the first measures were taken (Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory {TRIM} and Allport and Ross’s measure of intrinsic religiousness) and a further decrease in revenge aspirations when measures were repeated two months later. Also, to correct for recall and other factors surrounding the offense, a study was conducted that asked for reports of two specific types of offenses with measurements taken at three intervals (a total of 6 transgressions). The results specifically measured the participants’ tendency to avoid the offender and the inclination to focus on revenge. Outcomes show an association between religiousness and a decrease in the avoidance and revenge tendencies. The authors report the results as an association between religiousness and forgiveness saying that reduction in avoidance of the offender and limited interest in revenge are components of forgiveness. I am raising a question about the interpretation of those results. The ability to maintain contact and not focus on revenge may be indicative of achieving some emotional distance that could certainly benefit mental health, but it may not mean that
forgiveness will be the outcome. Forgiveness seems to require that additional component of beneficence, of offering the moral gift that Enright and Fitzgibbon (2000) describe.

Tsang, McCullough, and Hoyt (2005) also propose another explanation for the finding that religious people value forgiveness, but do not necessarily forgive when faced with a specific transgression. These authors point out that religious doctrines contain multiple meanings that can be interpreted in various ways. For example, teachings about justice through retribution can be found in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For the specific offense, an individual may build a rationale for the correct response based on the understanding of the religion’s call for retribution or, alternatively, the mandate for compassion and forgiveness might come to the forefront. Religious teachings can be used as moral justifications for assuming a vengeful stance. To test this hypothesis, the TRIM inventory with the addition of a benevolence scale was administered to 38 Christian psychology students at private university. The students also completed scales that measured religiousness, especially as it relates to retributive justice and forgiving concepts. Participants were asked to respond based on an offense that occurred within the past 7 days. Those who responded to the transgressor with avoidance were not as likely to support the forgiveness scriptures. Benevolence toward the transgressor was associated with approving of forgiveness scripture and somewhat negatively correlated with approval of scripture that advances retribution ideals. Also, avoidance responses were less likely to be found in those who held forgiving images of God.

Turning to other research about religious coping related to forgiveness, Krumrei (2008) and colleagues conducted a study of 89 divorcing adults located through public
divorce records. These researchers were looking more closely at how those affected by divorce might ask for God’s help with efforts to forgive the spouse (turning to God to forgive) as a coping method. In addition to providing demographic data, participants completed seven scales designed to measure both spiritual and psychological reactions to the divorce. Measures were completed the first time within 6 months of the divorce filing and then repeated at one year. Seventy-eight percent were Christians, 4% indicated that they were some other religion and 18% claimed no religious affiliation. Researchers found that Christians were more likely to turn to God to forgive (TGF) than those who had no religious affiliation. When looking at overall responses, those who used TGF the most at the time when the first measures were administered were also more likely to show “higher levels of spiritual emotions, . . . higher levels of verbal aggression by ex-spouse, . . ., demonization of ex-spouse, . . . and verbal aggression by participant” at the time the second set of measures were completed (p.305). The findings were similar for the Christians in the study with the exception that greater use of TGF did not predict the use of verbal aggression when interacting with the ex-spouse.

To explain further, those who had higher levels of TGF experienced an increased sense of connection with a higher power, but they did not report improvement in levels of psychological distress. Furthermore, higher levels of TGF were associated with verbal aggression between ex-spouses as well as beliefs that an evil spirit such as the devil influenced the ex-spouse. Those participants who moved from higher levels of TGF to lower levels, also showed a decrease in the tendency to attribute the divorce to a demonic source. The individuals who maintained higher levels of TGF throughout the study
period also reported greater levels of distress than those who had consistently lower TGF levels. Consistently high TGF levels were also associated with greater levels of anger than observed with those who resolved the forgiveness coping. The finding that chronic TGF in this study is associated with prolonged, unresolved distress suggests that the TGF may be an ongoing attempt to manage the stressors related to the divorce. This study did not address whether forgiveness did or did not occur.

In another study highlighting the connection between religious/spiritual practices and forgiveness, McMinn and colleagues (2008) conducted a structured email interview with 100 employees, graduate students, and non-traditional undergraduate students at an evangelical Christian university to determine the role of prayer in forgiveness. These researchers were interested in learning whether Christians would mention prayer in connection with their efforts to forgive without being asked. Also they were interested in more generally what the narratives would say about prayer and the forgiveness of an offender. Most participants (85) did spontaneously mention prayer when asked about what practices were involved in the process of forgiveness, with 54 mentioning that prayer was one of the most important parts of the forgiveness process. The research suggests that prayers used to discuss the experience with God for help with personal transformation (inward prayer) were the most frequently used type. Using a grounded-theory approach to the narratives, the researches noticed that those who use inward prayer discussed themes in their narratives that were consistent with the Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) Process Model of Forgiveness and with Worthington’s (2003) REACH Model. The narrative examples show prayer being used to express the pain surrounding the
offense and to get support needed for carrying out forgiveness. In one instance, the participant turns the offender over to God, thus making God responsible for the consequences of that individual’s behavior while simultaneously removing the need for the offended one to somehow even the score.

Before leaving this subject, another related aspect of coping requires attention. There is increasing interest in the idea that the upheaval created by trauma also presents an opportunity for growth (Joseph & Linley, 2006; Shaw, Joseph & Linley, 2005). Similar thinking appears in the loss and bereavement literature (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2006). In Joseph and Linley’s (2006) summary of current theory on growth after trauma, they note the difference between simply alleviating the distress related to trauma and actually promoting growth. Reducing the post-traumatic stress symptoms does not necessarily result in growth, but growth following trauma is associated with better long-term emotional adjustment. Basically these authors explain that when trauma occurs, the person’s understanding of the world is shattered. The person may respond by trying to assimilate the new trauma related information into current understandings. Growth occurs when the individual accommodates by making use of the new information to change and expand the worldview. The search to find some worthwhile meaning for the trauma is a reflection of the accommodation process.

To relate this capacity for growth following trauma more specifically to religion and spirituality, Shaw, Joseph, and Linley (2005) reviewed 11 studies that consider the religion, spirituality, and growth connection. These authors report that

. . . religion and spirituality are usually, although not always, beneficial
[when] dealing with the aftermath of trauma, . . . traumatic experiences can lead to a deepening of religion or spirituality, . . . [and] positive religious coping, religious openness, readiness to face existential questions, religious participation, and intrinsic religiousness are typically associated with post-traumatic growth. (p. 1)

Trauma may lead one to question religious and spiritual beliefs, but the opposite may also occur. Religious and spiritual beliefs may develop or become enhanced as a result of the trauma. These authors believe that available information points to the significance of intrinsic spirituality or religiosity, meaning that the personal relationship with or faith in the transcendent is more necessary for growth than extrinsic factors such as being a member of a faith community. This intrinsic link with the divine provides a consistent foundation for “a sense of meaning, purpose, and coherence” that may be quite helpful during times of great personal disruption (p.7).

As an illustration to tie all the offshoots of forgiveness together, Zehr (2001) interviewed victims of 39 violent crimes by asking a few very opened ended questions designed to facilitate the telling about what happened, how the informants coped with the devastation, and what were the issues that surrounded the experience. Mostly the informants let their stories unfold as they chose. His book contains the names and narrative of each victim/survivor. Pictures of each victim/survivor accompany every narrative. In thirty-six situations, individuals told about their personal experiences related to the crime. In three of the cases, couples told their stories with each individual member of the couple quoted separately. Twenty-eight (28) of the narratives were
devoted to crimes where a death occurred. It’s a very powerful medium that portrays the multifaceted impact of crime on individual lives. The stories are quite compelling.

Zehr’s (2001) compilation of narratives contained information about experiences with grief, spirituality, forgiveness, and restorative justice activities. Given this wealth of information, I decided to look carefully at each narrative and then summarize some of the themes I found. While examining this material, I was mindful of Armour’s (2006) writing about how helpful a supportive spiritual life and meaning making can be for carrying on with life after the crime. Those elements (spiritual life and finding meaning) are certainly seen in the narratives of the individuals in Zehr’s study. Also, I was aware that authors who write about the victim experience (Armour, 2006; Green & Roberts, 2008) say that victims are troubled when a member of the clergy tells them that they should let go of their anger and forgive. Interestingly, among the victims that Zehr portrayed, most had grappled with the issue of forgiveness and a little under half (48%) said that they have forgiven. A little under one third (29%) of the informants who mentioned some positive connection with a sense of spiritual support said that they have forgiven. The same number (29%) brought up some positive spiritual connection and did not mention anything about forgiveness. Only 19% mentioned that they had forgiven the offender, but did not say anything about a spiritual connection. Six of the informants participated in some type of victim offender mediation. All of these informants (100%) mentioned forgiving the offender. Four of these six cases were homicides. Also, sixty-seven percent (67%) report making significant contributions to their communities, such as working on major legislative changes or making educational efforts that were directly
linked to the death of their loved ones. These contributions appeared to be driven by the wish to have some positive meaning come out of the tragedy.

There is one more aspect of spirituality that is relevant when a death has occurred. Some survivors report having some experiences of receiving meaningful communication from a deceased loved one. In the next section, what is known about these types of communications will be discussed.

After Death Communications

After Death Communication and Victims of Violent Crime

As I begin this section, I am reminded of the words of famous world religions scholar, Huston Smith. In response to a question posed by interviewer Jeffrey Mishlove, Smith explained:

. . . the crux of modern science, of the scientific method, is the controlled experiment. . . . I think what we don’t go on to add and to think about is that we can control only what is inferior to us. Now, what that comes to is that our scientific worldview, what we really, implicitly believe in, in the modern world, consists of nothing except us and things that are inferior to us. (Smith & Mishlove, 2003).

Clearly what I am about to discuss here falls more into the spiritual category and currently resides outside of the scientific method realm. The subject is important because to omit it would be to overlook an encounter that is enormously significant (the word ineffable comes to mind) for several bereaved individuals. The words used to describe the phenomena have varied over time and currently no fixed words are consistently used.
Some recent authors are using the words, after death communication (ADC) (Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1996; LaGrand, 1997; Martin & Romanowski, 1997), so those are the words I will use when referring to the experience of having some sort of communication with a deceased person. One of the hallmarks of an ADC is that it emerges spontaneously. The living person has no control over when and how such communications occur. Returning to Smith’s line of thinking, the ADC is important to explore, not because the truth of it can be verified by the scientific method, but rather because many people who have an ADC experience an inner knowing about the veracity of the communication and many find the ADC helps to move the grief process in a constructive direction. Including the ADC in the inquiry is an effort to recognize and document the experiences that are outside of the parameters of our known control, but still may have great meaning for our clients.

How does the ADC phenomena relate specifically to victims of violent crime? In a book promising to offer the most up to date, evidence-based assessment and intervention methods for violent crime victims, Greene and Roberts (2008) provide a list of behaviors that are typically observed in the course of grief. At the bottom of the list are the words “sense of presence” (p. 26). There is no further explanation or citation connected to these words. The reader is left to wonder about the meaning of “sense of presence.” From my reading about ADC’s, I know that many bereaved individuals experience a “sense of presence” of the deceased. This was not clearly stated in Greene and Roberts’ otherwise straight-forward writing. I wondered if the authors felt some ambivalence about bringing up the subject in their “evidence-based” text. Perhaps they
felt compelled to mention the “sense of presence” words in their description of possible
grief reactions because there are many reports of this experience, but also felt some
embarrassment about drawing much attention to what some deem to be a paranormal
phenomenon. Maybe it was just an oversight. In any case, the mention of the “sense of
presence” words in a text about helping interventions for victims of violent crime opens
the subject for further consideration.

To learn more about the victim experience, I went to the Parents of Murdered
Children (POMC) website (www.pomc.com). According to the web site, the POMC
mission is to provide “on-going emotional support, education, prevention, advocacy, and
awareness” (POMC, n.d.). The organization is open to the families and friends of
homicide victims.

At the POMC web site I found an Atlantic Monthly article describing the
experiences of two families, each affected by the murder of a young female family
member (Schlosser, 1997). In one case, Charlotte and Robert Hullinger responded to the
murder of their 19-year-old daughter, Lisa, partly by founding the POMC organization in
1978. The description of the other case provides relevant details for the subject of
ADC’s. In that case, 23-year-old Terri Smith was shot in the back of her head by her 28
year-old live-in boyfriend in January 1987. Terri’s family eventually learned that the
boyfriend, Gary Rawlings, had a prior hospitalization for mental illness where he had
been diagnosed with schizophrenia. They also learned that Rawlings had stopped taking
his medication and that he had physically abused Terri. Terri was trying to end the
relationship. The article chronicles the devastating impact that the murder had on the
family and their efforts to keep Rawlings confined so that others would not become victims of his dangerous behavior. The article, also, gives the particulars of Terri’s older sister, Kathryn’s troubling grief reaction. One part of the article explains:

Night after night Kathryn had the same vivid dream:

Somebody would be at the front door, knocking. She’d go to the door and open it, and a person would be standing there, dressed in a black cape and a black hat, looking down. Suddenly the person would look up, and it would be Terri, and she’d smile and say, “Don’t worry, Sis, I’m not really dead.” (Schlosser, 1997)

Terri’s mother Harriet reports this experience.

Without any warning, in a quiet moment, Harriet sometimes feels Terri’s presence. “All of a sudden something will wash over me,” she says, “and I can hear Terri say, ‘It’s going to be okay, Mom.” (Schlosser, 1997)

These statements are not unusual when compared to other reports in the ADC literature. Here they are noted as examples of the types of experiences that family members of murder victims may encounter.

Also to learn more about the experience of coping with the murder of a family member, I attended the 23rd Annual 2009 POMC National Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio. The conference is offered to address the needs of parents and other family members of a murder victim or, as I observed in the cases of some families, multiple
murder victims. At the conference there was a workshop called “Connecting with Your Loved One” with Sunny Dawn Johnston (2009), medium and spiritual teacher, presenting. I attended this offering and from where I was sitting I could manage to count an estimated number of around 35 to 40 attendees, a number that represented about 10% of all conference attendees. The workshop was repeated during the course of the conference. When Johnston asked the participants in this group how many had in some way sensed the presence of their deceased loved one, virtually everyone in the room raised a hand. I was one of only a few professionals attending this conference. Most participants were family members of a loved one lost to murder. In that moment, I was struck by the awareness that there are beliefs and values among these people who come together to support each other in the aftermath of horrific loss that I, as a highly trained professional, have not been privy to understand. The point of the workshop was to help the participants develop their own skills at recognizing communications from deceased loved ones. One woman spoke about seeing her deceased son. The atmosphere in the room suggested that such contacts with the deceased were normal events under circumstances such as theirs. Some who asked questions seemed to be looking for validation of their experiences. As an outsider, I wondered if survivors keep these types of meaningful experiences carefully concealed or are they comfortable with telling their professional helpers about them? How do the professional helpers respond? In later reading I learned that these types of session where “nonordinary experiences” are discussed are also quite popular at Compassionate Friends conferences, too (Klass, 2001,
p.86). Compassionate Friends is a support organization for parents who have lost a child to death.

**What is Currently Known about After Death Communication**

To determine what is already known about ADC experiences, an attempt was made to find information in the scholarly literature. Partly because this phenomenon goes by different names, searching the usual databases brought minimal results. I was aware of one book on the subject that was written for the general public, *Hello from Heaven* by Bill and Judy Guggenheim (1995). I knew that if I went to the bookseller website, www.Amazon.com, and searched for a book on a specific subject other books on the same subject would appear. Part of my literature search was conducted on Amazon.com using this strategy. Eventually, I found reference to Devers’ (1994) dissertation on adults who had experienced some form of communication with a deceased loved one. The Devers dissertation cited several journal articles that could be accessed. As well as I can determine, there is not a vast literature on the subject, but some information does exist.

The information I located about the general subject of ADC’s came from five journal articles (Bennett & Bennett, 2000; Haraldsson, 1988-89; Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; Rees, 1971; Yamamoto, Keigo, Iwasaki, & Yoshimura, 1969), one dissertation (Devers, 1994), one book chapter (Conant, 1996), one book with 70 narratives written by women who had contact with their deceased mothers (Browning, 2002), and four books written for general audiences where the authors discuss ADC data they have gathered (Arcangel, 2005; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; LaGrand, 1997; Martin & Romanowski, 1997). In addition, some of the writing on this subject addresses dreams
only. I found one journal article (Barrett, 1991-92), and two books that are devoted specifically to dreams of the deceased (Ryan, 2006; Wray & Price: 2005).

To organize my own thinking about the information about ADC’s contained in the various sources, I outlined pertinent details contained in each of the twelve general ADC texts. I will address the three sources that only cover dreams separately. Many similarities were found in all of the accounts of the ADC’s. Some authors provided information about a fuller range of experiences than others. The differences can largely be found in the interpretation of the meaning of the experiences. As a way to approach this material, I will first focus on the various types of ADC’s that are reported in the literature. Then I will look at some of the communication issues along with possible ramifications for the helping work.

To begin, it’s important to draw attention to the spontaneous nature of the ADC’s in the reports. Some of the authors say that a small number of their participants took part in a séance or worked with a medium (Arcangel, 2005; Conant, 1996; Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; Martin & Romanowski, 1997), but for the most part the phenomena is unprompted occurrence with the quality of being out of the recipient’s control. For example, Devers (1994) makes this point quite clear as she states,

Most participants denied even attempting to elicit an experience with the deceased. They were engaged in a variety of activities and most said they were not even thinking about the deceased when the experience occurred. (p.55)

With that in mind, what follows are descriptions of the types of spontaneous ADC experiences that are reported in the various readings.
All twelve of the general ADC sources say that at least some of their participants/informants reported a sense of presence of the deceased (Arcangel, 2005; Bennett & Bennett, 2000; Browning, 2002; Conant, 1996; Devers, 1994; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; Haraldsson, 1988-89; Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; LaGrand, 1997; Martin & Romanowski, 1997; Rees, 1971; Yamamoto, Keigo, Iwasaki, & Yoshimura, 1969). Devers (1994) provides an example of such an ADC in the following quote from a man who experienced a sense of presence after his wife died:

...[A]bout a month after my wife died . . . I was so depressed I could hardly breathe. . . . I went upstairs and I just threw myself on the bed thinking ‘the refrigerator’s quit’, and I was thinking of all these problems. Then just all of a sudden the room was just filled with this presence, a soft light and I was overcome with this overwhelming feeling of peace. It lasted between five and eight minutes. It was just her saying ‘I’m okay and you’re going to be okay – don’t worry. (p. 60).

All twelve general ADC sources also indicated that their participants report seeing the deceased. The Guggenheim’s (1995) further clarify that a visual ADC may come in the form of seeing a partial or full apparition of the deceased or some report an internal vision that may contain telepathic communication. The internal vision most often occurs during a state of deep relaxation. The ADC authors provide examples of these types of experiences, but I thought it might be worthwhile to notice that such cases are reported elsewhere, as well. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1997), the famous psychiatrist known for her work on death and dying, describes an encounter she had with a deceased patient in her
autobiography, The Wheel of Life. Kubler-Ross was known for inviting patients to speak about living with terminal illness at a regularly scheduled University of Chicago-Billings Hospital seminar for medical students, theology students, and other interested health and spiritual care professionals. She teamed up with a chaplain for the seminars and felt that together they offered the students a worthwhile balanced perspective on end-of-life care. The chaplain with whom she had a valued working relationship left the hospital to pursue other career goals. The replacement chaplain was not working out. Kubler-Ross was so discouraged that she decided to tell the new chaplain that she would not continue to offer the seminar. Before she could do so, there in the hallway of the hospital, she encountered a former patient who had spoken at the seminar, Mrs. Schwartz. Mrs. Schwartz died ten months before this contact, but, according to Kubler-Ross, she “looked her usual pleasant, but preoccupied self” and her voice sounded real (p.177). Kubler-Ross wrote that Mrs. Schwartz came to convey this message:

“Dr. Ross, I had to come back for two reasons,” she said clearly.

“Number one is to thank you and the Reverend Gaines for all you have done for me.” . . . “[T]he second reason I came back is to tell you not to give up your work on death and dying . . . not yet.” (p.177).

Mrs. Schwartz went on to say “We will help you,” suggesting that those who are already deceased would be supporting Kubler-Ross’s work. When the contact ended, Mrs. Schwartz vanished. While Kubler-Ross was astonished by the contact, she decided to allow herself to be open to believing in what she called a mystical experience. From this
jolt of Mrs. Schwartz’s encouragement, Kubler-Ross found a new burst of enthusiasm for carrying on with her death and dying work. Just to add an interesting note, Raymond Moody (1993), the psychiatrist credited with naming the near-death-experience, wrote a public apology to Kubler-Ross for expressing doubt when she told him about the Mrs. Swartz experience. Now that Moody has had his own encounter with the deceased, he understands what Kubler-Ross was describing.

For an account of another type of visual ADC, Greeley (1976) quotes Carl Jung’s experience of an internal vision he had while awake in his bed thinking about a friend’s recent unanticipated death. Jung explains, “Suddenly I felt that he was in the room. It seemed to me that he stood at the foot of my bed and was asking me to go with him” (p. 82). Jung then went through some internal back and forth about whether this was a fantasy, but if it were not a fantasy how “abominable” it would be to ignore the visit. He decided to pay attention and as the vision continued, the deceased visitor went to the door and signaled Jung to follow on a path that eventually ended in the study of the deceased’s home. Jung said that upon arriving in the study, “He climbed on a stool and showed me the second of five books with red bindings which stood on the second shelf from the top” (p.83). The vision ended there. The next day, Jung asked the man’s widow if he could look at something in the deceased man’s library. Jung then proceeded to go to the library where he found the stool and the five books precisely as observed in his vision. The title of the second book was Legacy of the Dead. Jung did not find the contents of the book of much interest, but thought the title held a message about the experience.
Twelve of the general ADC readings mentioned experiences of hearing the deceased. In one study, Rees (1971) found that of the combined 227 widows and 66 widowers from Wales that he interviewed, 13.3% reported hearing the deceased spouse. Widows (14.1%) were more likely to have this type of contact than widowers (10.6%).

In the Guggenheim’s discussion of auditory ADC’s, they report that some of their informants heard voices in the usual manner through the ears and some heard an internal voice that was experienced as coming from a known, but external source. They give an example of a young widow who, with her ears, hears her husband say, “Don’t ever be afraid. You will always have the people around you that you need” (p.33).

Feeling the touch of the deceased was reported in ten of the consulted sources on general ADC’s (Arcangel, 2005; Bennett & Bennett, 2000; Conant, 1996; Devers, 1994; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; Haraldsson, 1988-89; Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; LaGrand, 1997; Martin & Romanowski, 1997; Rees, 1971). For instance, LaGrand (1997) found that people who are asleep often awakened by a touch at the beginning of a more extensive ADC such as an ensuing conversation. According to LaGrand (1997), touch is also reported to occur during waking hours and usually entails contact on the hand, shoulder, or an embrace. Similar experiences take place in the dream state. To illustrate the experience, LaGrand (1997) quotes a young female who lost her grandmother.

She [the grandmother] died on a Saturday. The following Wednesday evening I awoke to my grandmother clasping my hand. I was startled and I could feel the hair on the back of my neck stand up. I still feel it when I tell someone about it,
like now. I didn’t see her in the dark, but I knew she was there. She had to be okay, I thought. (p.101).

Eight of the general ADC readings refer to olfactory ADC’s, that is, the experience of a smell associated with the deceased (Arcangel, 2005; Bennett & Bennett, 2000; Browning, 2002; Devers, 1994; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; Haraldsson, 1988-89; LaGrand, 1997; Martin & Romanowski, 1997). A good example of this ADC type is found among Browning’s (2002) compiled narratives. In that book, Alexis Gonyeau (2002) writes that, as a gesture of love, her mother often baked brownies for her family. Shortly after the mother’s death, Gonyeau asked for a sign that her mother was safe and pain free. Gonyeau writes that she was just waking up early in the morning and goes on to say:

As lay in bed I smelled brownies baking in the oven downstairs. I thought my sister had gotten up to make my favorite dessert for me on my [birthday]. I walked quietly downstairs, but no one was up yet. . . Only when I walked back upstairs and into my bedroom and smelled the baking brownies once again, did I realize that I had indeed received a special gift from my mom. (p.177)

Six of the general ADC sources brought up meaningful symbolic communications (Browning, 2002; Conant, 1996; Devers, 1994; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; LaGrand, 1997; Martin & Romanowski, 1997). Interestingly, this type of ADC is mostly not mentioned in research that was conducted by survey (Arcangel, 2005; Haraldsson, 1988-89) or highly structure interview (Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; Rees, 1971). It
appears that the question was not asked. While Yamamoto, Keigo, Iwasaki, & Yoshimura (1969) and Bennett and Bennett (2000) did report on interviews, these studies primarily addressed the sense of presence only. From the accounts that do recognize symbolic communications, again, one of the narratives in Browning’s (2002) collection is an excellent example of this type of ADC. Susan Yarina’s (2002) mother promised that she would find a way to return after her death to let her daughter know that the mother’s caring did not end with death. After the mother died, in a moment of profound grief, Yarina prayed for a sign. Shortly thereafter, Yarina’s husband pointed out that there was a cardinal on the birdfeeder that he had placed outside their new Arizona home. The cardinal was her mother’s favorite bird and, although the cardinal was plentiful in Yarina’s home state of Indiana, it was rare to see a cardinal in the Arizona region where she lived after her mother’s death. According to Yarina, the cardinal looked at her for five minutes without moving. She says that she continues to see the cardinal in moments of despair, but the despairing times happened less often as time passes. Still, Yarina feels that the cardinal’s presence is a sign that her mother continues to watch over her.

Several ADC phenomena are mentioned in only a few of the general sources. Communication through electrical disturbances such as flickering lights is mentioned in three readings (Conant, 1996; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; Martin & Romanowski, 1997). For example, one of Conant’s widow participants and her family noticed dimming lights at special occasions such as a graduation where her husband would have been present if alive.
Telephone ADC’s are described in two of the readings (Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; Martin & Romanowski, 1997). The Guggenheim’s (1995) explain that the telephone ADC’s are the most rare type and they can come in the form of a dream or an actual phone call. In the actual call, the voice of the deceased may “sound strong and clear” or it may sound as if the call is coming from far away (p.161). At the end of the call, instead of a hang up sound or a dial tone there is silence. To illustrate the type of message that may come through a telephone call, the Guggenheim’s tell about the experience of a woman whose son, Joe, was murdered. She received the call in the night when she was asleep. As her story is told:

I said, “Hello?” And the answer came, “Hello, Mom. This is me.” This is the way Joe always started his conversations when he called us. He said, “Please stop grieving form me. Please stop crying. I want you to know that I’m happy and I’m at peace. Before I could say anything he was gone – just like the phone went dead (Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995, p. 169).

Again in the more detailed accounts where the informants were interviewed there are stories of what Martin & Romanowski, (1997) call precognition ADCs. The recipient of the communication has the experience of knowing something in a way that cannot be explained. This type of ADC might also fit into the category of an auditory ADC. In such cases, the recipient might receive advice or a warning from the deceased. Several of the general ADC sources recorded instances of advice giving (Bennett & Bennett, 2000; Devers, 1994; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; Martin & Romanowski, 1997 or life saving warnings (Browning, 2002; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; Martin &
Romanowski, 1997). For example, Bennett and Bennett (2000) say that the most common experience that the Leicester widows reported was that of “hearing or sensing the voice of the lost husband giving advice or making comments of changes around the house. . .” (p.144). The Guggenheim’s give several examples of life saving ADC interventions. In one case, a deceased mother awakened her daughter in the middle of the night. The daughter saw her mother standing in the doorway. The mother urged this woman to go to her baby’s bedroom and then vanished. When the woman arrived in the baby’s bedroom she found that the baby was blue from choking on a bottle nipple. After removing the lodged object, the baby was able breath normally.

Other types of experiences that are mentioned in the general ADC literature are third party experiences (Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; LaGrand, 1997), psychokinetic (Martin & Romanowski, 1997), and evidential experiences (Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; Martin & Romanowski, 1997). In the third party experience, a message is sent to the recipient through someone else. In an example provided by the Guggenheim’s, a deceased man sent a telepathic message to the sister of his wife asking her to tell the wife to take the desk drawers out of a desk in the wife’s home. When the wife did so, she found hidden cash. In what Martin & Romanowski, (1997) call the psychokinetic experience and the Guggenheim’s (1995) call ADCs of physical phenomena, significant objects such as pictures are moved around (Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995) or noises such as knocking can be heard (Martin & Romanowski, 1997). With the evidential experience, the contact provides information that was
unknown to the recipient as in the case of the wife learning that there was money stashed behind the drawer in her desk.

These strange and exotic tales raise questions for helping professionals? How are we to think about such experiences and is anything available that connects these reports to a framework that professionals understand? Does the literature that has been reviewed thus far provide any guidance for negotiating this somewhat foreign territory? Next I will try to address some of these questions by looking at the issues raised in the literature discussed so far.

**General ADC Report Issues and Ramifications**

As a place to start, it’s noticeable that many of the ADC authors (Arcangel, 2005; Bennett & Bennett, 2000; Devers, 1994; LaGrand, 1997; Yamamoto, Keigo, Iwasaki, & Yoshimura, 1969) cited various work of an author with a name familiar to most helping professionals, John Bowlby. In Bowlby’s (1980) volume, *Loss*, he sets out what he calls “phases of mourning” that one would expect to see in the response to the loss of a close relationship. The phases are:

1. Phase of numbing that usually lasts from a few hours to a week. . .

2. Phase of yearning and searching for the lost figure lasting some months and sometimes for years.

3. Phase of disorganization and despair.

4. Phase of greater or less degree of reorganization. (p.85)
The phase of “yearning and searching for the lost figure” is the relevant part of the process for ADC consideration. In this writing, Bowlby makes a connection between great yearnings for the lost one and the sense of that lost one’s presence. In discussing Parkes (1970) research on widowhood, Bowlby attributes the reported sights and sounds of their deceased husbands as “part of a general perceptual set that scans sensory input for evidence of the missing person . . .” (p.89). He believes that this sense of presence of the deceased is a positive sign because, from an attachment standpoint, this continued relationship with a secure attachment paradoxically supports the continued growth and self-sufficiency of the surviving spouse. Further he notes that in most societies there is a belief in the continuation of life beyond bodily death and most believe that a relationship with the living continues in a manner that is beneficial to the one who survives. With the addition of present day ADC data, Bowlby’s (1980) interpretation of the sense of presence phenomenon seems limiting as his expert opinion and interpretation tends to override the knowing of the ones who had the experiences.

Along the same lines, it is noticeable that some of the late 20th century writing on this subject used the words hallucination and illusion (Haraldsson, 1988-89; Rees, 1971) to define encounters with the deceased. Rees (1971) uses the word hallucination to describe seeing, hearing, or being touched by the deceased and the word illusion is used to denote the sense of presence of the deceased. He does indicate that these particular hallucinations are normal and helpful to the widows and widowers. Haraldsson (1988-89) seems to be struggling with “hallucination” word in his writing. At one point he uses the words “veridical hallucination” (p.104) to make a distinction between those
hallucinations that have some factual underpinnings versus those that do not. In concluding remarks he queries, “These findings, weak as they are, may permit us to ask if some, or any, of these experiences may possibly be something more than ‘just hallucinations’” (p.112). Devers (1994) gives full attention to the word “hallucination” explaining that since there is no “identifiable external stimulus” (p. 17) for the experience, the word hallucination can be correctly used to label the contact. She cautions, however, that because the word “hallucination” is accompanied by the connotation of mental illness or drug-induced states, other descriptors are better suited for experiences of contacts from the deceased that happen to individuals with no mental illness or drug involvement.

How the ADC experience gets defined holds great significance for those who have the experience. Devers (1994) provides the most detailed information about how her participants tried to understand their experiences. First, all of her participants thought that others would view their experiences as symptomatic of some pathology. Devers works from the perspective that there is a reconciling process where the individual who has an experience of communication from the deceased first must find a personal explanation and interpretation that is congruent with that individual’s own way of understanding the world. Also, the explanation must be relevant for that person’s worldview. The next step involves responding to the cultural norms or the public ideas about the meaning of the experience. Internal discord could erupt when the individual is not able to find an explanation that fits into the personal concept of the way the world
participants were reluctant to share their privately reconciled understandings in public when their views did not agree with the more commonly held public view.

Although all participants started off at a “gut level” knowing their experience was real, each had to find his or her own explanation for the experience that fit with the view of reality. They normally started with questioning whether the experience was real or imagined and then looked for cues to verify the experience such as recognizing the deceased’s clothing, noticing that the deceased used a personally significant nickname, or finding the deceased in a familiar context. Some of the participants were comfortable with a strictly spiritual explanation. The spiritual explanations came with other outcomes such as getting clearer about what is important in life, becoming more spiritually focused generally, gaining a sense of the continuation of life beyond the physical, and being prompted to examine current spiritual beliefs. One of Devers’ participants was initially convinced that she had contact with her deceased husband, but as time elapsed, she shifted to a psychological explanation suggesting that “it was probably just a physical response to her psychological needs at the time” (p.96). Some incorporated both a spiritual and a psychological explanation by saying, for example, that the grief state puts one in the right frame of mind to have the experience of contact with the deceased. At least one participant considered a scientific explanation. Those who arrived at strictly a psychological or a scientific explanation tended toward rejecting the reality of the experience. Those who could combine their psychological or scientific explanations with a spiritual explanation thought that they had an encounter with the deceased. Devers (1994) goes on to say, “Even when participants entertained alternative explanations they
never discounted the possibility of spiritual explanations. The spiritual explanations accounted for the reality and purpose of [the experience]” (p. 100).

In several of the studies, the participants have that gut level knowing that they have communicated with the deceased, but they are reluctant to be very public about the experience for fear of ridicule (Bennett & Bennett, 2000; Conant, 1996; Devers, 1994; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; Martin & Romanowski, 1997). For instance, the widows in Conant’s (1996) research clearly stated that their contacts were not hallucinations. In spite of this concern that others might consider the ADC a sign of craziness, nearly all the readings mentioned how helpful the ADC was for most of those who had this experience. The Haraldsson (1988-89) article was the only exception. This particular article did not comment on whether the contact was helpful or not. Several researchers found that participants received messages indicating that the deceased was okay (Conant, 1996; Devers, 1994; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; LaGrand, 1997; Martin & Romaowski, 1997) and this was a helpful aspect of the communication for most.

Some of the readings report that a minority of participants found the experience unhelpful (e.g., Arcangel, 2005; Devers, 1994; Rees, 1971) because it precipitated heightened longing for the deceased (e.g., Arcangel, 2005; Devers, 1994), or because the recipient was frightened (Arcangel, 2005; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995). The Guggenheim’s point out that the fear seems to be from the recipient’s lack of understanding about what was happening. The communications from the deceased do not contain fear-provoking messages. Arcangel (2005) mentions that some of her
participants were children when they had the experience and they were concerned that a disciplinarian type parent might be returning to criticize them. Children who were not frightened trusted that their deceased parent would be continuing to protect them.

Especially LaGrand (1997) critically assesses Bowlby’s (1980) notion that ADC experiences are psychological manifestations resulting from normal grief prompted searching behavior. Speaking of professionals’ usual interpretation of these experiences, LaGrand says, “[ADC type experiences] are all considered a normal part of the grief process by most professionals. But they are only considered to be artifacts of grief, not real events” (p. 31). He goes on to make the point that ADCs are not confined to any narrow time frame. In some instances, the ADC occurs before the recipient knows that the person is deceased so that death-precipitated grief has not commenced (such cases also reported in Browning, 2002; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; Haraldsson, 1988-89; Martin & Romanowski, 1997). Contact may also occur many years after the loss when fervent searching is no longer a factor (Bennett & Bennett, 2000; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; LaGrand, 1997; Martin & Romanowski, 1997). In the third party cases, the recipient of the message may not know the deceased (Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; LaGrand, 1997). Some of the other authors agree with LaGrand’s contention that the timing and path of the ADC leave Bowlby’s searching theory unsupported (Arcangel, 2005; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995). On this point, Arcangel’s Afterlife Encounters Survey (AES) findings are pertinent. Arcangel explains:

Of the 596 AES respondents who reported afterlife encounters, 82% were not longing for anything of that nature. . . Of the 231 respondents who had
never experienced afterlife encounters, 89% longed
for them, many of whom declared holding intense
desire for decades. (p.288)

Another question that is mentioned in this general ADC literature is about
whether the type of death might have an affect the likelihood of receiving communication
from the deceased. Harraldson (1988-89) reported that out of his 100 Iceland participants
who reported ADCs, 23% of the deceased communicators had violent deaths (accidents,
suicides, and one homicide), a high number when compared to the 8% of all deaths in
Iceland that occurred in a violent manner. Devers (1994) did not find any particular
pattern in the types of deaths connected to her participants. In Bennett and Bennett’s
(2000) study of nineteen Leicester widows, the researchers did not find any connection
between the suddenness of the death and an ADC encounter, but they did notice that half
of the widows reported contact from a deceased husband who had a distressing death.
While the numbers are small in the Bennett and Bennett study (19 widows), this
information along with Harraldson’s findings are worth keeping in mind given that the
present research is focused upon situations where distressing, violent deaths have
occurred.

Taken in chronological order, the Guggenheim’s (1995) are the first to report
forgiveness or forgiveness related types of ADCs. Experiences that have an implicit or
explicit message about forgiveness are scattered throughout the various ADC
descriptions. Three reported experiences came after the murder of a child. In one case, a
father received a message in a third party ADC that his recently murdered son did not
suffer during the attack because he left his body. The message also revealed that the now
deceased son was okay and that he felt sorry for his murderers. In a second case, a father had a strong sense of presence combined with an internal auditory ADC from his 26-year-old daughter who was just murdered. She asked her father to pray for the murderer. The father was struggling with his wish to kill the murderer and felt that praying would be like forgiving. The daughter’s message was adamant about the need to pray because it would help the father. The father did pray at that moment, but continued to struggle with his strong desire to kill the murderer. About 6 months later a second, similar ADC came from the deceased daughter saying that she was fine. She continued to insist that the father should pray for the murderer. This prompted the father to take steps that would help him work toward giving up revenge.

In the third case, a son who was murdered on a Monday night appeared at his father’s beside at about 4:00 AM the next Thursday. The son told his father that he was happy and repeated the phrase, “No hatred, no anger, Dad” (p. 330). The dad who, up to that point had been determined to kill the murderer, found great peace as a result of the encounter. His thinking about the murderer changed from a focus on retribution to feeling sorry for the murderer because the murderer would have to live with the burden of knowing that he had taken a life.

In other forgiveness related ADC reports, the deceased is offering an apology or asking for forgiveness. Examples include a deceased alcoholic father who asked for his daughter’s forgiveness (Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995), and a mother who died by suicide sending a dream message to her daughter asking to be forgiven, (Martin & Romanowski, 1997). In Browning’s (2002) collection of narratives, there are three stories where the women authors had trouble in the relationships with their now deceased
mothers. In two of the narratives, the women received communications that they were forgiven. In the third story, the author was working on forgiving and she felt supported by her deceased mother. This author says that her mother “reminds us all to love, forgive, and heal the past. For it is only through love and forgiveness that we are able to heal” (Browning, 2002, p. 94).

It is interesting to notice that in the ADCs where there has been some conflict or wrongdoing in life, the message that come to the recipient are not about seeking revenge or finding ways to maintain the conflict. At least in the reported cases, the messages either support forgiveness explicitly or they support forgiveness process activities such as praying for the murderer or having no hate for the murderer. In all of the reports, only caring, life-supporting ADCs are recorded. There are no scary ghost stories to be found. This life-affirming stance can also be found in the dream ADCs which will be considered next.

**Dream Encounters with the Deceased**

Some researchers only collected information about encounters with the deceased that took place in dreams. Since the dream research brings some unique perspectives on ADCs and the role of an ADC in the grief process, what is known about dreams will be considered separately here. To begin, (Barrett, 1991-92) provides some history of dreams about the dead to illustrate that different ideas about the significance of such dreams emerged at different times. According to Barrett, one type of belief can be observed in the writing of the 16th century Swiss physician, Paracelsus, who wrote that the appearance of a dead person in a dream is not an illusion and bolstered his conviction
by recommending that the dreamer should heed the prudent advice offered by the deceased in the dream. Also, the writings of the early in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century spiritist movement claimed their dream research demonstrated that life continues beyond physical death. Later 20\textsuperscript{th} century authors moved to strictly psychological explanations emphasizing the dream’s metaphorical message for some aspect of personal development.

In Barrett’s (1991-92) own two-part research based first on a review of 1,412 dreams from 149 undergraduates who kept dream journals from two to six weeks, and then on additional dreams of 96 college students who reported specifically on dreams about a dead person, she found the following four dream categories: a) \textit{Back-to-Life Dreams}; b) \textit{Advice Dreams}; c) \textit{Leave-Taking Dreams}; and d) \textit{State-of Death Dreams}. When one person had a series of dreams about the deceased, the dreams typically started with a back-to-life dream where that deceased was alive in the dream, progressed to an advice dream, and ended with the leave taking where there was a chance to say good-bye to the deceased. Interestingly, even thought Barrett provided the historical context for viewing the dreams as either direct communications from the deceased or as some form of metaphor brought forth by one’s own psyche to assist with the healing process, she does not address this issue again in her discussion about her own results. The report gives no indication of how the participants viewed the origins of the messages in the dreams. The author just notes that such dreams may be important to consider in grief counseling.
Several years later, the discussion about how to understand the whereabouts of the deceased in the dreams takes on a different tone. In Wray and Price’s 2005 book, *Grief Dreams*, the authors make a very clear statement about their stance on this issue. They explain that one view of such dreams holds that the individual’s unconscious is working to help resolve the grief through the appearance of the deceased in the dreams. Another view is that the actual deceased person enters into dreams to communicate with the living person. These authors note that many of the individuals who contributed dreams to their book believe that they received direct communications from the deceased. In the writing of the book, the authors say that they will not endorse one view or the other. Instead, they strive to present the dreams as the dreamers perceive the experiences. This attitude of openness to the experience of the one who has the dream(s) allows for a greater possibility of authentically capturing the experience rather than overriding it with the researcher’s limited conceptualization about what might be occurring. It seems to mark a change in the way such experiences are reported and viewed in the existing literature. In much of the literature on this subject, the one’s who have the dreams or other forms of communication with the deceased have the strong feeling that they were receiving direct communications, but they questioned their own sense of that reality (e.g., Devers, 1994). Especially given the reluctance of earlier research participants to mention such communications for fear that they would be considered pathological (Bennett & Bennett, 2000; Conant, 1996; Devers, 1994; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; Martin & Romanowski, 1997), acceptance on the part of the researcher seems crucial to gathering a trustworthy result.
Wray and Price (2005) report on several dreams that they have collected. Unfortunately, they do not provide any information about the exact numbers of dreams they reviewed, nor do they give demographic information about the people who contributed the dreams. The book is designed as a self-help guide for getting through the grief process. Based upon the dreams these authors gathered, they concluded that grief dreams fall into four categories: a) the visitation dream; b) the message dream; c) the reassurance dream; and d) the trauma dream (p. 2). When comparing these categories to Barrett’s (1991-92), one can see a correspondence between Barrett’s back-to-life dream and Wray and Price’s visitation dream where essentially the deceased person appears in a living form as if to stop by for a visit. The message dream and advice dream appear to be similar, as well. In the reassurance dream, the dreamer receives some reassurance that the dead person is okay and that the dreamer, too, will be okay. Barrett did not report that specific category. In her state-of-death category, the dreamers seemed to be inquiring about after death conditions and the responses were evasive. In Barrett’s leave-taking dreams, the dreamer has a chance to say good-bye to the deceased in a satisfactory manner. The saying good-bye element can be found in Wray and Price’s reassurance category.

According to Wray and Price (2005), the trauma dream does not occur as often as the other types of dreams. Trauma dreams are more likely to take place if the death was traumatic as in the case of murder, suicide, or an accident. Even though the content of traumatic dreams may take the form of nightmares where features of the death scenario are played out, they, too, can be an aid to healing.
One other researcher focused on dreams only. Ryan (2006) interviewed 1064 participants in his study of dreams about the dead. His participants were self-selected College of New Rochelle students, their friends, and family members. Participants included 224 males and 840 females. They ranged in age from 18 to 93 years old. Eighty seven per cent said they were Christians (N= 933). Ryan notes that only one participant did not find her dream meaningful. The remainder attributed meaning to their dreams. Some of his participants believed that they were receiving direct communication from a deceased loved one, some were not sure about the origin of the dream, and others rejected the idea that a spirit could communicate in this manner. Ryan leaves this matter open for individual interpretation as he states, “This is a . . . choice that dreamers have, that is, to choose to believe in the spiritual reality of the dream or to remain skeptical about it” (p. 4).

Ryan (2006) organized his findings into “six elements of grief” prompted by the dreams (p. 7). The elements are: a) remembering where there was a “remembered presence” of the deceased in the dream (p.7); b) imagining that entailed envisioning different scenarios regarding the deceased such as what life would be like if the person was still alive or imagining that the deceased is watching over the dreamer; c) feeling, meaning that affective responses in the dreams covered a range that might include, for example, peacefulness, sadness, or guilt; d) thinking that involved the thoughts about the deceased brought to the surface as a result of the dream; e) gaining insight related to personal growth brought about by some greater understanding as a result of the dream; and f) believing that Ryan (2006) described as a spiritual element. In Ryan’s own words:
[Believing] consisted of beliefs about life and death. For example, some believed that the dreams were visits from the dead, often offering a chance to say goodbye or resolve conflicts. Others believed that the dreams were messages from the dead; these messages included advice, warnings, requests, and apologies. Finally, some believed that the dreams contained true images of or information about the afterlife. One belief that was common in the dream interviews was that the relationship with the deceased continued. (p.11)

All of the dreams in Ryan’s study contained more than one of the elements he described.

Of particular interest for the purposes of this work are the dreams in Ryan’s (2006) collection that have a forgiveness component. A dreamer who lost a childhood friend through a murder that had taken place five years earlier reports one dream. The dream was given as an example of an insight dream where the dreamer recognized a message indicating that she should let go of the grudge she was holding against the murderers. Other forgiveness related dreams of interest include: a) a deceased father who apparently did not treat his daughter well in life asks for forgiveness in the dream; b) a father who apologized to his daughter for leaving her while he was alive and then dying a few years later; c) a deceased child who told his mother that he forgave her for the accident that caused his death (the accident occurred because the mother was drug addicted and not watching the child); and d) in another dream a childhood friend who died 13 years before the dream occurred asked repeatedly for forgiveness for the fight with the dreamer on the day he died. The dreamer would not forgive the friend in the
dream, but she realized as a result of the dream that she needed to be more forgiving generally.

Seventeen of the dead people who appeared in dreams reported to Ryan (2006) were murdered. In one dream, the murder victim told a story about how the murder occurred that confirmed the dreamer’s suspicions. One dream brought up guilt for the dreamer because she had not been more vocal about the danger she saw in the behavior of the boyfriend who committed the murder. One murder dream served as a message that the dreamer should go another direction in life because her current life style was dangerous and put her at risk of a similar fate.

**Summing Up!**

This discussion of ADC’s and dream ADC’s shows the last of all of the elements that I plan to explore in the planned research. To review the elements explored so far, individuals who have lost a loved one to the violence of homicide will experience grief that is different from grief where death resulted from natural causes because the death was caused by an intentional act or a preventable act of negligence (Armour, 2006). The criminal justice system will become involved in cases where a homicide has been committed. Interaction with the traditional criminal justice proceedings can be quite disturbing for survivors (Armour, 2006; Conrad, 1998), but those who come into contact with restorative justice procedures such as VOD report satisfaction (Sherman et al., 2005; Strang et al., 2006; Umbreit & Vos, 2000; Umbreit, Vos, Coates, & Brown, 2003; VanNess & Strong, 2002) and in some cases healing benefits (Angel, 2005; Strang et al., 2006; Umbreit & Vos, 2000; Umbreit, Vos, Coates, & Brown, 2003). There is some
recognition in the literature that restorative justice procedures entail a structure that encourages forgiveness (Armour & Umbreit, 2005, 2006; McCullough, 2008) even though finding forgiveness is not a stated intention of restorative justice meetings (Umbreit, Vos, Coates, & Brown, 2003; VanNess & Strong, 2002; Zehr, 2002).

From that place, the literature focuses on the mental health benefits that people glean from psychotherapeutic interventions designed to promote forgiveness (e.g., Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Freedman, Enright, & Knutson, 2005; Lin, Mack, Enright, Krahn, & Baskin, 2004; Worthington, 2006). Some comparisons were made between the assumptions that drive two forgiveness intervention models, The Process Model (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000) and the REACH Model (Worthington, 2006) to highlight different possible cognitive and affective processes that might either be essential or, at least, contribute to the likelihood that forgiveness could occur. A question that emanates from intervention models is still unanswered. Is empathy for the offender is necessary part of forgiveness or is dedication to replacing negative thoughts about the offender with more positive compassionate thoughts sufficient to drive a forgiveness result?

To look at forgiveness from another angle, some attention was given to the ways that general moral development theory might also be relevant for understanding the psychological processes that support forgiveness. Selman’s (1980) social perspective taking theory provides a framework for conceptualizing the development of ability to understand another’s experience based upon cognitive perceptions. Forgiveness appears to depend on some social perspective taking ability, that is, an ability to understand the offender’s experience. According to Gibbs (2010), the ability to take in the complexities
of the other’s experience comes into view with the developing cognitive capacities that emerge at the onset of early adolescence. With this cognitive ability to engage in hypothetical reasoning comes the possibility of moving away from pragmatic reciprocity (“an eye for an eye” thinking) in the domain of moral responses and moving toward a stance of ideal reciprocity (treat others the way you would wish to be treated). Ideal reciprocity thinking also appears to be an important component of forgiveness. To the cognitive aspects of moral development, Gibbs (2010) adds the element of empathy, saying that the picture of moral functioning is not complete without attention to the affective portion of human experience that drives moral behavior. Hoffman’s (2000) theory emphasizes the importance of empathy for moral development. The cognitive functioning then might be most devoted to fairness while the affective functioning is centered on caring that is derived from the natural tendency to respond empathically, especially in a face-to-face encounter with a suffering person.

Putting all of this information together, it appears that having willingness and ability to understand the offender’s circumstances are important contributors to forgiveness, but the caring response that comes out of empathy may be a crucial element in the spontaneous forgiveness that takes place in the restorative justice encounters. Again, because the restorative justice procedures often involve a face-to-face encounter between victim and offender, and the meeting is structured so that civility will be maintained, the set-up is right for evoking the victim’s empathy for the offender, which may explain some of the healing outcomes that victims report.
Given that some literature mentions reluctance on the part of victims to seek restorative justice conferences (Strang, et al. 2006), other information indicates that not much is known about what actually prompts the victim to make the request for a restorative justice conference (Armour & Umbreit, 2005), and the details about the forgiveness issue is basically unknown for those who do not seek restorative justice procedure, the literature on religious coping was explored in case it holds any clues about these matters. Religious coping is considered in detail because of the role it may play in the decision to seek or not seek VOD. Also, how does religious and spiritual life interface with views about forgiveness and the decision to move toward or stay away from forgiveness? Some points that stand out are that religious coping, both positive and negative, appears to increase during times of negative life stressors (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, and Perez, 1998). Forgiveness can be a part of religious coping (Pargament & Rye, 1998). Religious teachings support forgiveness, but those who are more inclined to focus on revenge may be drawn to the religious teachings about retributive justice rather than the teachings on forgiveness (Tsang, McCullough, and Hoyt, 2005). For some, the trauma brings about a disruption in the religious thinking that served the victim well prior to the traumatic event, but also presents an opportunity for growth that requires finding new explanations (Joseph & Linley, 2006: Shaw, Joseph & Linley, 2005). A search for meaning may commence. Arranging for a VOD may be part of that effort to find worthwhile meaning in the trauma (Armour, 2006). Also, in the spiritual realm, many people report receiving ADC from the deceased and some of those communications contain explicit forgiveness or forgiveness related content (e.g., see Browning, 2002;
Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; Martin Romanowski, 1997). Again, this area will be explored in the research to determine its impact on views about forgiveness and/or the decision to seek or not seek VOD.

So thinking about this literature in relation to the research questions, the existing knowledge does not reveal a great deal about what brings a survivor to the point of proceeding with a request for a VOD. Available information does not address the particulars of why one survivor would choose to pursue a VOD and another would not. Some of the exact questions Armour and Umbreit (2005) raised about whether forgiving individuals are more likely to request VOD and the long term consequences for those who forgive a violent offender are not covered in the literature, although the literature on forgiveness interventions would suggest that a forgiveness state would have extended mental health benefits (e.g., Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Freedman, Enright, & Knutson, 2005; Lin, Mack, Enright, Krahn, & Baskin, 2004; Worthington, 2003, 2006). The literature on moral development (Gibbs, 2010; Hoffman, 2000; Selman, 1980) suggests that the individuals may have certain moral development capacities that would make the conditions right for forgiveness prior to a VOD. Similarly, if forgiveness as part of religious coping (Pargament & Rye, 1998) might occur before the in-person VOD meeting took place. Also, the literature suggests that the forgiveness can come about because the dialogue process is structured in way that supports a possible forgiveness outcome (Armour & Umbreit, 2005; McCullough, 2008). The face-to-face encounter promotes empathy (Hoffman, 2000) which may add to a greater likelihood that forgiveness will occur in the exchange. The exact role of empathy is not clear.
Ultimately, for some survivors perhaps the overall worldview about healing in the aftermath of violence and about VOD specifically might be influenced by some aspect of general positive or negative religious coping (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998). The role of an ADC or lack of ADC is unknown in survivors’ course of healing and decision to request a VOD.

With this understanding and will all of these elements in place, the next step will be to outline the research strategy that was used. In the following section, the guiding framework for the research will be discussed.
Chapter 3: GUIDING FRAMEWORK FOR THE RESEARCH

I will start the process of explaining the underlying principles for the research by turning to Schwandt’s (2000) explanation of possible epistemological underpinnings for qualitative research. As a place to begin, I find it helpful to arrive at my final destination, social constructionism, by way of a comparison route through constructivism. Schwandt (2000) tells us that most social constructionist epistemologies start with the constructivist idea that the human mind is active in making sense of observed surroundings and experience. In this way, according to Schwandt,

...constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience. (p.197)

The constructivist concept includes the recognition that knowledge construction is influenced by the social, cultural, and historical circumstances. The process occurs within the context of some collective understanding about social practices and the use of a common language.
At this point, Gergen’s (1999) definitions of constructivism, social constructivism, and social constructionism will be helpful for clarifying the distinction among the concepts. According to Gergen (1999), constructivism holds that “the mind constructs reality but within a systematic relationship to the external world” and social constructivism adds that “the mental process is significantly informed by influences from social relationships” (p. 60). In social constructionism, “. . . the primary emphasis is on discourse as the vehicle through which self and world are articulated, and the way in which discourse functions within social relationships” (p. 60). So, back to Shwandt’s (2000) overview, social constructionism is not concerned with the mental processes that create an understanding of the world, but rather focuses on the meanings that language acquires in the course of human relations and how those meanings define the way the world is understood.

Gergen (2009) outlines five basic assumptions that underlie a social constructionist orientation. First, no specific words are required to describe “what there is” (p. 5). To say it another way, any condition or situation could have a number of different possible explanations or descriptions. The observed world does not direct the sense we make of it.

The second assumption is, “The ways in which we describe and explain the world are the outcomes of relationship” (Gergen, 2009, p.6). The sense we make of the observed world is derived from our social relationships. As Gergen (2009) says, “Understandings of the world are achieved through coordinations among persons – negotiations, agreements, comparing views, and so on” (p.6). Using the example of a
desk, he explains that scientists from various backgrounds would describe the desk based upon the relevant vocabulary for their particular field of science. So a physicist would be concerned about the atoms in the desk and a biologist might have interest in the cellulose. Gergen is not from either of those professional communities. He just sees a solid mahogany desk. Including scientists in the example serves to illustrate Gergen’s conclusion that what we call scientific truths develop out of community traditions rather than individual observing minds. He adds, “science cannot make claims to universal truth, as all truth claims are specific to particular traditions – lodged in culture and history” (p.8).

Assumption number three is, “Constructions gain their significance from their social utility” (p.9). To explain further, through the process of relating to each other, consistent patterns for going about life together are worked out, conventions about acceptable words and behaviors take shape, and environments with their requisite objects form as well. Even though there can be a variety of ways to describe the observable world, some descriptions of the world and experience in it turn out to be more worthwhile than others. Gergen gives the example that if one is physically ill, it is likely that the description for the illness provided by an educated physician will be more useful than that of child. So, as Gergen states, “All descriptions are not equal; some seem accurate and informative while others are fanciful or absurd” (p.9). When the focus is upon what is true or accurate, the measure is not how accurately the description shows a picture of the world. Instead the definition of truth and accuracy rests upon how the words convey the truth derived out of group traditions. On this point, Gergen warns that some group
definitions of truth result in oppression and general maltreatment of others who do not subscribe to that particular version of the truth.

The fourth assumption is that descriptions and explanations impact the future. In Gergen’s (2009) words, “. . . our practices of language are bound within relationships, and our relationships are bound with broader patterns of practice” (p.11). The higher education system is used as an example of this claim. Words like “students”, “professors”, “courses”, and “grades” are used to tell about higher education. In the social constructionist line of reasoning, the higher education system would not exist without the shared language that depicts that institution. Maintaining such institutions requires constant attention to reworking the meaning of the language that is shared about the particular entity. On this point, Gergen promotes the promise that a social constructionist understanding holds for the future, as one where “generative discourses” (p. 12, emphasis in original) offer hope for challenging existing meanings and fresh options for shaping our social world.

The fifth and final assumption that informs social constructionist thinking is “Reflection on our taken-for-granted worlds is vital to our future well-being” (p. 12). Here Gergen urges us to examine our traditions recognizing that with every convention that is maintained, an alternate ways of being in the world can be minimized, or perhaps marginalized or maybe altogether eliminated. He asks us to take a critical look at traditions with the understanding that each occurs within a particular cultural and historical context. The call for a critical examination is not a request for current traditions to be eradicated. Rather it is an appeal to examine our practices and to reflect
upon other possibilities that may result in beneficial life sustaining ways of carrying on together.

What are the ramifications of these assumptions? Gergen (2009) is clear that social constructionism is not saying that “[t]here is no reality” (p.4). Social constructionism concentrates on the concept that the sense people make of the world grows out of human produced traditions. Schwandt (2000) sums up several of Gergen’s writings on the matter as he sates, “social constructionism is mute or agnostic on the subject of ontology” (p.198). With regard to science, Gergen (2009) takes the position that some findings that grow out of a particular discipline’s framework for understanding the world are useful and their scientific definitions hold value for large parts of the population. The social constructionist position holds that scientific findings are not value free and further considers the privileged place the scientific explanation might take over other possible explanations, especially those that do not lend themselves well to scientific method review.

Social constructionism is criticized for a stance of moral and political relativism (Gergen, 1999; Gergen, 2009; Schwandt, 2000). To this criticism, Gergen (2009) replies that social constructionism provides grounding for the discussion of various moral and political issues in contrast to scientific views that claim neutrality, yet put out findings that result in domination of one group over another (e.g., those with high IQ scores are privileged over those with low scores). Constructionism directs people of all backgrounds and experiences to “challenge the ‘truth’ and ‘the facts’ of the dominant order” (Gergen, 2009, p. 169).
Gergen’s (2009) discussion of relativism is somewhat confusing because he makes statements such as “constructionist arguments . . . do not champion one ideal over another” (p. 168), “constructionism does not select a victor among competing voices” (p. 169), and “constructionists will not claim their values to be fundamentally superior to others” (p. 169), but also states, “one should not make the error here of saying that constructionists believe that ‘all moral values are equal’” (p. 169). He assumes that favored practices emerge in the process of orchestrating our way of life with each other and that good will naturally occur. There are many local understandings of how that good becomes manifest in patterns and traditions. The morality issue enters when there is a violation of the preferred order. Since constructionists are committed to seeing the many values and points of view that inhabit social practices, they are well suited to work toward developing productive outcomes when conflict disrupts human relations. So an advantage of social constructionism from Gergen’s (2009) point of view is its capacity to acknowledge the diversity of value commitments that grow out of various traditions. Seeing the plurality lessens the likelihood that one voice will dominate, oppress, and perhaps even plot to kill those who disagree.

Gergen (2009) explains that constructionists have their own personal values that are culturally and historically situated. He prefers dialogue among multiple voices with a variety of viewpoints about how to structure the world rather than having one or a few voices using violence or other forms of domination to advance their point of view. He acknowledges that dialogue is not a universally valued process and asks if there were a
choice between collaboration and fighting about the future, “what would you choose” (p.170)?

The social constructionist vantage point provides a fitting foundation for this research that, in part, is designed to look at the “truth” and the “facts” for a small number of individuals who have been touched by violations of the dominant order. With the respect for plurality of meanings, this framework places value on each experience of the disruption that comes with the loss of a loved one through violence? It allows for the exploration of meanings that help or hinder in the aftermath of violence or, to use Gergen’s (2009) language, the meanings that nourish life? With those thoughts in mind, the research methods will be described next.
Chapter 4: RESEARCH METHODS

Padgett (1998) recommends a qualitative research approach in situations where: a) not much is known about the subject of interest; b) there is a sensitive matter and the research would like to get an in depth understanding of the related emotional reactions; and c) the researcher would like to learn more about the experience from the perspective of the one who is living the experience. Given that all of these conditions apply to the questions of interest, a qualitative approach was used.

Narrative research methods were chosen to interpret the qualitative data. Given Reissman’s (2008) description of narrative research methods, narrative inquiry was a good match for the research for a number of reasons. According to Reissman (2008), this method does allow for the use of existing theory to conceptualize an approach to the data. She explains further that the narrative approach encourages vigilance for the emergence of new themes in the data as well. In the narrative procedure, the entire story is kept together for interpretation so that the participants’ views about their process can be retained. Attention is given to the specific time frame and place of the narration, which are important components of this research data. Narrative researchers typically do not support “generic explanations” (Riessman, 2008, p.74). The case-centered focus is a hallmark of narrative inquiry. Also, Gergen (2009) notes that narrative methods are
compatible with a social constructionist underpinning. Overall narrative methods were the best choice to accomplish the goals of identifying the processes that survivors go through and the meanings they ascribe to their experiences (Riessman, 2008).

Data Collection

Participants

Since purposive sampling is used to find participants who can provide the information of interest (Padgett, 1998), this sampling approach was used to recruit survivor participants in two categories. In one category, the Ohio Rehabilitation and Correction Office of Victim Services (ODRC-OVS) identified 29 potential research participants who had both experienced the death of a loved one as a result of an unlawful act (e.g., murder, manslaughter, vehicular homicide) and had completed Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD). While there were 53 completed VOD’s in these homicide cases, the Office of Victim Services (OVS) could contact these 29 individuals because these survivors had a current address on file with that office. They were all registered for the Victim Notification Program (Personal communication from Roxanne Swogger of ODRC-OVS, 2/6/11). The VOD Program Coordinator mailed a letter that introduced the research to these 29 individuals along with my flyer asking participants to contact me by phone or by email if they were interested in participating. Ten individuals contacted me to express interest. One individual lived so far away that an in-person meeting was not possible. Another individual expressed an interest in participating, but contact was lost before arrangements for the in-person meeting could be finalized.
Eight female participants followed through with individual in-person meetings with me. They ranged in age from late 30’s to mid 60’s (ages: 30’s [1], 40’s [3], and 60’s [4]). Three of these participants had high school educations, two completed high school plus one year of college, one was a college graduate, and two had master’s degrees. Six participants in this category are white and two are African-American.

In a second category, seven females who experienced the death of a loved one as a result of an unlawful act (e.g., murder, manslaughter, vehicular homicide) agreed to participate. Two of the females were associated with the same death. For this category, the offender was already convicted of the crime and incarcerated in an Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) facility. This condition was in place because those participants were eligible to request a VOD. For participants in this category, recruiting was carried out through contacts with Parents of Murdered Children (POMC) chapters located throughout Ohio. In southwest Ohio contacts were made through other groups where survivors might be involved such as Compassionate Friends, Who Killed Our Kids and Crime Stoppers. Victim advocates at the Columbus ODRC Office of Victim Services were given the flyers and asked to inform potential participants. The victim advocate at the Cincinnati Police Department Homicide Unit also agreed to share the information. I attended one support group meeting that Cincinnati Police Department and one Who Killed Our Kids meeting to inform those groups about the research. Participants received flyers and were asked to contact me if they were willing to participate in the study. Two potential participants volunteered who did not meet the criterion of the offenders in their cases being in ODRC facilities.
In spite of efforts to recruit throughout the state, the participants who came forward in this category were all located in southwest Ohio. Using the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Adult Parole Authority Regions map (2011a, see Appendix C), the participants in this category were from the Cincinnati and Chillicothe Region only. Both regions encompass several counties, but participants were from the southwest part of the state. These female participants ranged in age from mid 30’s to early 70’s at the time of the first interview (ages: 30’s [1], 50’s [3], 60’s [1], and 70’s [2]). Their levels of education ranged from high school (3), high school plus one year of college (2), competed college (1), and education beyond the college degree (1). Four of the participants in this category are white, one is white with a mixed ethnic heritage, and two are African-American.

Padgett (1998) recommends “data triangulation” meaning that more than one observer should be consulted to gather the data to enhance the trustworthiness of the study outcome (p.97). To achieve triangulation, six female VOD facilitators were interviewed to get another perspective on that process. Also, Ken Czillinger, one of the co-founders of POMC, agreed to an interview for the study. Czillinger was present for the first POMC meeting in 1978 and is credited in the POMC literature with being a grief educator for 40 years. His input can be found in the 1997 Atlantic Monthly Article that includes information about the POMC (Schlosser, 1997) and LaGrand (1997) cites a letter received from Czillinger in his book on after death communications. Czillinger’s years of experience and recognized expertise in the area of grief added another view about the process that people go through following the violent death of a loved one.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Participants</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>8 VOD Participants</strong></td>
<td>30’s: 1 participant</td>
<td>High School: 3 participants</td>
<td>White: 6 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40’s: 3 participants</td>
<td>High School + 1 year: 2 participants</td>
<td>African American: 2 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60’s: 4 participants</td>
<td>College Grad: 1 participant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Master’s Degree: 2 participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 VOD Facilitators</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7 Support Group Participants</strong></td>
<td>30’s: 1 participant</td>
<td>High School: 3 participants</td>
<td>Mixed Ethnicity: 1 participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50’s: 3 participants</td>
<td>High School + 1: 2 participants</td>
<td>White: 4 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60’s: 1 participant</td>
<td>College Grad: 1 participant</td>
<td>African American: 2 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70’s: 2 participants</td>
<td>Beyond College: 1 participant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ken Czillinger:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Informant</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: All Participants**

**Setting**

Meetings with the VOD participants were scheduled during the March and April 2011 and were held either in the participants home or in an agreed upon public building.
where private meeting space was available. Again, using the ODRC (2011a) Adult Parole Authority Regions map designations (see Appendix C for map) participants were located in the following Ohio regions: Akron Region (3); Cincinnati Region (2); Cleveland Region (2); and, Columbus Region (1). Follow-up phone contacts took place with the VOD participants in April and May 2012.

Meetings with participants who did not go through VOD were scheduled during the period of April through July 2011 and were held either in the participants home or in an agreed upon public building where private meeting space was available. I had access to office space in a building where mental health therapists offer services. Two interviews took place in that office space. Follow up phone contacts were made in April and May 2012 with these participants.

The Ohio Office of Victim Services made office space available to interview the VOD facilitators. The initial facilitator meetings were held in March 2011. Follow-up phone contact took place during the period of May through August 2012. Office space was arranged for the Ken Czillinger meeting that took place in January 2011 and follow-up was completed in September 2012.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Participants</th>
<th>Initial In-Person Interviews</th>
<th>Follow-up Phone Contacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 VOD Participants</td>
<td>March &amp; April, 2011</td>
<td>April and May, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 VOD Facilitators</td>
<td>March 2011</td>
<td>May through August, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Support Group Participants</td>
<td>April through July, 2011</td>
<td>April and May, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken Czillinger: Key Informant</td>
<td>January 2011</td>
<td>September 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Timeframes for Interviews & Follow-up

Other Sources of Data

As another source of data, ODRC – OVS did supply a list of zip codes only for all of those potential participants who were sent letters about the study. Since this is not a complete list of zip codes for all of those individuals who have completed a VOD in homicide cases (29 letters were sent, but VODs were completed in 53 homicide cases), it turned out to have limited utility. However, it does give some indication of where those who participate in VOD reside. Referring to the ODRC (2011a) map (see Appendix C), all regions of Ohio were represented in the zip codes, with the Lima Region located in
Northwest, Ohio showing the fewest with two zip codes recorded and the Cleveland Region showing a total of six zip codes, more than any other region. Five zip codes were located in the Akron Region and the Chillicothe, Cincinnati, and Columbus Regions each had four zip codes. Four of the 29 zip codes were out of state.

In addition, the VOD facilitators keep records about their contacts throughout the course of the VOD procedures. I was informed that these records, in some instances, give a good picture of the process that the victim/survivor went through while preparing for and then completing the Dialogue. The records contain information about the offender’s process as well. With the agreement that only the survivor’s portion of the record would be examined, written permission for access to the VOD records was received from all 8 participants. These 8 VOD participants actually took part in a total of ten VODs because there were two offenders in two of the cases. For this study, eight records that gave access to at least one VOD record for each VOD participant were reviewed. The most useful record information proved to be dates of the crime and the dialogue dates. This information was used to confirm and, in some instances, clarify the timeframe details that the survivor participants previously provided.

**Data Collection Method**

Riessman (2008) recommendations for implementing narrative research approaches were followed. According to Reissman (2008), most narrative studies in the human sciences use interviews to collect data. An in-person interview was completed with each survivor participant and with each VOD facilitator. For the survivor interviews, an opening question was asked that encouraged participants to tell the story
surrounding the death of their loved one with special attention to their thinking about forgiveness and spiritual matters as they cope with the loss. The interview was conducted in a conversational manner that follows the lead of the informant. Open-ended questions that gave some parameters for the discussion were used to encourage the telling of relevant narratives. Data gathered from the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed into texts for analysis. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

The average interview time for the audio-recorded meeting with those who have complete VOD was one hour and 15 minutes. Most meetings lasted approximately that amount of time and not much longer. There was much greater variation in the initial interview times for those who were not in the VOD category. The shortest interview was audio-recorded for 30 minutes and some additional information was gathered after turning the recorder off. The longest interview lasted for two and a half hours. The remainder of the interviews lasted from one to two hours.

Follow-up was conducted with survivor participants in both categories by way of a phone contact to ask for clarification. The shortest phone contact lasted about eight minutes and the longest was about one hour. The typical follow-up phone conversation lasted around 20 minutes to half an hour. Hand written notes were taken during the follow-up phone contacts.

The average interview time for the facilitator interviews was about three-quarters of an hour. The interview was initiated with a question that encouraged the facilitators to tell what they knew about how survivors get to dialogue, what else survivors might have tried before coming to dialogue, and what they noticed about forgiveness in the dialogue
process. The shortest interview lasted a little over twenty-eight minutes and the longest was a little over an hour. Follow-up phone contacts were brief taking approximately ten to fifteen minutes and handwritten notes were taken during the follow-up. The in-person interview with Czillinger lasted for about one hour.

Data Analysis

Riessman’s (2008) thinking about conducting and interpreting narrative research was followed as a guide for this study. Riessman (2008) explains that there is no consensus among scholars and practitioners about how to conduct and analyze narrative research. Other authors agree with this point (e.g., see Squire, Adrews, & Tamboukou, 2008). Riessman (2008) offers some guidelines and research examples that can be used to inform the organization of the research approach.

To set the context, she (Riessman, 2008) explains that narratives portray both events and experience. Data are mimetic meaning that the researcher has access to an imitation rather than the “real thing” (p.22). In other words, when data are gathered by interview or by reviewing documents, the researcher is removed from the actual event or experience. The information comes through someone else telling about the event or experience. To qualify as a narrative, the words must express “a bounded segment of talk that is temporally ordered and recapitulates a sequence of events” (p.116).

Continuing with Reissman’s account (2008), in the narrative framework, interviews are considered co-constructed in the sense that what unfolds is a co-creation of the participant and the interviewer. The participant is always providing information for an audience whether or not the audience is present. The researcher, situated in his/her own
historical and cultural context, becomes part of the audience. In the case of this study, participants were informed that the audience would include helping professionals and other victim/survivors who have had similar experiences. With this narrative approach, the interviewer uses questions, comments, and non-verbal communications to encourage elaboration on certain subjects and guide the direction of the expression of emotion. When the resulting interview is transcribed into text, the researcher determines the boundaries of the text analysis. The result is a “plurivocal” text meaning it can be interpreted in various ways depending on the personal history and perceptions of the interpreter (p.49).

Following Reissman’s (2008) guidance for interpreting narrative data, a dialogic/performance analysis was chosen as the approach that was most effective for capturing the information of interest in this study. Dialogic/performance analysis includes both thematic and structural analysis. Thematic analysis centers strictly on locating themes in the content of what is stated.

Reissman (2008) gives basic guidelines for using a few different types of structural analysis methods. The method she credits to William Labov and Joshua Waletzky was most workable for this study. The model was developed about 40 years ago, but continues to be used or frequently cited by current narrative researchers. Reissman gives the following details about the model.

A “fully formed” narrative includes six elements: an abstract (summary and/or point of the story); orientation (to time place, characters, situation); complicating action (the event, or plot usually with a crisis or turning point); evaluation (where narrator
steps back from the action to comment on meaning and communicate emotions – the “soul” of the narrative; resolution (the outcome of the plot); and coda (ending the story and bringing action back to the present).

The elements may occur in various orders and all elements may not be present in a story.

Using this method, the structure was examined for individual narrations and then the narrations of several participants were combined to show a prototypical narrative. When combined with the thematic analysis, the structural analysis serves a triangulation function because it is another analytic method that may support or not support the thematic analysis outcomes. This method is useful when the interest is in repeated clauses among the individual stories. It is criticized for omitting relevant information about the context such as the culture, power relations, and institutional norms that surround the telling.

Dialogic/performance analysis incorporates thematic and structural analysis and adds focus on other dimensions, especially the aspects of context. According to Reissman (2008), dialogic performance analysis “requires close reading of contexts, including the influence of the investigator, setting, and social circumstances of the production and interpretation of the narrative” (p. 105). Since social work is devoted to a person-in-environment perspective, including a reading of the context elements seems crucial to a study directed to a social work audience. The dialogic/performance thinking grows out of Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical idea that identities are realized through the course of social interaction by means of performances aimed at particular audiences. For instance, an individual might strive to show a persona self with attributes deemed most
desirable. This is not to question the authenticity of the identity, but rather to make the point that identities emerge in social contexts. Thus, understanding the nature of the audience is an important factor in comprehending the makeup of the story that is told.

Also, Reissman (2008) explains that what she is calling dialogic/performance analysis is influenced by Bakhtin’s literary theory. Bakhtin was a literary scholar who lived in Russia during the Soviet Union era. He died in 1975. Novels were used as the source of narratives for his theory development. According to Reissman:

. . . Bakhtin situates all utterances in the “I-thou” relationship.
Form and meaning emerge between people in social and historical particularity, in a dialogic environment. Every text . . . includes many voices, hidden politics, historical discourses, and ambiguities-beyond the author’s voice. (p.107)

In this view, words go beyond just providing information. They carry meaning and beliefs that have been integrated over the course of their use.

Reissman (2008) provides an example of psychologist Lyn Mikel Brown’s research to illustrate one possible approach to the dialogic/performance analysis. Brown used a “voice-centered method” to analyze her videotaped sessions and audio taped interviews with eleven and twelve-year old white girls to understand more about their school experience (Reissman, 2008, p. 117). Brown and Gilligan (1991) provide additional detail about this method in earlier writing. They set out a “Guide to Listening” that calls for “listening” to the narratives four ways to elucidate the various layers in the communication (p.45). While the data a total immersion in Brown and Gilligan’s exact
“listening” structure was not suitable for this study, their work did influence the basic thinking about how to analyze the data at hand.

Following Brown and Gilligan’s (1991) lead, each total narrative was coded for the purpose of understanding the story and its context. The Atlas.ti 6.2 Qualitative Data Management software was used to insert the coding assigned to the entire text for each narrative. Use of this software allowed for simultaneous coding of the text for the specific elements within the narrative (e.g., “Forgiveness – cannot forgive”), as well as the structure of the narrative (e.g., orientation to the story, complicating action, evaluation, etc.). Also specific information about each case such as age of survivor, date of crime, age of victim, age of offender, and so forth was recorded on an Excel spreadsheet to give a comparative picture of demographic and time related data.

To begin to explore themes, coding in the first round was entered in general language such as “Survivor – helped survivor” or “Emotions – emotional reaction to crime”. Those codes were then reviewed in a second round to look more closely at the details portrayed in each of the general codes while keeping the context of the entire narrative in mind. So, using the “Helped survivor” code as an example, in the second round the details such as “community support” or church family and friends surrounded her” were noted. In another example, in the second round the Emotions – emotional reaction to crime” code was examined more closely for specifics and elements emerged such as “Emotions – anger gone” or “Emotions – Pain is 24/7”. In the second wave of coding, the codes were listed on an Excel spreadsheet so that the VOD participants’ codes could be observed side by side for comparison and the same process was used for
the Support Group and facilitator codes. In a third review, the recurring, specific elements were set out with more detailed text in a table format and compared across narratives within and between participant groups to determine what, if anything, was common about the experiences and what relevant differences might exist.

**What the Researcher Brought to the “Listening”**

Brown and Gilligan’s (1991) also recommend that the listener (researcher) notice personal reactions to the story-teller and the story. The listener (researcher) is asked to review thoughts and feelings that emerge and to be aware of how her personal situation and worldview impacts the interpretation. As the researcher, I am aware that my “listening” was especially shaped by years of social work practice experience as well as extensive reading of the professional literature on religious coping, forgiveness and moral development.

Other pertinent factors in Brown and Gilligan’s (1991) model were “the conventions of the dominant culture” (p.47) and the wishes and concerns about caring (loving being loved, etc.) and justice (fairness, equality, reciprocity, etc.). The foci of dominant cultural thinking, caring, and justice were particularly applicable to this research. In this study, caring came up in the context of trying to understand how the survivor thinks of or feels about the offender. In reading about individual cases to prepare for the research, I found instances of survivors who had a remarkably caring response toward the offender (see, e.g., Pelke, 2003) or at least the offender was seen as a human being who should be regarded as such (Bishop, 2004), and I learned of cases where the survivor described the offender in other than human terms. For example, Debra
Puglisi Sharp (2003), whose offender murdered her husband, kidnapped her and then tortured her for five days before she escaped, refers to that offender as “the asshole”. She found it almost impossible to speak his name. Justice was examined with an eye toward how the survivor viewed fairness. Is fairness accomplished when pragmatic reciprocity is invoked or is another path that brings ideal reciprocity to fairness possible? Evidence of a dominant culture reaction to the survivors’ caring and justice responses was considered.

**My Own Process of Listening**

To elaborate on my own process of “listening”, I would say that some approaches to working with the data stand out as being most helpful. First I put everything in table form either on an Excel spreadsheet or in a Word document table. That format allowed me to see all of the elements together and compare them. I could see the bigger picture.

There were a few items that were more difficult to see. First, due to my own bias, I nearly missed the significance of the “Letters” codes (to be discussed in the Results chapter). I originally coded some of the references to letters in one of the narrative codes such as “Orientation” or “Complicating Action”. In the process of the second coding when the “Letters” code came to my attention again, I went back and reviewed the original coding and found additional references to letters. I could see that the letters issue was far more significant than I noticed originally. This was a reminder to be open to the unexpected.

Also, I was having difficulty figuring out why one of the Support Group participants was reporting a good emotional outcome when her story did not contain
elements that matched others with good emotional outcomes. Even with everything entered into the details table, the common thread was not readily apparent at first. The key element that I was trying to discover came to me at a time when I was away from my tables and texts. I was able to note that possible answer and confirm that it was correct later upon review of my notes about the participant. From this I learned that it was helpful to be away from the materials and my usual way of looking at them so that space could be made for another vantage point to enter.

Ensuring Rigor

Trustworthiness of the research was addressed by maintaining careful data collection and analysis procedures (Patton, 2002). Padgett (1998) recommends six procedures that can be used to strengthen research rigor by offsetting “threats to trustworthiness” (p.94). Cresswell (2003) discusses similar procedures. This research was set up in such a way that five of the strategies to promote rigor that both Padgett and Creswell recommend were used. The strategies are: triangulation, peer debriefing/support, member checking, negative case analysis, and maintaining an audit trail (Cresswell, 2003; Padgett, 1998, p. 95 [emphasis added])

As already mentioned, to achieve triangulation of data by collecting information from multiple sources, data was gathered by way of audio recorded interviews with victim/survivors, the VOD facilitators, and at least one expert in the field of grief related to violent death to get differing perspectives on the process (Creswell, 2003; Padgett, 1998). As Riessman (2008) recommends, I transcribed the audio-recordings myself in order to notice the nuances in the communication from the various sources. Member checking, that is, a
second contact as a follow-up with the person who was interviewed was used to review the accuracy of the interpretation of themes and representation of descriptions (Creswell, 2003; Padgett, 1998). Any negative cases, meaning cases that present atypical themes, were examined carefully for their contribution to the understanding of the survivor process (Creswell, 2003; Padgett, 1998). To build in a debriefing function, one meeting was held with the Dissertation Chair and one committee member prior to making the follow-up phone contact to get other views and feedback so that all pertinent clarification data could be gathered in the follow-up phone contact (Creswell, 2003; Padgett, 1998). Careful records have been maintained throughout the research project so that the Dissertation Committee may conduct an audit of the research procedures (Creswell, 2003; Padgett, 1998).

Creswell (2003) recommends two additional strategies to enhance the accuracy of what is conveyed in the research findings. First, in the research report “rich, thick description” will be used to communicate about what the participants are expressing (p. 196 [emphasis in original]). When possible, the participants own words will be used to illustrate the topics and ideas that emerged in the narratives. Also, Creswell advocates making the researcher bias known to the reader. As already indicated, immersion in professional literature on forgiveness as well as the research on moral development provided focal points for my attention before the participants were even interviewed.

Ethical Issues

Both Padgett (1998) and Creswell (2003) outline ethical protocols to be applied routinely when conducting research. Their general recommendations were carried out in this study in the following ways. Participants were informed both verbally and in writing
about the general purposes of the study and the procedures to be used. An informed consent form was provided that stated the purpose of the study, how the data was to be gathered, and the plan for follow-up contact. The informed consent form explained that participation was voluntary and the participant could withdraw from the research at any time. In addition, confidentiality was discussed both in conversation and in the informed consent form. As part of the confidentiality detail, I informed participants that my Ohio State committee member professors may want to look at transcripts, but names will be removed from the transcripts for this viewing. Also, I explained my plan to disguise some of the specifics of the stories or present the material in a general way to maintain confidentiality of individual survivors. Quotes that illustrate relevant points may be used in the reporting. Since finding meaning in the death can be important to survivors, one possible benefit for participants is that it will allow them to contribute to helping others who may face a similar fate.

The VOD facilitators who participate were given the same assurances about confidentiality and the information they report will be managed in the same way as the information reported by survivors. The facilitators were asked about their observations of the VOD process. They were not asked anything more personal than how long they have been a facilitator.

The Ken Czillinger interview was the exception to the promise of confidentiality. Czillinger is known for his work with the Parents of Murdered Children. He was interviewed as a key informant and his expert opinion will be reported.
On the subject of risk, there could be some concern that bringing up these traumatic issues would likely be troubling for the participants. Prior to conducting the research, everything I read suggests that survivors want to tell their stories and, if anything, they feel troubled by their experiences that others are not ready to listen (Armour, 2006; Conrad, 1998; Sharp, 2003). For example, Debra Sharp makes this case clearly in her writing about her own experience of being a survivor and an advocacy worker for other victims. She states,

Even now, with the trial over and Flagg [the man convicted of murdering Sharp’s husband and then torturing Sharp for 5 days] in jail, few people ask me what went on during those five days. . . What they don’t realize is that even years after a crime, many victims find it therapeutic to talk about the experience. As for me, if someone is willing to listen, I’ll never shut up. It still helps me. (p.273)

I heard similar sentiments expressed throughout the August 2009 POMC conference. With this in mind, I assumed that the research gave a voice to those who would like to have an opportunity to speak and that the benefits of speaking outweighed any possible detrimental effects of bringing up traumatic material. This certainly appeared to be the case as each participant was quite cooperative in making arrangements to tell their story.

The literature about victim/survivors of homicide suggests that these individuals may present additional challenging situations for ethical consideration. Examples include reports that survivors may have suicidal ideation (Armour, 2006; Green & Roberts, 2008; Jacobs, 1999), they may have PTSD symptoms (Armour, 2006; Green & Roberts, 2008) and some are dismayed by their wish for revenge (Armour, 2006; Conrad, 1998). There
are two issues related to these concerns. First, a need for mental health intervention could be observed in the course of the research. In addition, there could be concerns about safety if someone is suicidal or homicidal. Padgett (1998) recommends making participants aware of mental health resources if the need is observed. She is clear that the researcher cannot be the mental health therapist, but the researcher can provide information at the end of the interview about where to get help. With this advice in mind, I came to each interview prepared with a list of available mental health services in the communities where I conducted the interview and handed the information to the participant as part of the discussion about consent to participate. I was aware that survivors may be quite sensitive about any implication that their long-term grief might be pathological, so I presented the information as part of what I was doing routinely in case the participant would like some additional support following the meeting.

The safety issues related to homicide or suicide seems more complicated. Padgett (1998) states that in cases of where homicide or suicide “seems probable or imminent, the researcher may wish to breach the promise of confidentiality and go to the proper authorities” (p.39). She makes a distinction between behavior that is life threatening and behavior that is considered illegal and perhaps immoral, but not physically harmful indicating that the decision about breaking confidentiality would only apply in those instances where harm may occur. With a different view, Creswell (2003) presents a situation where injury could occur that may or may not be life threatening (abuse of a parent) and concludes that “the ethical code for researchers is to protect the privacy of the participants and to convey this protection to all individuals involved in a study” (p.65). Padgett (1998) would disagree with Creswell’s
rigid stance on this point, but she adds that no clear guidelines exist for taking action that would compromise the confidentiality in cases where participants report plans to commit harmful acts. The NASW *Code of Ethics* (2008) advise that like practitioners, researchers should inform participants about the limits of confidentiality. With this guideline in mind, the consent form that the participant signed did say that as a practitioner my professional Code of Ethics requires me to intervene in cases where threats to life exist. I planned to follow that guideline when conducting this research. As a social worker, I am also bound to report child abuse and neglect and elder abuse and neglect. I also noted that duty on the consent form. Fortunately, I did not encounter situation where confidentiality had to be broken.

Finally, as another safeguard to insure that the plan of research adheres to ethical standards, the proposal was submitted to two institutions for approval. First, because the research is being carried out under the auspices of a doctoral program at The Ohio State University (OSU), approval from the OSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) was required. Also, because I will be interviewing individuals who have used the services of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC), I was required to submit the proposed research to the ODRC for approval. ODRC asks for the approval of the academic institution first.
Chapter 5: RESULTS

On the professional side, the results include the views of grief expert, Ken Czillinger, and the stories of the Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD) facilitators. To get an overall context of issues in the grief process for survivors of violence, Czillinger’s thoughts will be offered first. Next the stories of survivors who completed VOD will be introduced. The input of the VOD facilitators will follow the VOD participants’ stories. Next the stories of survivors who did not go through VOD will be presented. With the exception of Czillinger’s contribution, a dialogic/performance analysis approach was used to explore all of the data.

As already mentioned, dialogic/performance analysis includes both thematic and structural analysis and also gives attention to context. With this guide for composition in mind, the results will be presented first by concentrating on the narrative structural analysis results for all of the survivor and VOD facilitator participants. The VOD facilitator narratives present consistent views about the VOD experience. While there are similarities in the survivors’ narratives, there is a continuum of differences in the stories of those who did go through VOD and a different continuum of differences in the stories of those who did not. The narrative method has the advantage of allowing the intricacies
in the individual stories to be brought to light. The distinctive details will be shown in the structural analysis. The thematic analysis will follow the structural analysis.

Ken Czillinger

Ken Czillinger is one of the founders of Parents of Murdered Children (POMC), an organization started with a group of five people in 1978 that has since grown to support over 100,000 members with a headquarters office located in Cincinnati, Ohio. Czillinger pointed out that in his forty-one years of working with those who are dying and grieving, listening is the most significant thing he has done. He recalled that Elizabeth Kubler-Ross viewed her dying patients as her master teachers. With that thought in mind, he explained, “You could expand that and say that any bereaved person, be it an adult, a teen-ager or a child, has the capacity to be a master teacher of their experience.”

Czillinger spoke of a favorite expression, “It’s been said that one of the greatest of all losses is the loss of the way I thought it would be,” and goes on to say that “most people do not expect their loved one to die violently.” In the course of the many years he worked with grief, he became aware “that mourning in many instances is much more complicated than we’ve realized.” When the death occurs as a result of violence, an offender is involved. In these situations, the offender might have died in the process of committing the crime, the offender might have been apprehended and put through the criminal justice system, or perhaps the offender might not have even been identified for many years or maybe never, so some of the unknowns related to the death can extend for the remainder of the survivor’s life.
According to Czillinger,

*The hardest part of the mourning process is day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, to live without your loved one or loved ones who have died. It’s just a very difficult kind of thing.*

Survivors of violent death have added complications that impact the mourning process. He compares the experience of surviving family members when a death occurs by violence with the kind of peaceful death that family members might find in a Hospice assisted death. With a death supported through Hospice care, the survivors know that the loved one died in a peaceful manner surrounded by the best care. Often the dying loved one can tell the survivors about that feeling of peace. By contrast, in a violent death, the victim’s experience of the death is unknown. It is not known, for example, how much the loved one may have suffered both physically and psychologically. Some survivors can be “haunted” by that lack of knowing what the victim experienced at the time of the death. Czillinger adds, “it’s been said that it’s far better to grieve a reality than to grieve a fantasy.” Czillinger goes on to explain:

*And so if you don’t know the truth – and it’s like cable TV – you have all these different channels that are operative. [For example, in a situation where a daughter was murdered and the person responsible had not been found . . . [the survivor] framed an image of the type of person she thought murdered her daughter and it was a young white male -OK – so – when she would go to Kroger’s and be going down an aisle and she would see a young white male inside herself she would say, “Are you the one who murdered my daughter, are*
“you the one?” So the complicating elements of this are in many cases going to stay with people as long as they’re alive.

Other factors that might be part of a violent wrongful death such as evidence that the loved one was molested or tortured in some way before the death also enter in to complicate the grief process. What's more, many survivors are stuck with not knowing why their loved one was the target of the attack. The question of “why” is a significant ongoing matter that may never be addressed in a satisfactory way. These complicating factors then have bearing on other outcomes such as the issue of forgiveness. It is more difficult to consider forgiving someone who not only murdered a loved one, but also cruelly inflicted considerable pain on the victim in the process of the death. The survivor is responding to a complex set of circumstances.

So Czillinger sees forgiveness as “a long word” and his experience tells him that, “self-forgiveness is even a longer word.” He believes that the struggle for the bereaved person is often underestimated. With regard to forgiveness, he states:

When you are beginning to go through this experience you start I like to say at the letter F, and then as you go through your life, you work your way through the word. Some people may never get beyond the letter F.

By that statement he means that the word forgiveness may be on the survivor’s mind, and the survivor might continue to work through a forgiveness process, but some might never go further than just considering the beginning of the word. He thinks that not forgiving “can be very much OK.” He advises:

What is important though is that even though they have their
own struggle with forgiveness that they avoid revenge, they
avoid retaliation, they avoid themselves in a way being murdered
in that they lose hope in certain ways that the quality of their
life maybe remains low in a lot of ways – in a sense when their
loved one died, they significantly died. I think that’s the kind of
thing that you’re trying to prevent . . . And the other extreme
you have people who not only forgive the person responsible,
they may end up visiting the person in prison, so you’ve got all
these diverse kinds of responses . . .

When working with bereaved individuals, Czillinger would not promote forgive-
ness as a goal. Rather he is just open to exploring where the survivor is in the healing
process. If forgiveness does happen, it may evolve along with the inner healing and it
may take many years. To sum up Czillinger notes that “some people individually may
have a greater capacity” for forgiveness and some cultures, such as the Amish culture,
more visibly support a forgiveness response. To wrap up he states, “I think again that
forgiveness is a very complicated kind of experience.”

Czillinger pointed out the work of Richard Groves who developed a Spiritual Pain
Assessment Form (see https://www.sacredartofliving.org for information about Groves).
According to Czillinger, Groves, who has a background in Hospice work, researched
various traditions such as the Celtic tradition, the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, and
other traditions that address death and dying. Groves’ research yielded four common
elements that can be found in the various spiritual traditions: Meaning Pain, Relatedness
Pain, Forgiveness Pain, and Hope Pain. Groves also developed a scale to assess how the
individual feels about their functioning in each of these element areas. Czillinger finds it
helpful to consider these particular elements when working with the violent death survivors as a way of trying to understand the after effects of a difficult situation that makes no sense at all.

When considering the spiritual aspects of the violent death, Czillinger has these thoughts:

*Different people have theories about the why of it all. They may say God’s trying to teach a lesson here, or some people even think they’re being punished, but I guess the approach that I take is that you can have all these theories, but when the bottom line comes all we can say is that suffering exists. Suffering exists. And when you start trying to interpret, especially trying to interpret how God might be involved here, you’re on shaky ground – because you can’t interview God . . . And so, that’s why I say you can have your theories, but having been involved in this work for so long, I would just say suffering exists and . . . it’s in many instances at a meaning level, it’s hard to explain.*

He goes on to say that there are many question marks connected to the violent death experience and, “In our culture we in so many ways want periods, we want explanations.” So even though a period may never be forthcoming, the hope lies in getting better at managing with the question marks that life presents.

When speaking of services that are helpful to survivors, Czillinger was mostly familiar with specialized peer led support group options such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) for those survivors where the death occurred as a result of a drunk driving offense. Who Killed Our Kids is a support group in Southwest Ohio for surviving
family members of unsolved homicides. He noted that the Parent’s of Murdered Children staff and volunteers are knowledgeable about community services that can be helpful to survivors.

Czillinger was familiar with the Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD) concept, and he was very positive about this type of creative option for those survivors who might be ready to explore that opportunity. He said that another one of his favorite expressions is “hurt people hurt people. Severely hurt people are capable of hurting other severely.” Once in prison, some offenders may go forward with their own healing, so that they are changed and no longer dwelling in the same dark place that caused such pain for the survivors. The offender is the one who, if honest, has the answers to the “why my loved one” question and other unanswered questions about the death. This alternative would not be right for all survivors. For those who might want to consider this path, he suggested contacting the knowledgeable POMC staff and volunteers, for the specific details of how to get a survivor linked up with the program.

The Victim Offender Dialogue Participants

The narrative format used to perform a structural analysis of the survivor and VOD facilitator data contained the following six elements; 1) abstract, 2) orientation, 3) complicating action 4) evaluation, 5) resolution, and 6) coda (Riessman, 2008). Not all elements are found in all narratives. The abstract element seems most relevant for the individual narrative it summarizes. However, while consolidating narratives to highlight
the repetitive elements in the individual narratives for the VOD participants, a composite abstract could read:

My loved one was a homicide victim and I suffered tremendous emotional pain over the loss. Everyone in the family was affected. I knew I had to speak to the offender and I eventually found my way to the Office of Victim Services. Facilitators worked with me to arrange the dialogue. (At this juncture you could have a couple of different versions of the abstract) One version: Meeting with the offender contributed significantly to my healing and I would recommend it for others. The alternate version: While I do not credit the actual VOD with miraculous healing, I am glad that I met with the offender and I would recommend VOD to others.

The orientations to the stories begin to show similarities and differences in more detail. For the VOD participants, the orientation would read: An immediate family member (mother, father, child, sibling) was the victim of homicide. The homicide happened at least 10 to 15 years ago by the time of the first interview (for some, more time has passed since the death: 10-15 years ago, 5 participants; 20-25 years ago, 2 participants; and 30-35 years ago, 1 participant). The victim knew the offender(s) who committed the homicide in five of the eight cases. At the time of the crime, the victims were various ages ranging from 16 to 67 years old with every age decade represented except the 40’s (teens [2], 20’s [2], 30’s [1], 50’s [2], and 60’s [1]). The offenders in these cases are all male and ranged in age from 16 to mid 70’s at the time the crime was committed. The older offender was atypical. All other offenders were in their 20’s or younger when the crime took place (teens [5] & 20’s [4]). The various circumstances surrounding the
crimes included intimate partner violence, attempted sexual assault, or robberies. As a point of clarification, the intimate partner could be a girlfriend, boyfriend, or spouse and these words are used to describe a current or ex-relationship (Mansley, 2009). A gun was used to commit the crime in half of the cases. In a few cases a knife was used and some deaths came about as a result of physical assault.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim’s Ages</th>
<th>Teens = 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20’s = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30’s = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50’s = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60’s = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Occurred</td>
<td>5-9 years ago = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10-15 years ago = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20-25 years ago = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30-35 years ago = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender’s Ages</td>
<td>Teens = 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20’s = 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70’s = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender Relationship to the Victim</td>
<td>Stranger – 3 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victim knew the offender - 5 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon</td>
<td>Gun – 4 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knife – 2 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Attack – 2 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender Caught</td>
<td>Ranged from immediately after crime to 60 days after -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most caught within a few days of committing the crime</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Orientation - VOD Participants**

**Complicating Action** - In all of these cases the offender was apprehended and charged with the crime relatively quickly. In most cases the offender was in custody within a few days of committing the crime. The longest time gap between the crime and the identification and charging of an offender was sixty days. In half the cases the offender confessed to the crime so the only immediate unknown was what the sentence would be. All teen offenders were treated as adults and all were sentenced to adult facilities.

Given that the horrific loss occurred, the surviving family members have life-long coping to do. The psychological route to the present day functioning varied, but common features can be identified as well. To understand the route, a whole picture with essential elements merits attention. Since the decision to pursue VOD is a central element in all of the stories, the accounts of the VOD decision will be considered first.

The dialogues took place in timeframes that ranged from immediately after sentencing to twenty years after the crime occurred. Three of the VOD participants remember getting information about the possibility of a VOD through a professional such as a victim advocate or mental health professional. The remainder of the participants found
their ways to VOD basically through their own explorations and determination. For example, a participant saw a story about VOD on TV and then began the process of finding out if it would be possible to meet with the offender in her case. A few of the participants asked to visit the offender and they were directed to the Office of Victim Services to check on the potential appropriateness of VOD. Some do not remember how they learned about VOD, but they were persistent in pursuing the plan to meet with the offender. They seemed to be driven by some internal strong desire to speak to the offender. For example, a survivor who saw some information about VOD in another state gives the following details of her process of getting to VOD:

    So I called the State of Ohio and at the time they said they did not offer dialogue services to the families of murder victims. . .
    And so years went by and then finally I heard that the State of Ohio, they were doing it, so I called again and I said, “Sign me up. I want to do this.” [There were some complications with the offender in this case, but eventually this survivor was informed that VOD was possible.]
    And – I jumped at it – a hundred miles an hour. It was like – yes!

And later in the interview this same survivor told of a conversation where she was explaining her need to pursue VOD to a relative and she said, “I need to do this. I mean I, I, I feel compelled to do it. I have to do it.”

Other examples of being powerfully drawn to speak to the offender can be seen in the statements from four different survivors below.

    • “We knew from day one, [family member] and I, that somehow, some way we wanted to talk to him. . . I had to do that!”
A survivor who wanted to know more about the offender’s progress in prison said, “So I needed to find that out. That was a burning desire in my mind.”

Another survivor explained, “I wanted to know the person. I wanted to know the human being behind the gun.”

And another proclaimed, “I was like pulled to go there.”

Along with the strong desire factor, many of the survivors wanted to go to VOD to find out more information about the crime (5 cases). This was especially true in cases where there were confessions so there was no trial or for some other reason the survivor did not attend a trial where details might have been exposed. A second reason that showed up frequently was the need to ask the offender why he committed the crime as illustrated by these two survivors who tell their reasons for requesting the VOD.

“I didn’t get the chance to a trial to learn anything and I would just like for him to tell me why he did this. I need to know why he did this.”

“This is about we never got to talk to him. I want to talk to him. I wanna’ know what took place. What would make you do something like this? Why?”

Also, for various individual reasons, some of the participants wanted to know about how the offender was progressing. In one case, for example, the participant believed that there would be some worthwhile meaning in her loved one’s death if it resulted in helping the offender to go in a constructive direction.

From this point the stories differ in such a way that the essence of the findings would be missed if the fine points were not made clear. To keep the meaning in the stories in place,
the evaluation and resolution in the stories must be shown along with parts of the complicating actions. So from here the possible courses of the aftermath of crime will be spelled out in some detail.

In thinking about the elements brought forward for most careful consideration, perhaps the end of the story is the most relevant place to begin. The ending of the story is how these individuals are feeling today and the remainder of the story is how they got to the current emotional state. To understand the path to the current state, the following elements were observed: a) views about justice/fairness related to the individual’s loss; b) what transpired in the VOD; c) understanding the offender’s circumstances; d) empathy or lack of empathy for the offender; e) did forgiveness occur; f) how spiritual life entered into the outcome; and g) the participants’ volunteer work.

Also, to lay the groundwork for this discussion, it is important to mention a theme that emerged in all of the stories. In the stories of those who went through VOD and those who did not, every participant was clear that they still miss their loved one. In many cases, the absence is noticed daily. For the most part, these survivors found ways to carry on so that the loss is part of their lives, but not incapacitating. Most likely all of the participants would be upset with the notion that they got over the loss. My understanding is that it would be more correct to see that they have incorporated the loss into their current way of being. The loss is very much with them. With this in mind, the next step will be to review the particulars of the experiences and the ensuing outcomes.

Among the VOD participants, a continuum emerges suggesting that a combination of elements is associated with continuing emotional discomfort and other
elements stand out as buttresses for wellbeing. At one end of the spectrum, a daily emotional state of depression was associated with the following array of elements. The offender was apologetic during the VOD, but he was not honest about what occurred. The story the offender told did not match the available facts that the survivor already knew. Spiritual views or religion are not valued facets of life for the survivor. She cannot forgive. In her way of thinking, forgiving might ease the offender’s mind about what he did and she would not want to do that. When asked, she can share some rudimentary thoughts the offender’s circumstances that might have got him to the point of committing the crime. Fairness is accomplished by way of “an eye for an eye”. As one survivor stated:

“I figure it this way, an eye for an eye. I figure everything will come full circle. . . He will be judged by God when it’s time.

The survivor will make an effort to oppose parole for the offender partly because he may be a danger to others, but also because there is a belief that the punishment should continue awhile longer. She does not feel sorry for the offender because he created his own difficulties. Some volunteer work related to helping other victims of crime was pursued after the death of the loved one.

As some of the elements in the stories change, the participants characterize their current daily emotional states in much more positive terms. The shift from depression to an outcome of feeling normal day-to-day with joy returning to life is seen with a change in only a few elements. Normalcy and joy are present even though the offender was not honest during VOD and the survivor does not forgive. As for the
differences, the survivor regards herself as spiritual, not religious, but there is really no emphasis on spiritual views as her story unfolds. In the story, there is the beginning of what appears to be a blending of fairness thinking and an expression of some understanding of how the offender got to the place of committing the crime. There may be some thought of limits in the offender’s personal ability to function or there are statements that indicate some effort to theorize about environmental circumstances that contributed to the criminal behavior. For example:

*His father died . . . This man’s mother, um – he’s a momma’s boy. Mama did everything. Well he was kicked out of [more than one high school] but it wasn’t his fault [said facetiously]. That’s the terrible – I’m sure a lot of what he turned out to be - she’s an enabler is what she is.*

In this kind of situation, parole will be opposed because the offender may be a danger to others. There is no mention of a need to further punish this individual. There is an emotional detachment from the offender so minimal or no negative emotional energy is connected to him. As the survivor explains:

*To tell you the truth, I don’t feel anything about him. I don’t. I don’t know what that’s about. . . I don’t know what it is, I just felt nothing, that I didn’t even want to waste my time thinking about him in any form. And occasionally I would get little peaks of thinking about him and what he did, blah, blah, blah, but I just had to make that go away or else you would go crazy.*
This same survivor explained further that she is angry at times when she thinks about what her loved one is missing, but she was taught in her family to behave in public as if everything was all right even if she was not feeling so well. She thinks that helped her to move toward eventually finding joy in life again. Giving credit to this teaching of presenting a happy face in public, she tells about the decision she made:

\[\text{How could I be bitter? That would make you mean and cranky and nasty, right? Well that’s just not my personality with other people or my family. So maybe that’s how I dealt with it. I just decided I’m not gonna’, I’m just not gonna’ do that.}\]

Again, there is no forgiveness here. While the survivor was aware of definitions of forgiveness that called for no action on the part of the offender, she wanted to see some remorse from the offender before she could entertain the idea of forgiving. Since no remorse was observed, she was not likely to forgive. In another instance where there was a generally positive emotional state, but no forgiveness, the survivor indicated that she did not know what forgiveness would look like. She did not know how to forgive. In these situations, forgiveness was obviously not a necessary component of living a productive, joyful life.

In other versions of the stories that led to positive emotional outcomes, the survivors began their stories with tales of distressing anger and upset directed toward the offender. In these cases, there was no reference to a strong spiritual influence as the stories are told. As one survivor stated:

\[\text{Every day I go to work and it’s like I go to work to pay to feed this man that killed my [loved one]. And every day}\]
I wanted him to die.

And later in the conversation she says:

[After about a year] I came to the realization that if he died it would be too easy. . . So for the first year, I would say, I was out of my mind.

Then the survivor met the young offender and she described the scene:

He just kept crying, saying how sorry he was – and I can clearly tell you, I told him I don't care that he’s sorry. Sorry is not going to mean anything to me.

Through the course of dialogue, the offender did take responsibility for the harm he caused. The survivor responded by insisting that the offender use his time in prison to better himself. She does not forgive the offender, but she will not oppose parole if she sees evidence that the offender is taking that request to better himself seriously. There is no plan to prolong the prison stay just for the purpose of further punishment.

With regard to fairness mixing with an understanding of the offender’s circumstances, the survivor knows that the offender was beginning to demonstrate problem behavior in the community, which she attributes to a lack of supervision at home. So she speaks of a community failure to respond:

Where is the system? Why isn’t there a social worker?
Why isn’t there a school person? If somebody else would have stepped in, would my [loved one] have died?

Even though there is no forgiveness, she cannot tolerate ongoing negativity in her life. As she explains:
I know I have to live with it. I know I can’t turn it around. But I also know that if I stay in the negative of it, he might as well have killed me that day, too. I can’t continue every day of my life with the negative part of this of I hate [him], I want [him] to die, because I would just die with [him].

The survivor has arrived at a state of what she calls “acceptance”. She says that talking to the offender and seeing him as a person helped her to move past her negativity. In her own words:

If it wasn’t for [dialogue] I wouldn’t have a voice. I wouldn’t be able to you know, stand up and say, “Why did you do this to my [loved one]?” You know if [dialogue] didn’t exist I would never have met [the offender]. I would have been going about it some, you know, way that wasn’t going to get me anywhere. . . . [T]o me one day my world cracked and finally when I got to be able to do [dialogue] it was like the circle finally closed. It was the last part.

In another instance of the dialogue contributing to a significant change in the emotional state, a survivor told that she was angry for years after her loved one was murdered. At times the anger was so intense that she would become physically ill. According to the survivor’s description, the offender behaved in a despicably cruel manner toward the victim. The crime was truly heinous. Still it was important for this survivor to learn what she could about her loved one’s death, so she did pursue the dialogue. She explained her state of mind as she entered the prison where the dialogue was to take place.

When I went to the prison I wasn’t in a good place in my heart. I was angry. I had no intention of forgiving this
man, and you know – so I had all that anger on my mind.

In the dialogue, the offender was courteous and the survivor was aware that he made some concessions in the arrangements so that the dialogue would be most productive for her. He apologized immediately and went on to tell her an account of the crime that was in her words “barbaric” but truthful. It helped her to hear the truth. She realized after the dialogue that she had forgiven him.

I didn’t forgive him when I was there. I kinda’ felt it in my heart that I should, but I did not want to do anything at such an emotional state because I didn’t want to get home and say, “Shoot, why did I forgive him? I don’t really forgive him.” And so I didn’t say anything there, but when I got home I was writing him a letter thanking him for his time and his answers. And I started to write it and my [family member] came in and I was like, “I have to forgive him don’t I (laughs)!” And my [family member] says, “Yes, you do.” And I said, “Shoot, who saw this coming!” You know, and it wasn’t something, you know it didn’t happen in the prison and it wasn’t in my heart when I went.

And she adds this insight about how the face-to-face encounter resulted in humanizing the offender for her.

I think maybe sitting down with him and talking to him – You know for years he was this monster that destroyed my life, but sitting down with him, he couldn’t be the monster anymore.

She also describes the forgiveness experience by saying:

I knew I had to. I mean I felt it in my gut. It’s like, you know,
it felt like instinct.

She attributes the profound change she experienced in the dialogue to the presence of God and says:

It was – and it was like – it was instant. It was instant.
I went in there with all the hate in the world. All of it . . .
I hated him every time [an important family event took place] and when I came out, I didn’t . . . I walked out that day and I was whole. I wasn’t whole walking in and I walked out and I was able to do things for and with my family as a whole person for the first time, and that was exciting.

With this first mention of forgiveness comes another important ingredient. In spite of this miraculous change of heart, the survivor remains concerned that the offender presents a safety threat and she will continue to actively oppose parole. The idea that the offender remains accountable for his destructive behavior is a principle that was mentioned by all the participants who forgave the offender. No participant suggested that forgiveness excused offenders from facing the realistic consequences of their violent actions.

This survivor described her current emotional state as “peace”. Like others who ended up in a positive emotional state, she thought about the offender’s personal life experiences. At a sort of basic level, she had some understanding that there must be something different about the psychological make-up of an individual who could behave as this offender did. Also, in the cases where there was the noticeable change from tremendous anger prior to dialogue to a more positive emotional state following the
dialogue, the offenders offered apologies and took responsibility for the crime and the resulting harm.

With another shift in the story elements, four of the survivors either forgave or were in the process of forgiving the offender before the dialogue took place. Again, to begin with the end of the story, all of these individuals who forgave prior to the VOD report present day positive emotional functioning. Like survivors who did not forgive, the forgiving survivors presented stories of going through times of emotional turmoil or great sadness. As one survivor explained:

*And I remember waking up the morning after I found out and thinking, I will never laugh again. I will never have joy in my life. My world is over. And um, that’s how you feel. The pain is so enormous that unless you go through it, you can’t even explain to somebody what pain is like. It never goes away. You wake up with that pain and you go to bed with that pain, and it’s constant 24/7 and it takes months before it starts to lessen. And then it lessens each year a little bit more. And I would say that at 5 years, that’s when people are ready to let go of their grief... But when you let go of your grief, it’s like letting go of that person again, because your grief is holding onto that person. It’s holding onto everything. And so when you let go of your grief, you’re saying good-bye all over again, you know. And um, it’s very difficult to do. But you have to go forward and you do laugh again and you do have joy in your life again and, do you miss that person? Every day of your life! Every day of your life! It just never changes.*
Even though this survivor misses her loved one daily, she says she is “back to her old self”. Others characterize their daily emotional states in terms of trying to stay positive or finding a new normal that involves avoiding a negative focus. One survivor spoke of her present state this way:

*I have so much peace and harmony within myself. I don’t allow anyone or anybody to take that away from me.*

This particular survivor goes on to speak about another element that appears in a noticeable way among other survivors who forgave. She says, “Everything that I can’t control or do anything about, I give it to the One that can and I walk away. I don’t worry about it. I don’t pull my hair out, you know.” Here she is speaking about her steadfast faith in God. Three of the four who forgave prior to VOD have strong spiritual lives that are greatly influenced by Christian religious teachings. The fourth of these survivors describes as spiritual, not religious, with an emphasis on striving to do what is right in life. Two of these forgiving survivors actively participate in organized religion and two are not affiliated with a religious community. Religious teachings appear in three of the stories of those who forgave or were in the process of forgiving prior to VOD. For instance, one survivor who forgave before the VOD explained, “I think I forgave [the offender] pretty much right away. I’ve been a Christian my whole life and . . . so you know, I just prayed for forgiveness right away.”

In other stories, the link between forgiveness and religious teaching is not so clearly stated, but the survivors do talk about other ways that religious coping was helpful. For example:

*Yes I was angry. I was angry because I knew my heavenly*
Father could have misguided that bullet. But then I say, 
God, His will gonna’ be done no matter what. His will is 
gonna’ be done. . . And that’s what I had to come to the 
realization of. Cause my faith never failed me. I had 
my faith, you know.

This survivor saw the offender as a child of God and she believed that she had to go 
about resolving what happened to her loved one through her faith in God. She arrived at 
a state of peace.

Another religious survivor, who started the process of forgiving before VOD, 
spoke of a different means of religious coping.

[When I found out that [my loved one] had died, . . . we were 
all there and we were all crying and we were all very upset and all of a sudden I stopped everybody and I said, “You know 
what we need to do? We need to pray together.” And we 
formed this circle and we prayed together. And that kind 
became a way that we coped with this during the whole ordeal.

The forgiving survivor, who was not so involved in religious thinking, spoke 
about an awareness that she did not want to treat others in a way that hurt her. In other 
words, she was operating out of an ideal reciprocity position of essentially treating others, 
even the offenders, as she would wish to be treated. She states:

I’m a stopper. . . I’ve learned that there are two types of 
people in this world. There’s a person that has something 
done to them and they turn around and do that same thing 
to somebody else. And they’ll be like, “Hey, somebody 
did it to me.” But I’m just like somebody does something 
to me and I stop it and it almost keeps me from doing that
thing because I’m like, “That was done to me and that was a horrible thing.” I could not do that to somebody else. There’s a lot of people not like that.

All of these forgiving survivors were aware of and had given thought to the societal or psychological circumstances that might have contributed to the offenders getting to the place of committing such unthinkable acts of violence. Three of the forgiving survivors expressed great concern about the offender’s well-being. Two survivors used the respectful Mister with the last name when referring to the offender. All spoke in considerate, and often caring language when the offender’s behavior or fate was discussed. For instance one forgiving survivor describes the scene and her thoughts when the offender entered the VOD room.

*When they brought this young man in, . . . I looked at him as a mother, cause that could have been [my child] walking through that door. . . His family was [a gang]. . . [He has] no education, his parent . . . was killed . . . He didn’t know whether I was going to call him everything except the child of God. That’s not what I did. I shook his hand.*

And another survivor expressing wishes for the two offenders who were young at the time of the crime states:

*I hope that the situation [for the offenders] is as best as it can be under the circumstances. And um, I hope they’ve grown up. That’s a big thing. It’s like they didn’t even have a chance to grow up.*

None of the survivors who forgave prior to the VOD plan to oppose parole. It’s also important to note that none of these forgiving survivors expressed major concern...
about the immediate danger the offender posed if released to the community. Some hoped that the offenders found supports so that they would not feel compelled to get involved in criminal activity again. Even though everyone who forgave was clearly in favor of holding the offender accountable, two of the forgivers felt that the offender’s sentence was too long. These two survivors did not think that the offender intended to kill their loved one. They attributed the deaths to situations that got out of control and they believed that the necessary lesson could be learned with less time served in prison. This idea that the sentence was too long only appeared with these two survivors who forgave or were in the process of forgiving prior to VOD and also did not think the offense was intentional. No other participant expressed this view.

The forgiving attitude was firmly in place for these survivors regardless of how the offender behaved in the VOD. In one case, the offender continued to deny that he had any responsibility for the crime. The survivor did not expect that the offender would take responsibility, so the VOD provided a satisfactory opportunity for exchanges of other information that the survivor was seeking. In another case there were two offenders and two separate dialogues with the same survivor. According to the survivor’s report, one offender was apologetic, focused on the harm he caused and demonstrated much remorse, while the other focused on his own progress in prison with no acknowledgement of the pain that he had inflicted on others. The survivor noticed that the dialogues with each offender were very different, her reaction to each offender was different, and she came away feeling that the apologetic, remorseful offender was more sincere in his wish to become rehabilitated. She thought these differences in her reaction were occurring
because she was at different places in her own life circumstances at the times when the
two dialogues happened. As she discussed the dialogues, her emotions and words
showed that she was noticeably touched by the presentation of the remorseful offender,
and she was skeptical about the proclamations of the self-involved offender. In spite of
these differences, this survivor remained fixed in her wish for the best outcomes for both
offenders.

In two dialogues where the survivor had either forgiven or was in the process of
forgiving prior to the dialogue, the offender was described in some language that
conveyed he was mannerly, respectful, apologized, focused on harm he caused, and was
remorseful. In their own ways, both offenders mentioned forgiveness. One survivor
describes the dialogue exchange about forgiveness in this way:

I forgave the young man, cause he said, Mr. [Offender] said,
and I’m looking at him straight in his eye, and I’m looking
at his soul really and his soul is very troubled, very troubled,
he said, “Mrs. [Survivor], I know I can’t ask you to forgive me.”
And I said, “Let me stop you right there.” I said, “I forgave
you a long time ago.”

Those VOD participants who did not forgive also did not mention anything about
spiritual or religious life entering into the VOD. In contrast, all five participants who
forgave the offender (the one who forgave after the dialogue and the four who forgave
prior) brought some content into the discussion about either the dialogue itself being a
spiritual experience (three participants) and/or religious related subjects that came up in
the course of the dialogue (three participants). Two participants encouraged the offender
to read the Bible. One was pleased to learn that the offender had developed some fellowship with other Christian men in prison.

As for the dialogue experience itself being spiritual, one participant told about the beginning of dialogue when she first sees the offender seated across from her saying:

*I looked at him, you know. I'm here, you know that the Lord had a long table. . . I looked at him not with malice in my heart, in my eyes, you know. I looked at him and I got up and I extended my hand.*

Another participant who forgave as a result of the dialogue spoke about God’s role in the dialogue experience:

*It has to be God. Anyone who doubts the existence of God has never had an experience like I did. There is nothing in my heart [meaning no anger or hate]. . . [T]here is no way anything else but God could have done that that day. I could not have done that.*

And another participant tells that part of her goal with the dialogue was to find out how the offender was functioning in prison. She believed that if the offender found God and turned his life around to help others, the loss of her loved one would have some meaning. She explains what happened the day of the dialogue:

*I had prayed about seeing Mr. [Offender] . . . So right before I went in to meet him for the first time, or talk to him, I prayed outside the room and I just said, “Well Lord, whatever you want from me just you open the doors and I’ll go through ’em. Well, um, . . . we had a nice dialogue. We started out the dialogue actually in prayer. I asked him if that would be all right if we prayed together and he said, “Yes.” . . . [H]e talks about that*
he was talking to young boys who had visited the prison and stuff like that and some day he hoped to do that. And I was like, I kind of looked around to see if God was in the room . . .

In this dialogue, the survivor and offender negotiated that they would possibly speak together on crime prevention after the offender was released. This agreement was an answer to the survivor’s prayers.

To think more generally about those who went through VOD and say they forgive when compared to those who say they do not forgive, a few features are worthy of note. First, there is nothing about the age or educational levels that distinguish the forgivers from those who do not forgive. The ages of the forgivers were late 30’s (1), 40’s (2), and 60’s (2). Those who did not forgive were 40’s (1) and 60’s (2). Also the forgivers had educational levels that ranged from high school (1), high school plus one year of post secondary education (2), to a master’s degree (1). Those who did not forgive had a high school education (1), college degree (1), and a master’s degree (1). Overall in the group of VOD participants there were six white participants and two African American participants. Three of the forgivers were white and the two African-American participants forgave as well.

One difference that stands out is that those who did not forgive were involved in some significant volunteer work either related to helping other victims of crime, working with current offenders to prevent future crimes, or both. Only one of the participants who forgave the offender spoke of actively volunteering in crime prevention activities. One mentioned that she would like to find ways to get into some volunteer work. Perhaps this speaks of a different healing path for those who forgive and those who do not. Given the
circumstances of those who forgave, volunteering may not have been a realistic choice or perhaps those who choose not to forgive have to find another way to make sense of the tragedy and volunteering provides the meaning they are hoping to find.

Another difference that was unique to the forgiving survivors was the encounter with others who could not understand their wish to meet with the offender or others did not understand their forgiving attitude. One survivor who was working with more than one offender spoke of her challenges with a support person:

\[\ldots \text{When I first went, I had a friend with me and so that helped. By the time the second one had gotten along, my friend was like, “I think it’s stupid. I don’t think you should go. And he [meaning the offender] keeps getting in trouble so obviously he doesn’t deserve for you to go.} \]

That potential support person ultimately refused to accompany the survivor to the dialogue.

Another survivor was the recipient of strong reactions to both her plan to seek VOD and to her eventual arrival at forgiveness. She explains:

\[\text{The decision to go – a lot of people in my life- even my boss had an opinion on this. You know when I said, “I’m going to do this,” my [one family member] said, “Don’t do it. Don’t do it.”} \]

She had some difficulty locating someone who could agree to be a support person because some family members were fearful that the offender would “do some emotional
damage” to her. But with much determination, she was able to get all the necessary arrangements in place for the VOD.

She talked about the family’s reaction when she forgave the offender:

[The extended family of the victim] looks at what I did as a betrayal. They said I let him [meaning the offender] of the hook. They said he doesn’t deserve my forgiveness. But I don’t think forgiveness is something I give to him. I think forgiveness is a gift you give to yourself. His life has not changed because I forgave him. I did not give him anything. I did not give him this gift. My life changed. So – who got the gift?

And another survivor tells this anecdote.

I was working and my boss said, “How can you forgive him? What if it’s just a bunch of, you know, B.S.? What if he’s just, you know, all criminals say, ‘Oh yeah, I’m changed.’” And I said, “You know what? That’s not up to me. That’s between him and God. I’m gonna’ choose to believe him and say yes, he is sorry for it, you know. And would I change sending him to jail? No!”

Even though survivors experienced efforts to discourage forgiveness, those who forgave recognized the personal benefits of maintaining a forgiveness stance.

For example one survivor gave a typical view when she said:

When you forgive somebody, you free yourself. You’re able to go on and to have the joy of life return to you. When you hold a grudge or that evil inside of you, it eats at you. It doesn’t necessarily hurt the other person as much as it hurts yourself.
So whether that other person takes up forgiveness, that’s their problem so to speak. Yours is to release that and that’s what I would tell anybody who is going through this process – that forgiveness is to free yourself so you can move forward.

And another survivor explains:

[If you can forgive and love your fellow man everything will fall right in place – it will fall in place. You will have peace within yourself. But when you walk around with a bitter heart, and you wanna’ play God, vengeance, you know, an eye for an eye, it’s not gonna’ work. All it’s gonna’ do is end up destroying you. You know, because it’s not going to solve anything. It’s not going to bring that loved one back.

And yet another survivor puts this important caveat into the understanding of forgiveness:

. . . I can forgive him, but I can’t put myself into a situation where the same thing is going to happen over and over again. There’s behaviors that um that have to stop for our relationship to go any further. So I don’t hold a grudge and yet I’m not going to keep putting myself in that same position for that same thing to happen . . .

In other words, forgiveness does not mean that one gives up self-protection.

Thinking about all of the VOD participants together, a part that is missing from the VOD stories so far is what was helpful to these survivors. This element is missing because there seemed to be no consistent theme in what the VOD participants found helpful or not helpful. Of course several of them mentioned that the VOD was helpful, and in some cases, life changing in a positive way. Two of the participants who did not forgive had contact with one other homicide survivor who came forward to offer support.
and that was helpful. One survivor who did not forgive found contact with a Parents of Murdered Children support group helpful, but two survivors who did not forgive specifically mentioned that this kind of support group was not helpful. They could not surround themselves with so many others who were in such visible pain. Other experiences that individuals mentioned as helpful were, doing something to honor the victim, some type of community support that could have been neighbors or a church community, some detectives were very helpful, and one person spoke of her faith in God. These survivors did not focus a great deal on what was not helpful.

Perhaps the most telling evidence about how the VOD impacted the lives of these survivors is whether they would recommend VOD to others. Regardless of the way the offender behaved, all of these survivors would recommend VOD to others. Some had stipulations attached to the recommendation. As survivors evaluated the experience, the only negative comments were connected to frustration because the preparation time was too long (3 participants). Most survivors had a positive response to the experience. For instance, one not forgiving participant assessed the dialogue as “good” even though she did not get the information she wanted. She raised question about whether others who already had details about the crime from a trial would want to go to a dialogue. Another not forgiving survivor says:

*I believe in [dialogue]. I believe its part of the healing process.*

*If nothing else, what mediation gave me was that [the offender] had to – I had the opportunity to say to [the offender] how I felt, tell [the offender] about [my loved one], and let [him] see her as a person. Now what [he] chose to do with it, I*
don’t know, but when I walked out of there that day, I felt like finally the story was over.

This participant credits dialogue with helping “100%” in the move from a negative view to a healing.

And a forgiving survivor says about her dialogue:

[I]t went great. It was a good meeting. I had to explain to the facilitators that I did not, I wasn’t going there to hear [the offender] say, “I did it.” I totally did not expect him to say that and he didn’t say that.

So even though the offender did not take responsibility for the death of the loved one, the survivor assesses the dialogue by saying, “It went well.” She did get the information she wanted from the meeting.

Another forgiving survivor spoke of having an ideal dialogue where there were no harsh words and the offender took responsibility for the death. She said:

I mean our talk in that room was very, I think it was healing for both of us. We forgave him and that forgiveness sent him on a different path in life.

Another forgiving survivor has this recommendation:

I would recommend it [meaning dialogue] for someone who wanted to go in for curiosities or forgiving, but for somebody to go in and just want to batter ’em [meaning the offenders] – I wouldn’t suggest that.
Summary of How VOD Participants’ Results Address the Secondary Research Questions

So to summarize how VOD participants addressed the secondary research questions that were posed prior to hearing the stories, a return the original questions is in order. Before proceeding, perhaps some reflection on the original questions is in order, too. The questions seem to call for a narrow and limited range of information that does not adequately cover the depth and richness of the stories that were told. That being said, as a way of summing up the main points that the VOD participants made, what follows are summary answers to the original research questions.

*In general, what helped the survivor carry on after the death?* Perhaps the only overriding theme in response to this question was that survivors turned to a variety of sources for support. The range included contact with one or more other survivors, support from the community in some form, the religious or spiritual faith, or doing something to honor the memory of the victim were all helpful. VOD was quite helpful for many of these survivors. It is interesting to notice what is missing from this list. At least one survivor had contact with a mental health professional following the death of her loved one. She did not mention, nor did any other survivor mention help from a mental health professional in their list of what helped them to carry on after the death.

*How did the survivor learn about VOD?* In three cases, survivors received information about VOD from a professional such as a mental health professional or a victim advocate. In some cases, the survivors did not remember the details of how they
found VOD, but the basic theme is that they sought out the opportunity to speak to the offender.

*What helped the survivor to follow through with the intention to pursue VOD?* In most instances, the survivors had a strong (it’s hard to find the right words here to describe this internal state), need, desire, or pull to meet with the offender. Even though people around them could not understand their wish to meet with the offender, the need, desire, or pull was so compelling that these survivors moved forward with making arrangements for the in-person meeting.

*What does the survivor recall about views on forgiveness related to the offender in the case prior to the VOD?* Three of the survivors said that they did not forgive the offender prior to the VOD and they continue to say that they do not forgive even though in some instances there is certainly an emotional letting go of day-to-day negative feelings connected to the offender. In two cases, the emotional shift from intense anger connected to the offender to a letting go of those negative feelings is a direct result of the VOD experience. One of those survivors calls that shift forgiveness. The other four survivors either forgave or were well into the process of forgiving prior to the VOD.

*What influenced those views about forgiveness?* For those who do not forgive, the deliberation on this decision appears to be a very individual matter. In a few situations, the survivors consulted with clergy (more about that later) and continued to believe that forgiveness was not right for them. Religious teachings were brought up in conjunction with views about forgiveness for three of the forgiving survivors and another forgiving
survivor spoke of wanting to treat others the way she would wish to be treated and just generally having a more forgiving nature.

*Did religious or spiritual influences enter into the understanding of forgiveness?*

As already mentioned, the forgiving survivor’s religious teachings did enter into their discussion about forgiveness for three individuals. In one instance, the survivor mentioned religious teachings to support her decision not to forgive. This individual thought that “eye for an eye” justice was obligatory in the case of the cruel death her loved one suffered.

*Have the views of forgiveness changed as a result of the VOD?* In one case there was a dramatic, spontaneous change from ongoing, persistent anger to forgiveness as a result of the VOD.

*What happened in the VOD that affected the thinking about forgiveness?* In the cases of either spontaneous forgiveness or a change in emotional state from intense anger to a state of disengagement from those negative emotions, the offenders were apologetic and took responsibility for the harm they caused. One offender was obviously remorseful during the VOD, and one was courteous and considerate throughout.

*How has the current thinking about forgiveness or not forgiving impacted the healing process?* All of those who have forgiven recommend it highly. It is for them a key component of their healing. Those who have not forgiven, but maintain emotional distance from the offender by refusing to get caught up in ruminating about the negatives associated with the offender, also report positive emotional daily functioning.
To continue with the results, input of the VOD facilitators was requested to add another perspective about the VOD process. The VOD facilitators’ views will be considered next.

**The Victim Offender Dialogue Facilitators**

As the six facilitators tell the stories of their observations, the collective abstract might read:

The survivors come to Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD) because they have a burning desire to talk to the offender. Survivors learn about VOD through a variety of sources and they may contact the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Office of Victim Services (ODRC-OVS) directly. The timing of the survivor’s request for VOD varies quite a bit. Another path to dialogue may begin when the survivor initiates a request to visit the offender either by writing to the offender or by contacting the institution to request visiting privileges. The survivor is then referred to the ODRC-OVS to review whether VOD might be appropriate. In either situation, if the survivor is interested in pursuing VOD, the request prompts a process that includes contacting the offender to determine if he (or she, but I will use he to keep it simple) is willing to take part in the dialogue. If the offender is willing to participate, the facilitators begin the procedure by letting the offender know what the survivor wants to ask. The offender answers those questions and the facilitators report back to the survivor with the answers. This back and forth exchange takes place until the facilitators conclude that the offender and survivor are ready to meet. In some instances, a meeting does not take place, but the survivor is satisfied with the process because the desired information was obtained. In the cases that move to the in-person dialogue, the process of sharing information prior to the meeting begins to change the way that the survivor views the offender. The offender starts to become humanized in the survivor’s thinking as a result of that exchange. The subject of forgiveness does
not surface in all VOD situations. Some survivors have forgiven the offender before the dialogue and some forgive as a result of the dialogue even though there may have been no intention to do so. Forgiving does not mean that the survivor wants reconciliation, although further contact may be planned. It also, does not mean that the survivor is saying the offender should not be held accountable. The facilitators have only seen positive, often healing results of the exchanges that occur. The process can be powerfully moving and uplifting for the facilitators to observe.

To begin with the orientation, the facilitators may be employees of ODRC or they may be community volunteers. In each situation a community volunteer is paired with the ODRC employee to conduct the VOD process. The ODRC employees take on the VOD as volunteers. This work is not part of their regular employment duties. VOD might take place with different types of cases that involve violence. For example, a VOD might take place in cases where there was sexual assault, so the facilitator’s perspective on the VOD process is not confined to homicide cases.

Facilitators report that survivors may have tried a variety of strategies to cope with the crime related trauma by the time they come to the attention of the Office of Victim Services. When asked what survivors might have tried to help them cope prior to getting to VOD, one facilitator said, “Wow, that is a varied as many human beings are on the earth.” Counseling, support groups, alcohol and drug addictions, turning to spirituality or turning away from spirituality were all mentioned as coping methods that facilitators noticed. Survivors seem to learn about the possibility of VOD through various sources such as victim advocates, rape crisis or domestic violence counselors, the
parole board, prosecutor’s office, the defense attorney, the Office of Victim Services publicity, or by seeing a TV program where dialogue is featured.

The timing of the survivor’s request to meet with the offender can range from immediately after the sentencing to as many as twenty years later or anytime within that range. The in-person meeting may be expedited if an execution is scheduled in a death penalty situation or if the offender or survivor is terminally ill. Scheduling a dialogue at the point that an offender is up for parole is generally avoided. One facilitator mentioned that she frequently sees requests for dialogue in anticipation of the offender’s release because the survivor wants to prepare for the offender’s return to the community. Beyond the limits that are set related to parole, the readiness of both the offender and the survivor dictates the timing for the dialogue scheduling.

A few of the facilitators spoke about the advantages of allowing some time to pass before going to a dialogue. One facilitator explained that if survivors wait five or ten years after the trial,

\[\ldots \text{they are still angry. That won’t change. It may bifurcate in a different way. But ultimately they will be able to harness that emotion in a way that they can articulate better. \ldots They can ask better questions and they can have a more meaningful dialogue.} \ldots\]

The offender also needs some time to settle in to prison life before he might be ready to take on a dialogue. One facilitator noted that two years is the typical time for an offender to get accustomed to prison life. Offenders tell the facilitator, “We’re too busy
just to even get used to being in prison for the first couple of years and we’re just not at a point where even meeting with the victim would be helpful.”

Another facilitator added to this point by saying that survivors who “have done some work on themselves” have a better outcome with the dialogue. In her words:

*Like this is not the first time that they’ve talked about it, you know, or that they’ve been in counseling or maybe they sought assistance through their church or through family members or they’ve dealt with it in a healthier way. . . I think people who have done a good job of taking care of themselves see the difference in the actual dialogue. I think they’re more open to the forgiveness piece of it. They’re more open to allowing to have a healthier dialogue back and forth – whether the person’s being truthful or not.*

Perhaps as a complicating action in this part of the story, the subject of letters came up in the conversation with the facilitators. A facilitator noted that the survivor might try to cope with the aftermath of the crime by writing a letter to the offender. As one facilitator observes:

*A lot of times we get calls from institutions where victims either send the offender a letter. So they write to them – basically ask them things. So the offender gets the letter and takes it to somebody cause they freak out, you know, got a letter from my victim. So then the staff will call us and say, “The victim wrote the offender and he doesn’t know what to do.” So they give us the letter and we’ll contact them and let them know about the process [for VOD].*
Another facilitator mentioned a situation where the survivors received a letter from the offender. The offender was asking for forgiveness. In that case, the letter from the offender was a welcome answer to the survivor’s prayers. It was that offender’s letter, too, that helped the survivors get to the Office of Victim Services to make arrangements for a dialogue. Another situation was mentioned where the survivor and offender exchanged a series of letters prior to the dialogue.

One of the facilitators explained her understanding of the policy on letter writing this way:

*Well we can’t stop U.S. mail, but if there are threats or there’s contraband in it, we can intercept it and say, “mm – you can’t send this.” But just in general, a victim can write the offender and an offender can write the victim. But – so um the procedurally, but if there’s a no contact order or a cease and desist that we’ve intervened and placed, then absolutely they’ll get sanctioned and get in trouble for doing it. But just in general, any inmate, yeah they could write to a victim and they could receive a letter from a victim. We don’t like that to happen. It’s not something we endorse or say it should happen. We do tell inmates don’t write the victims in your crime, but it happens.*

In a different approach to attempt contact with the offender, some survivors might ask to be placed on the offender’s list of approved visitors. A facilitator tells about another scenario that brings survivors to VOD:

*Or [the survivor will] call the prison and say, “How do I get on*
so and so’s visiting list? I want to come visit.” And then when they [meaning the prison staff] do the research and find out that they were the victim of the crime, obviously they’re not going to let them come visit and that will be a referral back to our office. So usually victims, I think a lot more than often, they don’t know that our program exists. They find out about it just through their own trying to get to the offender themselves.

On that point of the survivor trying to get to the offender, five of the six facilitators noticed that survivors have what has been called a “burning desire” to speak to the offender. Here are a few examples of the way that was stated:

[M]ost people, they’ve already come with a desire that’s burning them up I think and:

[T]hey ultimately reach a point where nothing's working
[e.g., drugs and alcohol, counseling, support groups, spirituality] and the ultimate questions I have are not going to be answered by anyone other than the person that did this crime. So that burning desire just kind of wells up in them and they feel like they have to meet with that person.

Another facilitator explains that in spite of others discouraging the survivor, the need remains.

I’ve had a victim say, “I need to do this, but my family doesn’t understand,” cause the family doesn’t support it, doesn’t understand why the person would want to meet with the offender who murdered their child or – So then the victim not only has to walk through the process of back and forth meetings but also has to deal with the family who doesn’t understand. But they just really feel like
this is something that they have to do. It’s just something they have to do.

Survivors who come to the attention of the Office of Victim Services may be in various emotional states. Facilitators were clear that survivors must demonstrate good management of their anger to be considered appropriate for VOD. As one facilitator put it:

If a victim is just so ballisticly angry, we’re not even going to pursue the case. It’s dangerous for everybody. . . They want to go in and harm that offender. We’re not going to let ‘em engage in dialogue. So you have a, in a way, a pure sample of those that are what we’ve deemed, that’s very subjective, what we’ve deemed to be appropriate. And is there an appropriate way or an inappropriate way to be a victim of crime. I don’t think so. How you are and how you’re reacting is how you are and how you’re reacting. We can’t judge that. But we are judging it to the point of safety and security for the institution and our facilitators to be able to work with them forward. Sometime these cases take many more years.

Facilitators gave examples of cases that took as long as three years or five years to prepare for dialogue because the survivor was so very angry. The survivor begins to see the human side of the offender as part of the preparation process. As one facilitator explains:

And as a Victim Offender Dialogue facilitator it’s your job to really give them as much truth as they choose to receive so it gives them a chance to handle their emotions about the process, cause they have to relive everything. And then they
also share with you their pictures, their memories, so by the
time you go back and forth, back and forth, back and forth
and you get to the actual dialogue, the monster that they think
they’re going to face is not the monster, you know. They have
heard from this person. We have tried to share with them what the
person looks like, what they have done while they’re incarcerated,
things that the offender wants us to share with the family. So the
families get to kinda’ know the person where they are today
vs. what they did.

Some facilitators also notice that the survivor’s thinking about the offender begins
to change even before the in-person meeting as a result of the preparation process. The
goals for the in-person meeting may change as well. In the facilitator’s words:

In the cases that I have worked on, the family went in with . . .
the agenda – the whole [agenda was] just want to get the facts,
just want to know what happened, just want the offender to
know the harm that was done and how the family has had to
live with that and live with that, but when we got to the actual
dialogue, the family was more concerned with his spirituality.

At times the facilitators see survivors progress through this process to arrive at
forgiveness either close to the time that the in-person meeting is scheduled or forgiveness
is spontaneously offered during the in-person meeting. Here is how one facilitator
describes her reaction to an experience where a survivor started her contact with the
Office of Victim Services in a state of extreme anger and vowed that she would never
forgive the offender, but forgiveness occurred spontaneously during the in-person
meeting.
But um, at the end of the day when she finally met with the offender, she forgave that offender. She did, she absolutely did. And it was one of those things that I would never have said that she would have done, never – never, never, never ever, never.

The facilitator believes that this kind of unplanned forgiveness is more likely to occur if the offender is taking responsibility for the offense. Another facilitator who has seen this unanticipated declaration of forgiveness credits the in-person encounter with the change of heart. She adds this insight about the spontaneous forgiveness:

*I think it’s because of the process and how they have had that chance to digest the information and really get those questions answered that they had. When they come face-to-face with the person it’s sort of like, “OK, I know these things and here you are. I’m looking at you now.” And I think it may change their feelings about everything.*

It’s important to note that at the other end of the spectrum, most facilitators (5) had experiences with survivors who forgave before they requested the dialogue. In these instances there seems to be some connection between the survivor’s existing faith and forgiveness. One facilitator said that she had seen survivors who speak about their faith, but they do not necessarily forgive. She has “never seen anyone who came to the table without some sort of faith and forgave.” Another facilitator said that even though the survivor may not have intended to delve into the forgiveness subject, it always comes up if the survivor is a person of faith. Yet another facilitator spoke of seeing forgiveness that was not connected to any particular spiritual view, but if spirituality is involved, the
talk about forgiveness is couched in the terms of Christian beliefs. In the conversation around forgiveness there is often some connection to spiritual life.

Continuing on the topic of forgiveness, one facilitator spoke about the humanization element in the forgiveness outcome, but adds that the definition of forgiveness is quite important.

_They both start to see each side of the table as a person rather than just an object or the monster that they think that person is . . . and I believe a lot of it is their own beliefs . . . To me it’s huge how they define forgiveness because you and I may define it differently. If we have 10 people here, they’re all going to have their own feeling. Some say forgiveness is just letting go. Others are extremely spiritual and religious based about it. So let’s go to those two extremes and say, “Well I’m just letting go. It has nothing to do with him. It’s something I’ve got to be able to do to be able to move and get out of bed the next morning.”_

On this point, some survivors may not use the word “forgiveness” to describe that “letting go” of the animosity toward the offender, but the psychological release happens for some regardless of the words that are used.

The following definition captures the general ideas that the facilitators conveyed when they discussed their observations related to the survivor’s stance on forgiveness.

_Well, I just think it’s that notion of I can’t hold onto the anger, the hurt, the feelings that I have. I have to be able to put those in some perspective so that I can move on and you know, not saying that I’m gonna’ forget what happened, but I can at least see some good._

238
As facilitators discussed the forgiveness definition, they typically noted that those who speak of forgiveness are not offering to reconcile with the offender and they are not saying that the offender should be released from prison. The recognition that the offender committed harmful acts remains along with the belief that the offender must be held responsible for the destructive behavior.

Given that so much effort goes into dialogue, the evaluation of how the program works for survivors is an important part of the story. Some phone follow-up is carried out with the survivors. Facilitators mentioned different possible timeframes for phone call follow-up or the exact timing for the follow-up was not clearly stated. From the facilitator’s standpoints, no one leaves a VOD in worse psychological shape than before they had the in-person meeting. On the contrary, they report the observation that much healing occurs. Facilitators credit the care that is taken in the preparation process for promoting positive outcomes. Careful decisions are made about the readiness of both the survivor and the offender to have a civil dialogue before the in-person meeting takes place. One facilitator summed up her assessment of VOD by saying, “I’ve never had anybody come out of it still so angry, ever, ever.” She cannot recall anyone assigned to her who did not get some good out of the process. One facilitator pointed out that some survivors get the information they want without scheduling an in-person meeting with the offender, so the process that involves some exchange of information is sufficient in those instances. Forgiveness is not necessary for the gains to occur. As one facilitator puts it, survivors say, “I just feel like I’ve been able to release, you know, how I’m feeling,
release all these things that I have been feeling.” In other words, they are able to carry on without the degree of bitterness and anger that they had before the dialogue took place.

A few of the facilitators said that VOD was beneficial to both the survivor and the offender. For example, one facilitator states:

*I just think that the program has changed lives, I really do.*
*I think on both ends. And I don’t keep track of every single offender who goes through the program, but staff have even said after they’ve gone through the process that they’re different. If they had somebody who had been a disciplinary issue, they’re not as much one. Or um, it doesn’t mean that they don’t do their undercover manipulative things, but staff has really said that they believe this program makes a difference and I believe that. I believe that it does impact lives and it changes lives.*

And another facilitator states a similar view:

*Well sometimes I think it helps the offender face the reality of what happened other than the legal process, because the legal process deals with the crime from a legal perspective. The dialogue deals with the crime from the perspective of the harm that was done to the victim . . . But the dialogue is not a legal process. It has nothing to do with anything but this offender and this victim needing to have a conversation about what happened and what impact it had on the life of the victim. So that’s why I think the offender gains as much as the victim does, because the real responsibility of what happened becomes very real.*
And that same facilitator also states that she has “found that the dialogue process itself creates a lot of healing, forgiveness, closure for both.”

Also, many of the facilitators spoke about their own feelings and reactions that result from being witness to the encounter between the victim and offender. One facilitator confessed that she came into VOD as a skeptic with questions about the wisdom of allowing a victim and offender to meet in person. She now declares that she “fell in love with the program” after seeing the advantages of permitting victims who want this opportunity to have access to the offender in this controlled way. One facilitator proclaims, “[Y]our’re just there to make sure that the two parties have a healthy conversation, but in the process you’re witnessing lives being changed and being influenced . . . it is a rewarding feeling to do that.” Another facilitator who said that she loves the work provided a good example of how compelling the experience of being present in a VOD where forgiveness takes place can be. Like the VOD survivors who make comments indicating that the dialogue itself can be a spiritual experience, the facilitator recalled:

*This is like an out-of-body experience to me. It’s just – your soul leaves your body almost. You know that it’s totally God is present. The Holy Spirit is present. Whatever you believe in, something happened right there . . . So it was just like a, it was totally the most beautiful thing I’d ever been involved with.*”

Clearly, the facilitators have a strongly favorable evaluation of the VOD experience.
Comparison -Victim Offender Dialogue Facilitators and Survivors

The VOD facilitators’ stories for the most part match the VOD survivor stories quite well and, in that way, serve as a source of corroboration for some of the points made in the survivor stories. The sources of information for locating the VOD that the facilitators mention fit with the survivors’ stories in many cases. Sometimes the VOD survivors did not remember how they found out about VOD. They just knew that they were searching for a way to have a conversation with the offender. The facilitators’ observations that victims of crime seek out the offender by means of writing letters to the offender or asking to visit the offender is in sync with the idea that survivors seek the opportunity to find out more directly from the offender. The facilitators noticed that some survivor’s have a “burning desire” or a strong desire to meet with the offender. Interestingly, one survivor used those very words, “burning desire,” in talking about her strong wish to know certain things about the offender. Many survivors gave this same impression of having a strong inner-directed desire that motivated them to pursue VOD in spite of discouraging words from close family members and friends. The facilitators, too, were aware that survivors move forward with the process even though others may adamantly oppose their decision. Facilitators would not proceed with a VOD meeting if the survivor were so angry that the in-person contact would not be a civil exchange. A few of the survivors also noted that the meeting would not be worthwhile if the only purpose would be to attack to offender with a barrage of anger. One facilitator noted that the spontaneous forgiveness is more likely to happen if the offender takes responsibility for the wrongdoing. Two of the VOD survivor participants experienced a noticeable
change of heart and healing as a result of meeting with offenders who were straightforward about their wrongdoing and the harm that they caused. One survivor pointed out that she could see the offender as a fallible human being and not the monster she had imagined for years. The facilitators, too, said that the VOD process supports that more human view of the offender and helps to dismantle the monster image. Those survivors who forgive maintain that forgiveness does not mean excusing the offender from the objectionable behavior and the facilitators concur on this point. Both survivors and facilitators agree that dialogue is a worthwhile experience. Certainly no survivor claimed any deleterious effects, some credit VOD with having a major impact on their healing, and all would recommend it to others. Again, the facilitators agree that they have not seen harmful effects of VOD and mostly they do see benefits, and sometimes enormous healing benefits, for those who go through the process. At least one facilitator and some of the survivors found the VOD meeting itself to be a spiritual experience.

There were only a few areas where the review of the VOD experience was not a strong match between the VOD facilitators and VOD survivors. The facilitators like to slow the process down to allow all involved to digest the information they are receiving in order to ultimately be in the right psychological place to proceed with the in-person meeting. Some of the survivors mentioned frustration with the slowness of the process. They were ready to go forward at a faster pace. The facilitators are aware that sometimes the survivors would like to move at a faster pace, but they believe that the slower process allows for better preparation in many instances. Also, some of the facilitators mentioned that they begin to see changes in the survivors’ perceptions about the offender as the
facilitators begin the back and for information sharing between the survivor and offender.

Some facilitators notice that the survivor might begin to forgive the offender as a result of that humanizing process before the in-person meeting takes place. None of the VOD survivors mentioned this aspect of the preparation process as they told their stories.

**Participants Who Did Not Go Through a VOD – The Support Group Participants**

The abstract that comes out of a consolidation of narratives from the participants who did not go through VOD (for simplicity, I will call these participants Support Group participants) could be:

My loved one was a homicide victim and I suffered tremendous emotional pain over the loss. Everyone in the family was affected. Shortly after the crime occurred, I learned about a support group in my community that was in place to help homicide survivors. The contact with these other survivors who understood my situation was tremendously helpful. To make something worthwhile come out of the death of my loved one, I got involved in significant volunteer work in a combination of areas such as supporting other homicide survivors, working toward crime prevention, providing victim awareness programs for offenders, or advocating for legislative changes. I do not forgive the offender. I turn the decision about forgiveness over to God. I know about VOD and I have no interest in talking with the offender (4 participants), or alternatively, I know about VOD and I have taken or will take some steps to explore a meeting with the offender (3 participants). Emotionally, I function very well now (4 participants), or instead, emotionally I have good days and bad days. It’s been a long time since the death, but something can remind me of my lost loved one and I am upset and crying again (3 participants). You never get over it.
Again the orientations to the stories give more information. For the Support Group participants, the orientation would say that an immediate family member (a child or sibling) was the victim of homicide. The homicides were, for the most part, more recent than the homicides that affected the VOD participants. For the Support Group participants, two of the crimes happened in the range of 5 or fewer years before the time of the first research interview. For three homicides, at least six to ten years had passed since the crime took place and one crime occurred in the range of 30-35 years ago. The victim knew the offender(s) who committed the homicide in four of the six cases (proportionately similar to the VOD cases). At the time of the crime, the victims’ were various ages ranging from late teens to mid-40’s with most victims in their 20’s at the time of the death (4 victims). The offenders in these cases are all male and ranged in age from late teens to early 30’s at the time the crime was committed. Most offenders were in their 20’s (4 offenders). The various circumstances surrounding the crimes included intimate partner violence, attempted sexual assault, or disputes that could have a robbery component. A gun was used to commit the crime in half of the cases (3 cases), a knife was used in one case and the remaining deaths were perpetrated through some form of beating.
### Table 4: Orientation - Support Group Participants

**Complicating Action** – In contrast to the VOD cases where the offender was apprehended, charged, and convicted quickly, in several of these cases there was either a long interval before the offender was located and charged or, if the offender was charged...
shortly after the crime, circumstances were such that there was much turmoil and commotion surrounding the case and the conviction did not occur in a timely way. A typical wait for the offender to be apprehended and charged in these cases was approximately 1.5 years with one case remaining unsolved for over three years. Most of the cases were settled with a plea bargain. Only one case involved a trial. The teen offender was old enough to be tried as an adult and sentenced to an adult facility. As a group, these survivors lived with not knowing who the offender was for a much longer time than the VOD participants. One survivor talked about how difficult that time of not knowing was for her:

So we went for a year and a half not knowing who had done it,
which was really difficult. . . Any time one of my other
family members’ friends would come in the house,
I would always wonder if they were the one [that committed the murder].

These survivors also contend with the enduring, life altering changes that the murder brought to their lives. Again, all of these survivors chose to engage in support groups such as Parents of Murdered Children (POMC), and/or Who Killed Our Kids (WKOK), and they also extended themselves to offer considerable volunteer work focused on helping other victims, or maybe taking on crime prevention efforts. This combination of being part of a support network, and also extending themselves to work on making improvements so that others will not have to suffer the loss of a loved one was part of life for all of these survivors. This passion for supporting other victims and working to prevent further crime damage is the course they have chosen to make something meaningful come out of the tragedy.
As with the VOD participant stories, the evaluation and resolution in the stories must be shown along with parts of the complicating actions to preserve the broad-spectrum meaning in the stories. Going into these stories, it is already known that all participants are active in homicide related support groups and they do an enormous amount of volunteer work connected to supporting other victims or working toward crime prevention. So again, the end of the story, that is, the current emotional state of the participants, will be the starting point. From there, the association between those emotional outcomes and the prominent elements will be reviewed. The elements are: a) views about justice/fairness related to the individual’s loss; b) understanding or lack of understanding for the offender; c) how is forgiveness understood; and d) how spiritual life enters into the outcome; and e) how VOD is viewed.

To begin with the emotional outcomes, three survivors described their daily emotional states in less positive terms. These survivors conveyed the message that one can have good days and bad days. For example, one survivor whose loved one was murdered over ten years ago said that her emotions are like a roller coaster with ups and downs depending on what’s happening in the environment. She listed a number of emotions that might be experienced such as feeling deprived, punished anxious, and angry. On special occasions such as the murder victim’s birthday, guilt and depression might be added to the list of disheartening emotions. At times she feels some of the painful emotion as forcefully as she did when she first learned of her loved one’s death.
In another example, a survivor who had lived with the fact that her loved one was murdered for several years (in the 5-10 category) explained her response to unpleasant reminders this way:

*But that’s how it goes. You’ll go real smooth and all of a sudden a land mine goes off, and you know, it’s all right back . . . And every year during your anniversary [meaning the anniversary of the death]. . . I can feel myself at work getting kinda’, you don’t mean to but your kinda’ getting irritable or edgy.*

This survivor characterized her day-in-day out emotional state as “angry”, but she adds, “We don’t sit around and dwell on it . . . I know mothers that do and they never get out of bed and have nervous breakdowns and stuff like that.” So even though she experiences anger, she finds that the distressing emotions are not as strong as when the murder first happened, and she found ways to manage her emotions somewhat. As is typical for all of the Support Group survivors, the many support group and crime prevention activities help. This survivor talked about some of her leadership roles that have kept her busy and then goes on to say:

*So I go to the support groups, too you know, for me. I try to help other people, but it’s for me, too. They keep ‘em busy. I know people will say, “Going to those [meetings], don’t that just bring everything back every time you go?” I said, “Well you don’t wanna’ forget them [meaning the murder victim], you’re not going to.” I said, “You try to support and help another family.” You know – and that*
"kinda’ helps me a lot just trying to help other people and to keep busy, which I keep very busy most of the time.

In contrast, four of the Support Group participants report what can be considered fine emotional outcomes. When asked how they would describe their day-to-day emotional state, the participants responded by saying things like, “Daily I do well,” or “. . . I do fine,” or “It’s been long enough now that I’m pretty much OK.” A few of these participants say that they have arrived at a new normal. This is a way of acknowledging that the lost loved one is still missed, but the survivors have found a method of carrying on with life in a satisfying way. At follow-up one of these participants explained that she has chosen to make something positive of the murder, so she chooses to focus on the hopeful. For the most part she has the capacity to experience life in this positive state, but she also pointed out that sadness might quickly overtake her when, for example, during one of the support groups meetings she is reminded of the loss as other survivors speak about their losses.

For these survivors, both the ones who report the more pervasive distressing emotions and the ones who manage with less anguish on a daily basis, emphasis on the unfairness in the situation surrounding the offender is in the forefront of the discussion. There is little or no talk of psychological or societal factors that may have contributed to the offender’s injurious behavior. In other words, understanding and empathy for the offender did not enter into the stories of the survivors. The fairness focal point can be seen in this survivor’s statement:

You know, the perpetrators have all the rights. You can’t
talk to them. You can’t touch them, but they can say
whatever they want and all my family had to do was
just sit there and they had to accept this. And I thought
this is wrong, but this is the way it went.

Even a survivor who seemed to have quite a bit of compassion for offenders in
general because she encountered other types of offenders in her volunteer work, remained
mostly focused on the unfairness that the offender in her case brought about. She
lamented the fact that the offender would be able to have a life. The deceased would
never have that opportunity nor would the surviving family have the benefit of sharing
life’s joys with the murdered one.

In a few instances terms were used to describe the offender such as “psychopath”
or “serial killer”. When such words were used, the survivor had some knowledge of a
small number of behavioral signs that pointed to the diagnosis, but there was no
knowledge or mention of possible causal factors. In one such case, the offender is
described as an evil person who made a choice to commit the horrific crime and,
therefore, does not deserve to be part of society. In this view, fairness is prominent with
“deserve” standing out as a key concept (the offender deserves incarceration or death).
The concern that the offender needs to remain incarcerated because he is likely to
continue to present a threat to others is a consideration, but a secondary one. Punishment
is a very important part of what should happen to the offender.

None of the Support Group survivors say that they forgive the offender. Most are
clear that they do not forgive. A few who have a strong spiritual life do not adamantly
oppose forgiveness. They, along with most of the other Support Group survivors, say
that God will take care of forgiveness. In other words, God will be the One to judge.

(The one and only VOD participant who had participated in POMC held this view that
God would be the judge, too.) A few of the participants said that it was perhaps more
difficult for them to think of forgiveness because the offender was free and did not
acknowledge any part in the crime for such a long time after the homicide occurred.

While thinking about what forgiveness might look like one of the survivors said:

*Forgiveness – yeah – if you saw it in his face and you could
really believe that they were honestly, truly sorry, you know,
maybe after he spent all that time in jail and (laughs), maybe then.*

When asked for the definition of forgiveness, a few of the participants had
difficulty finding words to describe what it would look like. Those who did find words
mostly came up with language that did not include offender accountability. Here are
some of the thoughts about what forgiveness means:

- *You forget what happened maybe*

- *You’re parting from it because you’re omitting it*

- *What do I think forgiveness means – that I didn’t hold it against him*

- *Forgiveness is like giving a pass*

In contrast to the forgiving VOD participants who were very clear that
forgiveness did not signal that the offender would be excused in any way for his
deplorable behavior, the Support Group survivors’ language suggests that the offender’s
behavior will be overlooked in some way. Only one of the survivors who was guided by
religious teachings said that forgiveness means not holding onto hate or bitterness. This
survivor believed that one has to forgive up to a point because holding on to hate is not
acceptable, but it is up to God to make the final judgment about whether the offender can be forgiven.

It is interesting to notice that one of the Support Group survivors said that she did not have to forgive the offender in order to get on with her life. In many ways, all of these survivors are functioning above and beyond very well. The contributions they have made to other survivors and to their communities are, in fact, awe-inspiring. None of them claim to have forgiven. Several report that they generally have a good emotional life on a day-to-day basis. So if forgiveness is not the freeing factor, the question becomes what else beyond the support groups and volunteering seems to be helping?

One important factor appears to be the connection to spiritual life. One survivor speaks of her current emotional functioning by saying that through the grace of God, she does pretty fine. Here is what she says about the time she was first learning that her loved one had been murdered:

*I'm still numb. I was, like I said, the faith was there. The trust in the Lord that, uh, even though a tragic thing like that happened, that some good had to come out of the whole situation. I didn’t question God about anything, not at all. . . I trusted the Lord that everything was going to be OK.*

Interestingly this survivor said that she was never angry. Her loss was recent. Her loved one was murdered under five years ago. She says that she hopes that the offender will better himself while he is in prison, so her mind is not solely on punishment.
Two more Support Group survivors who report good daily emotional functioning spoke about the importance of their faith in helping them with the healing. One survivor tells us:

*I think my belief helped me get through it, because I have had people tell me that I’m the most normal person they’ve seen that has a [loved one] that’s been murdered. But I think it was my belief in God, um, that helped me. . . I just feel like – evil happens in the world . . . I never felt like [God] was a cause of any evil. I always felt like He was crying along with me rather than allowing evil to happen.*

And another survivor mentions the help that her religious life brings as she says:

*I’ve been going to church since I’ve been very little and I’ve got the religious background and I guess that has really helped me through. I don’t hate [the offender].*

Those survivors who report more emotional angst on a daily basis portray a somewhat different picture of their spiritual lives. While there may be some affiliation with an organized religion, the religious connection was not mentioned as a primary factor in the healing process. A few of these survivors left their churches at the time of the murder. A mix of positive and negative religious coping can be seen with one survivor who feels that the Lord let her down by allowing the violence to occur, but also believes that God must have a plan for her life because she is still alive in spite of all of the pain she has suffered. For these survivors, the spiritual life does not have the
sweeping curative power that can be seen in the situations where the strong positive religious coping is called upon for solace and meaning.

But the spiritual life does not account for all good emotional outcomes. One of the participants who was quite active in her support group for several years observed, “People that I think have the most problems are really angry people. A lot of them are really angry.” This particular participant did not count herself among those survivors who carry excessive anger. She thought perhaps her religious views helped her to avoid that state. Given that anger and other troubling emotions are the culprits, then perhaps one antidote is to consistently draw attention to what is positive in the situation. As one survivor with a good emotional outcome explains:

I can tell you, I mean every one of us will say that we died that day [the day the loved one was murdered]... Who I was died – um – at some point in time I decided I wasn’t going to stay gone. You know, I’m gonna’ start moving forward cause I’m gonna’ make a difference. . . I always say there’ll never be a reason for why this happened. The reason is for what’s happened since, who I’ve met since, and who I’m supposed to meet. And that’s the difference – who we come together with.

The survivor honors the memory of her murdered loved one by essentially seeing that it is her job to work on changing the adversity that has come into her life. She elaborates by saying:

I just think that you have two different survivors. You have the ones who feel like you have to do something positive from the adversity and they choose to do something positive
... [O]r you have the survivors who die like we did that day and choose death, whether choose death literally or choose death from the life that they still have to live.

This survivor was clear that she chose life. Something precious was lost in her life, but there is the recognition that gains have been made as well. She is determined to see something worthwhile ascend from the loss.

Returning to another fairness matter, all of the Support Group survivors will not have the option to actively oppose parole because of the nature of the offender’s sentences. Of those Support Group survivors who can exercise that option, most will do so. Survivors are aware that they can leave documents or make a video testimony that can be used to oppose parole in the event that they are no longer living when the offender is eligible. One survivor in this group did not want to go to those lengths. She wanted the offender’s parole decision to be evaluated on the merits of his behavior at the time rather than on some testimony from the past. She is the survivor with the perspective that comes closest to bordering on forgiveness.

When asked about VOD, most of the Support Group participants were familiar with the program. They are well informed about possible services available to survivors. Four of the participants were clear that they had no desire to pursue a VOD giving such reasons as, it would be too upsetting, the offender would not tell the truth, or there is nothing to say to the offender. One survivor was feeling strong inner prompting that she must meet with the offender. Her plan was to pursue a meeting through asking to visit the offender. (I informed her that she would most likely be referred for a VOD). A few of the participants had inquired about VOD. In one situation, the VOD will not go forward
because of offender circumstances. This left the survivor feeling that, once again, the offender has all of the rights and the survivor’s needs are less important. In another situation, the survivor is still trying to decide about whether she wants to go forward with the dialogue and, if so, what the optimal timing would be. As with some of the survivors who did go through VOD, a family member is attempting to dissuade her. In this survivor’s words:

I actually talked to my [family member] about it too and see what he thought about it and he’s like, “I don’t know why you want to talk to him. He’s just gonna’ lie to you.” But part of me still wants to go forward and go face to face with him.

Like the VOD participants, the Support Group survivors spoke mostly about what was helpful to them and made only minimal mention of what was not helpful. As already mentioned, the support groups were helpful to all of these participants. On the helpful side, faith in God was cited and in that category, another participant noted that her religion was helpful to her. On the not helpful side, two of these participants did bring up their less than satisfactory encounters with mental health professionals. Here is one survivor’s account of her experience with a mental health professional:

The grief counselor comes on board, and the first thing they tell you, and I know they learned it in school, is that right now you’re dealing with grief, and you’re going through those five stages of grief, which are anger, resentment, and um, guilt, and you know they go on and on. And they say, “Now which one are you dealing with now? And I’m like, “Are you kidding me?”
The survivor goes on to say:

_It ain’t even about grieving. You haven’t even begun to hit the grieving process because you’re still stuck in the fact that this is not real. It didn’t happen._

After firing several mental health professionals, this survivor finally found one professional who was willing to just listen and that mainly listening method was the most helpful to this survivor.

That brings the main Support Group survivor story results to a close. With that, a return to the secondary research questions is warranted. The following is a summary of these results of the Support Group survivor responses as they apply to the original questions that were posed.

**Summary of How Support Group Participants’ Results**

**Address the Secondary Research Questions**

_In general, what helped the survivor carry on after the death?_ All the Support Group Survivors found their contacts with the support groups valuable. The appreciated having contact with others who had similar experiences and could understand what they were going through. The groups allowed them to be devotedly involved in activities that gave some meaning to the death such as directly supporting other survivors, working toward crime prevention, or advocating for changes in the criminal justice procedures that impact victims. Also, about half of these survivors found their faith to be a major help in sustaining them through the challenges of losing of loved one by violence.
What are the survivor’s views on forgiveness as the concept relates to the offender in the case? None of the Support Group Survivors say that they forgive the offender. While defining forgiveness was difficult, for those who did attempt it the definitions often included some indication that the offender would be excused in some way for committing the crime or the crime would be forgotten. Many of these survivors spoke of turning forgiveness over to God. It was God’s place to make this decision and judgment about whether the offender could be forgiven, not theirs.

Have the views of forgiveness changed over time? One survivor indicated that her thinking about forgiveness had changed over time, but she could not articulate exactly what the change was. The survivors generally seemed stable in their views that they would not forgive.

What influenced the views about forgiveness? Three survivors mentioned that they had either consulted clergy or there was some direction about forgiveness in their church teachings. Forgiveness seems to come up for these survivors either because they are thinking about it or because a clergy person brought up the subject.

Did religious or spiritual influences enter into the understanding of forgiveness? As already explained, those survivors who did engage in some reflection on forgiveness, did so with the help of clergy or some church related activity.

How has the current thinking about forgiveness or not forgiving impacted the healing process? These survivors do not forgive and many of them report that on a day-to-day basis their emotional life is fine. Forgiveness is not necessary to have good emotional outcomes.
Has the survivor ever considered VOD? A few of the survivors have inquired about VOD and one survivor is interested in meeting with the offender. The one who would like to meet the offender was aware of many ODRC-OVS services, but she did not remember the specifics of the VOD program.

If so, what stopped the survivor from pursuing VOD? If not, why did the survivor not consider VOD? Of those survivors who inquired about VOD, one could not go forward because an offender situation. One is interested in proceeding regardless of a family member’s discouraging words about it. She is thinking about what the best timing for the meeting will be. These survivors are well connected through their support groups, so they know about services such as VOD. The survivors who did not want to pursue VOD made decisions that this route would not be right for them for such reasons as seeing the offender would be too upsetting, the offender would not be truthful, or the survivor has nothing to say to the offender.

This concludes the presentation of the main elements of the stories of those who went through VOD and of the Support Group Participants. With this information in place, it is now possible to consider the primary research question results.

Primary Research Question Results: VOD and Support Group Comparisons

The primary research question was, “What elements, that is, what experiences or viewpoints are associated with the most optimal outcomes for these survivors of homicide?” To address this question, the experiences and viewpoints of the survivors in both groups who arrived at a mostly good current emotional functioning were analyzed. Differences between the survivors with good emotional outcomes and the survivors who
more frequently contend with challenging emotional states were examined. In reviewing the data for that difference, one central feature comes forward. All of the survivors who report that for the most part their day-to-day emotional functioning is fine also appear to have some emotional detachment from the offender. As a few of the survivors put it, on a long-term basis, these survivors do not allow the offenders to take their lives, too.

Many factors appear to facilitate this state of disengagement. As some of the survivors pointed out, the passage of time helps. Those who have an understanding of the offender’s psychological or social circumstances, in other words, some ability to be aware of the offender’s life situation, is present for many of those survivors who report a current overall satisfactory emotional state. Adding empathy or caring that understanding also appears to be a significant ingredient that results in a beneficial outcome. All of the VOD participants who lean more toward or clearly express empathy for the offender report positive emotional functioning on a day-to-day basis. Interestingly, when the offender becomes a human being and not a monster, much of the anger and negative emotion attached to the offender dissipates. Perhaps human faults and deficiencies may be easier to comprehend, and may look more controllable and less threatening than the viciousness of a monster. If the offender is behaving in a manner that conveys recognition of the harm he did and remorse, the face-to-face encounter that Hoffman (2000) discussed comes in to play to make that empathic response possible. Those participants who forgive demonstrate understanding and empathy for the offender. With the forgiveness, they also uniformly release the hold that the anger and negativity could
have on their lives. As seen with the VOD participants, the human encounter with the offender facilitates forgiveness or just a release in negativity.

However, both VOD participants and Support Group participants show that forgiveness is not a necessary condition for an outcome that is as good a possible given the nature of the loss that occurred. The Support Group participants, who are heavily focused on the fairness side, show us that understanding and empathy for the offender are not necessary conditions for a good outcome. In both groups of participants, positive religious coping helped with releasing the negative emotional attachment to the offender, in some cases, almost immediately.

If there is no understanding or empathy for the offender, no forgiveness, and no positive religious coping, one element still remains that is associated with a good day-to-day emotional functioning. This other route to maintaining detachment seems to be based on sheer determination. The survivor makes a decision that she will not be negative and works diligently toward maintaining a positive outlook. A choice is made. The choice often involves not only thinking about life in a positive way, but also finding a way to bring something constructive out of the tragedy. This is the resolve that even though the offender killed the loved one, the survivor will not allow that person to take her life, too. One of the participants followed her explanation of this kind of thinking with the statement that she knew her deceased loved one would not want her remaining life to be ruined.
Figure 1 Elements Associated with Positive Emotional Outcomes for All Participants

Table 5 - Elements Associated with Positive Emotional Outcome for Individual VOD Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOD Participants</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>VII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding about O’s Circumstances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy for O</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refuses to be Negative</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgives O</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Religious Coping</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Work</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 - Elements Associated with Positive Emotional Outcome for Individual VOD Participants

○ = Element Present
Support Group Participants | I | II | III | IV
--- | --- | --- | --- | ---
Understanding about O’s Circumstances |  |  |  |  
Empathy for O |  |  |  |  
Refuses to be Negative | ⬜️ |  |  |  
Forgives O |  |  |  | ⬜️
Positive Religious Coping | ⬜️ | ⬜️ | ⬜️ | ⬜️
Volunteer Work | ⬜️ | ⬜️ | ⬜️ | ⬜️

Table 6 - Elements Associated with Positive Emotional Outcomes for Individual Support Group Participants

- ⬜️ = Element Present
- ⬜️ = Somewhat Forgiving

In addition to this assembling of the main elements that appear in cases of favorable emotional outcome, there were other general elements or themes that showed up across several of the stories of both the VOD and the Support Group participants that are worth mentioning. Those themes will be the topic of the following section.

**General Themes for Both the VOD and Support Group Participants**

As already noted, the major theme that was prevalent across all of the stories was how devastating the homicide was for all of the survivors and how each survivor had to find a way to integrate the loss into daily life in order to carry on in even a minimally satisfying way. This is the context for all other parts of the stories. In addition to this
main theme, there were a few odd pieces that did not seem to fit with the pattern of the way any general stories unfolded, but did seem to crop up in both groups of participants.

One such piece is the consulting about forgiveness with clergy or with some other person related to the religious affiliation. Several (5) of the survivors spoke about some type of discussion they had with a religion related person about the topic. None of these survivors say that they forgive the offender, even though they may have received permission or encouragement to forgive. This suggests that several survivors at least think about, and in some cases, struggle about the issue of forgiveness even if they conclude that they are not going to forgive. This deliberation about forgiveness may go into the process of arriving at a new psychological equilibrium after the upheaval has occurred. In some cases, it seems important for the survivors to have some peace about where they stand on this matter of forgiveness, but forgiveness is not required for this state of peace.

On another subject, various types of attempts to correspond using letters kept coming up in the stories of both the VOD and Support Group survivors. Seven survivors mentioned the topic of letters. Also, a few of the VOD facilitators noted that letters might play an important role in getting the survivor to VOD.

In the VOD participants’ stories, a few of the survivors and offenders negotiated a plan for letter correspondence after the VOD. The typical agreement might allow the offender to write to the survivor on an agreed upon timetable, often to report on the progress made in prison that year. The survivors chose to routinely reply to the offender’s letters in a few cases. One survivor said she got a post office box so the
offender would not have her home address. Survivors viewed this negotiated letter writing arrangement favorably. One survivor was permitted to write one thank you letter to the offender following the VOD. No further correspondence was permitted. She wanted to know what the after effects of the VOD were for the offender and wished that he would be allowed to write one letter for that purpose.

The Support Group survivors talk about letters was not quite as amicable. One survivor wrote to the offender to ask for the details surrounding the death of her loved one and the offender did write back to her with his version of the story at the time. In half of the cases, the offender wrote to the survivor to ask for forgiveness. These letters were disconcerting to the survivor and in a few instances the survivor spoke of contacting the Office of Victims Services to ask for the letter sending to stop. One of the survivors who found the letter with the request for forgiveness unsettling also had this response to it:

I don’t know if God’s telling me I need to go see him because I’ve had two dreams about the letter and that I need to go talk to him [meaning the offender]. And I don’t know if you believe in dreams and God kinda’ giving you that nudge or whatever, but I feel like God’s telling me I need to go talk to him. . . And I thought at first about communicating in a letter and the answer came back, “No. You need to talk to him.”

This subject of letter writing brings up something that one of the VOD participants said in her story. One day when she was in court with the offender she asked for permission to speak to him. As she tells the experience:

I asked him if he knew who I was and he said, “I think
your [the deceased's family member]. And I said, "You better know who I am because I am in your life for the rest of your life."

This statement seems very true for all of the survivors and offenders. They are now in each other’s lives for the rest of their lives. This can be seen with the parole decision when survivors know that for their entire lives they will have to be prepared to submit testimony for parole hearings and, in some instances the next generation will inherit that parole watch. The letters seem to be another indication that they are in each other’s lives. In the case of the VOD negotiated letter exchange, it is possible for the focus to be on repairing the relationship with the offender taking responsibility for the harm and the survivor taking a direct role in the correction. Letters exchanged outside of this formal structure do not seem to have the same restorative result and, in fact, the uninvited letters may further disrupt the relationship. The intrusion is bewildering to the survivor. Perhaps the letters serve as a reminder that survivor and offender seem to have some ongoing awareness of each other and at times there is a felt need to communicate about the effect one has on the other.

**After Death Communications**

The subject of After Death Communications (ADC) seemed tacked on the interviews in most cases, so the results of the inquiry on that subject are reported separately here. Only one participant brought up her experience of having a sense of presence of her lost loved one without being asked. She found that sense of presence helpful. Others seemed to be quite familiar with the notion that people believe they
receive communications from their deceased loved ones. The personal experiences related to the death of their own loved ones varied.

To ask the ADC question, I explained that I attended the 2009 National Parents of Murdered Children Conference. One of the presenters there was talking about communicating with the deceased loved one. She either asked if anyone in the room had a sense of presence of the deceased or if they felt they had a communication (I explained to the participants that I am truly not sure how she put it.) Most people in the room raised their hands. Since I don’t think social workers know a lot about those kinds of experiences that people have, I just wanted to ask if that individual had any such experiences. Since this was a POMC conference, many of the Support Group participants were familiar with the concept.

Three of the Support Group participants reported feeling a sense of the victim’s presence. For example one participant who says she does feel the presence of the victim believes that her experience is partly psychological because she surrounds herself with many reminders of her loved one, but she also believes that the deceased has helped her through difficult times. As she explains:

I truly felt each day that I walked in that court room, cause
I always walked alone, I would always talk to her, and it seemed like the more I talked to her, I built up that strength
. . . Because I think if I would have relied on my own emotions,
. . . I don’t think I would have made it. I truly don’t.

And another survivor who credits her own tremendous growth after the death to the presence of the deceased victim says:
As to that person [the one that does whatever is needed to make a difference], I feel that’s [the victim] in me, cause she was much, she was much like me, but I thought she had more strength than I did. Um – so the two of us together, we became very strong.

Some of the survivors in both groups noticed what they considered meaningful symbolic communications. Two survivors who had a sense of presence of the deceased, also noticed symbolic communications such as seeing a rainbow on a day when despair was taking over, or hearing a meaningful song on the radio as a reminder to the survivor of the loved one’s presence. One survivor who had already observed one meaningful sign from the deceased went on to tell that she was talking on the phone with another survivor who said that pennies come from your deceased loved ones as means of telling you that they are still around. She goes on to say:

So I got off the phone with her and I happened to have towels in my washer. I took out the towels and in the bottom of my washer was a penny. But it wasn’t only a penny. It was a 1980 penny and that’s the year that [the victim] was born. So to me that was a second sign.

Another survivor notices coincidences that she did not strongly attribute to being signs, but she did acknowledge, for example on a day when she hears her deceased loved one’s unusual middle name spoken many times she wonders if the loved one is thinking about her.
Many survivors said that they did not have dreams about the deceased loved one, but three said they did have dreams that were meaningful to them. For example, one survivor said she had only one very clear dream:

_We were on vacation and it was like she came to me in a dream and she was trying to explain to me why she died. And that’s all I remember about the dream. She was there and it was just a matter of explaining to me why she died._

Another survivor reported a short farewell dream. At the follow-up, a third survivor indicated that she had more than one dream where she believed her deceased loved one was conveying some information about the homicide scene. Two participants noted that they were aware of other family members who had meaningful dreams about the deceased even though they themselves did not have such dreams.

Two survivors spoke of electrical disturbance ADC’s. In one case, the victim’s electric game started up without anyone turning it on. In another case, the survivor reported that she had no communication from the deceased, but another family member had an alarm clock alarm go off on a clock with an otherwise nonfunctioning alarm. The family member thought it was a communication from the deceased.

A number of other unusual occurrences were mentioned in response to the ADC question. In one situation, the survivor was clear that it was not acceptable in her belief system to communicate with the dead. Nonetheless, after the homicide, she experienced her bed going down as if someone was sitting on it on three different occasions. The belief against communicating with the deceased was so strong that she was able to refrain
from the temptation to look at the place in the bed where someone seemed to be sitting. Others mentioned such mysteries as the deceased favorite books falling off of a shelf with no explainable cause, a light visiting in the corner of the bedroom for a year after the death, and a relative getting information about an expected baby from the deceased before the news was announced in the family. Two survivors mentioned experiences where they felt that their life was protected or saved by way of help from the deceased. One survived a terrible car accident and one felt that she was led to a life-saving doctor at a time when she was facing a serious illness. One survivor in this study spoke of an experience that she now believes was a premonition about the homicide, and one said that a psychic foretold the death in a general way by indicating that her family member would die at an early age.

One participant reported the following third party ADC.

But um, so anyway, years later, and this had to be maybe 4 or 5 years after [the victim], I get a call from this woman. I don’t know her. She doesn’t know me. And she said, “I hope you don’t think I’m crazy, but I had to call you.” And just by the tone that she said that, I knew where she was going. And I said, “No, I’m very open to it. Tell me what you need to tell me.” . . . So she proceeded to tell me this story of her child. And she said her child, I think at that time was maybe 4 or 5 years old, OK, and . . . for some reason she came up to [name of cemetery], that’s where [the victim] is and she was looking for her grandparent’s plot, so she was looking around and that. So she found it. So she sat down. She put the baby down. Well the little boy was just walking around, you know, and then he sat down. She could see him. He wasn’t with her. She could see where he was so she didn’t say
anything. So she finished what she was doing, she picked up the baby and she went over and she says, “Come on. We gotta’ go.” And he goes, “I’m not done talking.” She goes, “What do you mean you’re not done talking?” “To the boy who’s here.” And she says, “What?” She goes, “What are you talking about?” And he goes, “He’s telling me how he died. So she looked down at the stone and she saw [the victim’s] name, OK. And she saw how old he was and she goes, “Oh. Did he die in a car accident?” Cause you would assume at [the young age]. He goes, “No. He hit his head.” And that’s exactly what he did. Now there’s no way this 5 year old would know this happened. OK. So she kind of got freaked out and she said, “Come on well we gotta go.” He said, “Well can I come back.” She said, “Yeah. Yeah. Tell him you’ll be back,” you know, just like that. . .

So anyway they get to her parents and he gets out of the car and he says, “Well what about the message? And she goes, “What message?” “I’ve got to tell his [family member] something.” So he told her the message. Well she didn’t know what to do.

The survivor goes on to tell that the woman did not call her for about a year after her son got the message. As a result of consulting with someone more knowledgeable about such matters this woman did decide to try to locate the survivor and call. The survivor continues:

And the message was that he [the victim] was sorry and that he loved me very, very much. And the day she called me happened to be my wedding anniversary. So yes, I believe that they do try to communicate with you. I would say yes, very much so.
Overall, six of the eight VOD participants indicated that either they or a family member had a sense of having some kind of communication or unusual experience that they connected to the deceased. Four of the seven Support Group survivors believed that they had received some communication. No survivor reported a hearing, physically feeling, or olfactory ADC. On the whole, these responses signify that the ADC idea has entered into the culture as a viable way to explain some experiences that take place in conjunction with the death of a loved one. Nobody seemed terribly surprised when the subject was broached. The topic was familiar enough that most had some knowledge of the concept and they could share their thinking about it.

The original research question ADC was, “Did the survivor or anyone close to the survivor have an ADC form the deceased victim that might have influenced views on forgiveness or the decision to request VOD?” The answer to the total question is simply “no”. However a total of ten survivors did report that either they or someone else closely related to the deceased had the sense of presence, some kind of communication, or at least unusual experiences that were connected to the deceased. One participant did have dreams urging her to meet with the offender. She attributed these dreams to God’s prompting and not directly to her deceased loved one.

So this completes the task of hearing from grief expert, Ken Czillinger, and learning from the VOD and Support Group Survivor participant stories. The viewpoints of the VOD facilitator have been covered as well. With the findings of these inquiries reported, the next endeavor will be the discussion of these results.
Chapter 6: DISCUSSION

In an attempt to sort out some of the complicated details in the survivor stories, the thoughts of one victim/survivor of another violent crime seem useful. Debbie Morris (1998) wrote about her 1980 experience of being kidnapped, repeatedly raped, tortured, and of witnessing the attempted murder of her boyfriend in her book, Forgiving the Dead Man Walking. In the course of the crime that took place when Debbie (then Debbie Cuevas) was 16, her boyfriend was shot and left for dead. The offenders eventually released Debbie and she was able to find her way back to her family. She was also able to provide information that led to the arrest of the offenders, to the location of the body of another of the offenders’ murder victims, and ultimately to the execution of one of the offenders, Robert Willie. The offender character in the Dead Man Walking movie, the story of Sr. Helen Pergean’s spiritual advisor relationship with a death row inmate, is based on a compilation of Pergean’s contact with Robert Willie and another death row inmate. The Forgiving the Dead Man Walking book is Morris’s compelling story about the process of healing after the atrocious crime. A few of her words seem quite relevant as possible markers for the directions that survivors might go in the course of trying to heal from the aftermath of violence.

In Debbie’s telling of her own story, she remembers her thoughts after she testified against her assailants and they were properly convicted and sentenced. She
recalls, “I was just beginning to understand a difficult truth: Justice doesn’t really heal all the wounds”(p.130). This remark seems to capture some aspect of the experience for those survivors in the study who described their current emotional state as less than satisfactory on a day-in-day out basis. The survivors who remained in a more pervasive troubling emotional state, were also ones who were more focused on punishment for the offender, the unfairness of the offender’s behavior, or the fact that the offender is better off than the deceased loved one without relying upon any of the remedial factors that appeared to support a more positive emotional state such as: a) understanding and perhaps having empathy for the offender; b) finding meaning and getting emotional distance from the offender through positive religious coping; c), forgiving the offender, or d) refusing to live in a state of negativity. The individuals who were primarily focused on fairness and justice concerns function well in many ways. Some continue to make ongoing, significant contributions to the community with their volunteer efforts. They report suffering more persistent upsetting emotional states than those who have found other ways to cope. It is as if they are turning to justice to do the healing. Even some of the volunteer work is focused on justice related activity. In the end, there is no way to arrive at a fair outcome. Nothing can ever replace what was lost. While the focus on fairness is important for a number of reasons, and having some consequences for unfair behavior is certainly a part of what makes healing possible, in these cases, justice alone does not emerge as sufficient to provide all of the necessary healing. Returning to Debbie Morris as an example, in her situation the offender was executed, so his life was taken because he murdered another. Even after the execution she says, “I think I finally realized that no punishment – not even
the ultimate punishment, the ultimate justice – could ever heal all the wounds” (Morris, 1998, p. 174).

This is not to say that those who have found other ways to cope do not experience some long term upset over the loss of the loved one. For example, in a case where the homicide occurred in the 10-15 years ago range, the participant shed tears through much of the research interview when talking about her loss, but when asked about her day-in-day out emotional state, she described herself as a 9.5 on a scale where 10 was the best possible emotional state. She does not forgive, but she also refuses to be caught up in the ongoing negativity. She does not want the offenders to take her life, too. This example also shows that the emotional distance does not seem to be from the fact that the loss occurred. The loss of the loved one is life defining and the result touches many aspects of the survivor’s day-to-day being. The survivors go on carrying the after effects of the loss and often finding new purposes in life that were not even thought about prior to the death.

How the Results of the Study Relate to Existing Research

How do the findings connect to the existing research on forgiveness, moral development, and religious coping? To respond to that question, I will first return to the Social Cognitive Developmental Model of forgiveness (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989; Girard & Mullet, 1997; Huang, 1990, Park & Enright, 1997). As a practical matter, it was difficult to apply this model for the most part because the survivors had either forgiven the offender or they had not. One Support Group Survivor imagined that maybe she could forgive after the offender spent all the
time in prison if he really looked like he was sorry. This imagined scene fits with a Compensational Style in the sense that the offender has paid for the crime by spending the time in prison. Of course, no compensation equal to the loss can ever occur in these cases. As Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) predict, this survivor continues to live with a lot of day-to-day anger. The survivors who forgave before the VOD express their thinking about forgiveness in terms that are closer to the Forgiveness as Love Style. The survivor who forgave as a result of the VOD also presented views on forgiveness that are a match for the Forgiveness as Love Style. Two of the forgivers did not believe that the offender intended to kill their loved one, and one of these survivors clearly mentioned that, like the participants in the Girard & Mullet (1997) study, this knowledge that the crime was not intentional figured into making forgiveness possible. It might have been different if the attack was premeditated. Also as Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) would predict, all of the forgiving survivors report good day-to-day emotional functioning.

Moving on to the Process Model of Forgiveness (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000), there is much to say about how this model lines up with several survivor experiences. The Work Phase is especially relevant. This is the phase where reframing takes place. This is a cognitive process that involves trying to understand the offender’s circumstances that might have contributed to his wrongdoing. Also, empathy is encouraged by asking the victim to imagine how the offender might feel. What would it feel like to be in the offender’s shoes? Recall that these authors say that compassion for the offender comes forward automatically when empathy is evoked and that the mechanism for this reaction is not really understood. It just happens. Also, what the authors call “bearing/accepting
the pain” (p.68) is the next step in the model. This means acceptance that the unfairness has happened and the damage is done in such a way that one can move beyond the negativity. It does not mean that appropriate consequences for the wrongdoing are omitted so bearing the pain would involve doing what can be done to address the unfairness and move on in the most life nourishing way possible.

All of these steps in the Process Model seemed to have already taken place with the VOD participants who had previously forgiven. They expressed an understanding about the offenders’ circumstances and they spoke of the offender in very respectful, and in some cases, openly caring language (suggesting that they had well developed perspective taking abilities). As already repeatedly mentioned, they were deeply saddened by the loss of their loved one and they believed that the offender deserved consequences for committing the offense, but negativity toward the offender or anybody else was not part of their stories. They tried to make the best of the situation. Perhaps these survivors have the more forgiving disposition that Worthington (2006) discussed.

In the situations where the survivors reported life-changing healing as a result of the VOD, both survivors entered the experience with some knowledge of the offenders’ personal circumstances that surrounded the committing of the crime. In the face-to-face encounter, the potential for an empathic distress response was heightened because of the here-and-now bias that Hoffman (2000) described. The empathic response was most likely also facilitated by the offenders’ conduct. The offenders appeared genuinely sorry and gave what appeared to be an honest account of the details surrounding the crime and took responsibility for their part in it. These are all of the pieces of the structure that
McCullough (2008) suggests for encouraging a forgiveness outcome. One survivor did have an experience that she called forgiveness. Another survivor credits the VOD with a change of heart that resulted in healing, but she does not call her new state forgiveness.

To bring the moral development thinking into the mix, it is noticeable that those survivors who forgave the offender do speak from what would fall into an ideal reciprocity cognitive stance. They were able to see other facets of the offender’s life that might have contributed to the crime and they could keep their focus on the human being along with the more salient picture of the crime that was committed. This became true for the survivors who changed their response to the offender as a result of the VOD.

The Support Group Survivors who found their faith helpful spoke in ways that indicate that they, too, could see the human being (e.g., hope that the offender betters himself in prison) and even though in one situation where the offender’s behavior was certainly monstrous, the survivor never used language that would convey disrespect for the offender. In all of these situations, positive emotional outcomes were reported.

Conversely, in the situation where the survivor was adamant about a pragmatic reciprocity stance, “an eye for an eye”, the daily emotional state was depression. Perhaps an “eye for an eye” maintains a survivor in a state of helplessness that perpetuates a negative emotional outcome because in these cases, there is really no way to replace what was lost. The survivor does not take in the concept of “bearing the pain” in such a way that the negativity can be released.

Empathy for the offender, too, can be seen in all of the survivors who forgave before the VOD. All gave indication that they could understand how the offender might
be feeling and their language conveyed a caring attitude. Many of the survivors who had a positive emotional outcome expressed empathy for someone in the situation. If they could not muster up empathy for the offender, in some cases they spoke in very empathic terms about how difficult this must be for someone in the offender’s family. For those survivors who had the significant change as a result of the in-person VOD meeting, the assumption is that the situation was right for empathy to occur and it was empathy for the offender that set the final healing steps in motion.

Perhaps empathy played a different role for a VOD survivor who ended up reminding herself and the offender that his own behavior got him into prison. This survivor was a bit taken aback by the austere, inhospitable prison environment when she went there for the VOD. When the offender told of how difficult it was to live in prison, the survivor could only focus on the fact that it was the offender’s own fault that he was living in these harsh conditions. Maybe this response was what Hoffman (2000) calls *empathic over-arousal*. The empathic distress of the observer is heightened to the degree that personal distress is created. The individual moves out of the empathic response mode altogether and in a case such as this, a self-protection response takes over. The survivor has no resources to respond to the offender in a helpful way, so she focuses on his culpability in the matter. This survivor did not have the life-changing curative results from the VOD that a few others reported. Perhaps a person who turns quickly to the reality that the offender is responsible for his own dismal circumstances is more prone to the grudge-holding type of disposition that Worthington (2006) explained as well.
Generally, the Support Group Survivors did not express empathy for the offenders in their cases, but other noteworthy elements were present for those individuals who reported day-in-day out positive emotional states. Like Pargament and his colleagues (1990, 1999) found in earlier research, these survivor participants also had positive mental health outcomes if they relied upon *spiritually-based coping activities*. As the earlier studies found, the survivors in this study did good deeds, some reported having religious support, and there was some use of benevolent religious reappraisal (Pargament, et al, 1999), meaning a religious reframing of the death to have some positive meaning. These results are also compatible the Anderson et al. (2005) research that found lower levels of grief when the bereaved mothers combined positive religious coping with task related coping. All of the Support Group Survivors who use positive religious coping were also actively engaged in volunteer work as a way of actively doing what they could about their situations. In addition, collaborative coping (Pargament, 1997, Pargament, et al., 1999) was observed among these participants meaning that the individual believes in working collaboratively with a supportive God to move toward solving problems. Also as earlier research found (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, and Perez, 1998), those participants who turned to negative religious coping such as leaving one’s religious community or attributing the wrongdoing to demonic forces did report more troubling emotions on a day-to-day basis.

The VOD survivors who forgave before the VOD were the only survivors among those participants who were vocal about relying on religious coping and their religious coping was positive. Unlike the participants in the McCullough and Worthington (1999)
study, these survivors learned about forgiveness in their Christian faith and they were able to act on those teachings in this terrible situation. Good deeds, religious support, and using religious avoidance practices such as turning to prayer at the most difficult times were the methods that were mentioned. One survivor felt strongly that God allowed the death to occur, but like the participants in Pargament’s (1990) research, she essentially attributed the death to God’s will and she reported positive day-to-day emotional functioning. These forgiving participants may have turned to God to forgive as the Christians in Krumrei’s (2008) study of recently divorcing adults did, but they did not explain their forgiveness process in those terms. There was turning to God related to the death in general. One person did say that she prayed right away for forgiveness as McMinn and colleagues (2008) found in their study of the role of prayer in forgiveness.

There was one more element that seemed to be operating for some survivors who ended up in a more positive day-to-day emotional state. This was usually put in some language indicating that the survivor refused to be negative and was also stated in terms of not allowing the offender to take the survivors life, too. This element appeared in one situation where none of the other helpful elements such as understanding the offender, empathy for the offender, forgiveness, or religious coping could be observed. Here Worthington’s (2006) ideas about emotional replacement seem most relevant. In Worthington’s (2006) REACH forgiveness model, the E component asks the victim of an offense to work toward replacing negative emotions in response to thoughts about the offender with positive emotions such as empathy, sympathy, or compassion for the offender. Some of the survivors who did not forgive, but also were quite determined to
survive and thrive themselves, seemed to use this emotional replacement approach but the positive emotions were not directed at the offender. The positive emotion replacement seemed to be more about life in general. For example, one person remembered that she was taught to put on a happy face when going out in public. This practice of putting on a happy face even though she was devastated eventually proved to help her actually move toward being happy again. In another instance where there was a refusal to be negative, the focus turned to making sure something worthwhile resulted from the loss of the loved one. The determination not to be negative seems to automatically keep the survivor from getting perpetually immersed in anger, hatred, and bitterness directed at the offender. Those emotions are replaced with the more positive, life supporting attempts to be happy or to search for what is positive in the aftermath of the violence. This decision to focus on the positive emotions probably contributes to the restoration process that Stroebe and Shut (2001) find helpful for moving through grief constructively. While Worthington’s (2006) notion of “accepting and letting go” is put out as a lesser endpoint than forgiveness, a stance that is closer to accepting and letting go of an intense negative emotional involvement directed at the criminal and his unfairness seemed to result in a quite acceptable emotional outcome for the survivors in this study.

Given that VOD has this great potential to be helpful to survivors, the question that Armour and Umbreit (2005) raised about who chooses to participate in VOD is worth considering. The results show that in Ohio there could be some regional differences that explains who participates in VOD although the numbers do not vary
widely across the regions in the state. The range is from two complete homicide VODs in the Lima Region, the region that typically has the fewest offenders committed to ODRC facilities annually for all crimes, to six completed homicide VOD’s from the Cleveland Region, the region that has the most offenders committed to ODRC for all crimes (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, n.d.). Beyond that, the survivors in this study showed quite a bit of variation in age, educational level, and spiritual orientation. No one under 30 years old was represented in this group of participants.

The fact that some of the Support Group survivors were considering VOD indicates that, at least the concept has some appeal for those who might be more drawn to a support group. Seven of the eight survivors who completed the VOD did not participate in homicide related support groups at the time of the interview or in the past. Half of the VOD survivors had already forgiven or were in the process of forgiving before the VOD took place. While that is not a definitive answer to the question about whether more forgiving survivors tend to seek VOD, it does show examples of survivors who forgave before participating in VOD and have good long-term emotional outcomes relating to the loss of the loved one. What stands out about the survivors who followed through with the VOD is their own internal drive to do so. They were often discouraged from meeting with the offender, but their own sense of the importance of going forward with the meeting was so strong that they were able to prevail in spite of obstacles in their environments. None of the VOD survivors expressed regret about going through this process. All would recommend it for others who have appropriate VOD goals.
Language and Culture

Bearing in mind that dialogic/performance incorporates analysis of the contexts that surround the stories (Reissman, 2008), and remembering Gergen’s (2009) social constructionist view that we make sense of the world by way of discourse that develops out of social relationships, the contexts and language perspectives on the data are important for consideration. Of course, the word “forgiveness” stands out as having very different meanings and therefore different consequences for the survivors depending on where they are located. Debbie Morris (1998), the survivor of Robert Willie’s attacks points out possible differences in the conceptualization of forgiveness based on her own experience as she states:

Much, if not most, of the time our reluctance to forgive is based on the false assumption that forgiving means giving in or giving up something valuable. We think it might mean granting the other person some reward he or she doesn’t deserve. Or completely discounting the wrong that was committed - as if it never happened.

But that’s not how forgiveness works. By forgiving Robert Willie, I in no way absolved him of his responsibility for what he did to me, . . . or to anyone else. He has to answer for that. And he did. . . . So forgiveness isn’t giving him anything he doesn’t deserve. He gains nothing from it.

However, the refusal to forgive him always meant that I held on to all my Robert Willie-related stuff – my pain, my shame, my self-pity. That’s what I gave up in
forgiving him. And it wasn’t until I did, that the healing really could even begin. I was the one who gained. (pp. 249-50)

It is interesting to notice that several of the Support Group survivors who are located in a particular region in the state subscribe to the belief that forgiveness does in some way mean minimizing the unfairness that was done. Some are able to release some of the negative emotions attached to the offender. This is helpful, but it is not called forgiveness. Among Support Group survivors who have some belief in forgiveness, there is a strong theme that they must turn this decision about forgiveness over to God. This is God’s decision, not theirs. This way of understanding forgiveness stands in sharp contrast to the forgiving VOD participants. Those who had completed VOD were much more in agreement with Debbie Morris’s point that forgiving does not absolve the offender from the wrongdoing or the resulting consequences. It does, however, free the forgiver for healing.

Another matter that stood out in many of the stories is the effort that both survivor and offender make to communicate with each other. As Zehr (2002) explained, the driving force of the traditional criminal justice system is to establish guilt and punish the offender. This convict and punish orientation to offenders is the dominant, and often necessary response to crime in our country. The VOD participants were essentially moving in a direction that was not in keeping with the dominant view, and they were often questioned or they lacked support for their efforts to go with the restorative approach of working on the relationship with the offender. They had to be strong about following their own desires in order to follow through with the VOD meeting.
Interestingly, working on the relationship proved to meet Gergen’s (2009) standard of nourishing life often for the survivor and reports suggest that the offenders benefit as well.

The letter writing, too, suggests that there may be some undercurrent of a desire on the part of some offenders and some survivors to work on the relationship. This desire is reflected in letter communication that might not always meet with the approval or support of the authorities in the criminal justice system. Interestingly, ODRC does have a structure in place for the offender to write a letter of apology to the victim of the crime. The letter is held at ODRC-OVS and the victim/survivors can notify OVS if they are open to receiving a letter (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction 2011b). While this ODRC-OVS Apology Letter brochure indicates that offenders are discouraged from sending letters directly to survivors, some survivors reported that they received letters directly from the offender anyway. When the survivor, offender, and criminal justice authorities agree that the letter correspondence will take place, the letters can be a beneficial part of the healing process. Again, in Gergen’s terms, the civil exchange of letters can nourish life. This suggests that those who work closely with survivors and offenders might be aware of opportunities to perhaps structure and sanction more direct ways for letter exchanges in situations where this is agreeable to all involved parties.

**Implications for Social Work Practice**

In dialogic/performance analysis, it is assumed that the participants are directing comments to a particular audience (Reissman, 2008). Participants were told that the audience would be professionals who might be in the position of offering help to other
survivors. Of course, a very strong message that permeates everything the survivors tell is that the loss will be a never-ending aspect of their lives. From my own helping professional perspective, there are other lessons that can be taken from these powerful stories.

The participants in this study shared a variety of narratives that delineate a path toward healing. Since the data were gathered in the form of stories, the results provide rich resources for a narrative therapy approach. According to Paquin (2009), narrative therapy is based on a social constructionist underpinning which takes the position that society defines what is problematic and, in turn, may prescribe a limited number of options for responding appropriately to the problem. Narrative therapy is devoted to helping clients develop their own unique narratives with the aim of arriving at optimal outcomes (Paquin, 2009). While there is no question that homicide is a problem, these participants have shown that there can be a number of stories that support acceptable emotional outcomes even in these terrible circumstances. These stories can be used as examples to examine as the social worker and survivor collaborate to construct a meaningful narrative about the loss. These survivor examples may be especially useful if the social worker has not had the first hand experience of losing a loved one to homicide. The survivors that participated in this research do understand what it is like to loved one to violence.

On another subject, the VOD literature may address the fact that some victims want to speak to the offender (Borton, 2008; Umbreit et al., 2003, Umbreit & Armour, 2010), but the strength of the drive to carry out the mission of meeting with the offender
despite discouraging words on the part of others is not clearly noted. Hopefully helping professionals can recognize and honor survivors’ strong wishes to speak to an offender even though restorative justice practices may fall outside of mainstream justice thinking. Since existing research indicates that victims have high levels of satisfaction with restorative justice procedures (e.g., Umbreit, Coates, & Vos, 2006; Umbreit & Armour, 2010) and VOD can afford a unique opportunity for the survivor to participate in a healing process (Umbreit & Armour, 2010), supporting survivors in their efforts to meet with offenders is compatible with the social workers duty to help clients make connections with useful resources.

Similarly, helping professionals may examine their own beliefs about forgiveness. Since forgiveness does appear to be quite helpful to survivors, the helper can certainly offer to work with survivor toward that goal. Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) emphasize that the helper offers this option, but the client decides whether or not to pursue forgiveness. Czillinger, too, emphasized that helpers should not force a forgiveness intervention on the client. This is always a matter for the client to decide. The experiences or naturally occurring forgiveness reported in this research support the path that the Process Model of Forgiveness encourages (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Freedman, Enright, & Knudson, 2005). Emphasis on both the cognitive functions of understanding the offender’s circumstances and the affective component of cultivating empathy for the offender appear to be important in the process.

Helpers are cautioned to notice that the same conditions that promote forgiveness can emerge in situations that present a danger to the victim. For example, in Walker’s
(2000) *Cycle Theory of Violence*, a typical potential battering episode starts with tension that is created when a male batterer complains in a hostile manner about the woman in the relationship. The woman responds by trying to do everything she can to please the batterer, but eventually she may become exhausted and efforts to pacify the batterer fail. The tension builds to a point where the batterer bursts into an explosion of verbal and physical aggression, which leaves the woman emotionally distressed and physically injured. The outburst relieves the tension for the moment and Walker reports that in her research there was what she calls “loving contrition” in 69% of the first battering episodes (p. 128). According to Walker, in this loving contrition stage, “the batterer may apologize profusely, try to assist his victim, show kindness and remorse, and shower her with gifts and/or promises.” (p. 127). The batterer may be genuine in his own belief that he will never batter again. This scenario with the apology, remorse, and kindness is the perfect set-up for an empathic and perhaps forgiving response on the part of the victim. Available evidence shows that this type of violence typically escalates in seriousness over time. Walker (2000) recommends that professional helpers who work with violent offenders or abused women should have solid training and available consultation because of the dangers that surround these complicated situations. It is pointed out here to emphasize that safety must always be a consideration and, as those VOD survivors understood, empathy for an offender or forgiveness does not mean that one should overlook the dangerous behavior of the offender.
Areas for Further Research

Further research is needed to understand if some components of the Process Model of Forgiveness might be used for those individuals who make the decision that they do not want to forgive. Given the experience of those who went into VOD with a lot of anger and came out with an emotional state that was moving toward healing, perhaps some survivors who say they do not want to forgive might still be open to working on the reframing, empathy, and bearing the pain components of the model. Perhaps a model could include the Uncovering Phase where the ramifications of the unfairness are explored. If in the Decision Phase, the client says no to forgiveness, an alternate intervention could be offered. The reframing, empathy, and bearing the pain portion of the model could be implemented in this alternative to forgiveness track. The intervention would have to contain a clear statement that the attention to understanding more about the offender is not in any way an attempt to excuse the unfair behavior. This step would be taken with the clear recognition that the offender’s behavior was wrong and unacceptable. For example, if an offender is clearly diagnosed as a psychopath, it might be helpful for the survivor to be aware of the research indicating that genetic factors and anomalies in brain functioning are linked to the psychopathic behaviors (Hare, 2007). The greater understanding might assist the survivor move toward acceptance and letting go in a way that is more tolerable than the idea of forgiveness.

Even with this more clinical understanding, other questions remain unanswered for the survivors. For example, in the case of a psychopath with limitations in brain functioning, the survivor may still need to struggle with some explanation about why this
impaired individual came across the path of the murdered loved one. Some of the units of the Deepening Phase of the Process Model of Forgiveness such as Finding Meaning and Realizing a New Purpose (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, pp. 85 & 87), would be an important consideration for any survivor regardless of whether forgiveness was part of their response or not. For some, the understanding of meaning and purpose can be part of a spiritual worldview. Support for helpful religious coping (Pargament, 2011) and enhancing resilience (Pargament & Cummings, 2010) can be brought to this aspect of the helping discussion for those survivors who value connections to religious or spiritual perspectives (Pargament, 2007).

Future research could also focus more specifically on the course of the post traumatic stress symptoms when forgiveness or some form of emotional letting go occurs. The existing research shows that victims of crime have a greater risk of developing post traumatic stress disorder (Green & Roberts, 2008), and some research indicates that restorative justice procedures has a beneficial impact on the traumatic effects of the crime (Angel, 2005). It would be especially helpful to document the outcomes of those individuals who had post traumatic stress symptoms and then experienced some spontaneous either forgiveness or letting go of the negative emotions due to a VOD where the offender evoked empathy by showing genuine remorse and by taking responsibility for the harm that was done.

For the survivors in this study, the capacity to refuse emotional negativity appeared to be a key factor for a good emotional outcome. Much is written about the benefits of positive psychology (e.g., Seligman, 2011; Seligman, 1991). Attention to the
specific mechanism that helps a survivor move out of negativity while at the same time working on the grief could be helpful for future intervention models. It appears that to some degree, the survivors used the emotional replacement to arrive at a more satisfactory emotional state. Worthington (2006) recommended emotional replacement for replacing negative emotions with forgiving emotions. Perhaps the same process can apply to negative emotions in general and thus facilitate that movement toward the restoration side of the grief process that Stroebe and Schut (2001) discuss. For example, Algoe and Fredrickson’s (2011; Seligman, 2011) approach to encouraging the development of emotional fitness provides some guidance for helping to tip the balance of emotions toward the more positive while recognizing that some negative emotions are also necessary for satisfactory life functioning. Also, the research that outlines the factors and processes that result in posttraumatic growth provides additional ways of thinking about how to help survivors support life enhancing personal development following the trauma (Joseph & Linley, 2006; Seligman, 2011; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Tedeschi & McNally, 2011).

A few other thoughts about future research are related to the unexpected findings in the research. Two patterns were noticed that deserve additional attention. First, it was surprising to see the difference in the amount of crime-related volunteer work between those who did forgive and those who did not. The circumstances of the forgiving survivors may have been the most important factor in the lack of involvement (or at least they did not mention involvement) in volunteer work. Future research might focus more
carefully on this detail of whether there is any link between forgiveness and the decision to do or not do crime related volunteering.

The other pattern worth noting was the difference in the time frames for the apprehension and incarceration of the offenders involved in the VOD participants cases as compared to offenders in the Support Group participant cases. Perhaps the fact that overall the offenders in VOD cases were caught and charged in a much shorter time than the Support Group offenders is a fluke pattern in this small number of survivors. Even so, this detail would be interesting to notice in future research about those who choose and do not choose VOD.

Also, the issue of letters is quite intriguing. ODRC has at least one formal mechanism in place for offenders to leave a letter of apology for victims if the victim wished to receive such a letter. It would be interesting to have a study where letters could be exchanged with some supervision in cases where both victim and offender want to participate in a limited, civil letter correspondence to determine if this, too, could be beneficial for both the victim and offender. If successful, letter exchanges might be another way to implement a restorative justice procedure.

Finally, some of the ODRC Office of Victim Services procedures could be analyzed in a formal way to add understanding of the VOD process. Two main areas stand out for more detailed attention. First, half of the survivors in this study came to the dialogue experience already thinking about forgiveness. It would be interesting to make some note about the survivor’s views on forgiveness in the initial VOD planning meeting and then the survivor could be asked if the views changed at follow-up. Outcomes for
those who had already forgiven could be compared to those who forgave as a result of the process and those who did not forgive at all. Results might shed light on the paths to VOD that are most likely to have a productive outcome. This information might also add a dimension to calculating the best timing for the VOD meeting. Some survivors were frustrated about the length of time involved in the process. Perhaps optimal timing might be different for those who were already settled on forgiveness as compared to others who had not decided on the matter of forgiveness. While it is certainly understandable that every precaution would be taken before agreeing to go forward with the VOD meeting, it is interesting to notice that the survivors in this study did not mention the back and forth process as the pivotal points for the changes that occurred for them. The in-person meeting is what they remembered in their narratives. In Umbreit (2006) and colleagues’ review available research on victim offender mediation, they note that victims are more satisfied with in-person mediations as compared to mediations that take place by way of a go-between communicator. This raises a question about whether facilitators see this back and forth preparation process as more meaningful than the survivors do. Research could be devoted to understanding more details about the survivor’s experience of the preparation and how that might figure into the most advantageous timing of the back and forth preparation process and the eventual in-person meeting.

**Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

The strengths of the study are the participants were quite cooperative, shared detailed information, and all were available at follow-up. Triangulation of the experiences the VOD participants reported took place by means of interviewing VOD
facilitators and reviewing VOD records. Ken Czillinger’s interview also provided another source of information about the general grief experience for survivors. The participants provided fine points and details about the process survivors experience in the aftermath of violence. Since many of the participants function so well, their stories give good information about possible paths to healing after the violence occurs.

With regard to limitations, the study was conducted with a relatively small number of self-selected participants from a limited geographical area. The VOD participants and facilitators were from various regions in Ohio, but the Support Group Survivors were limited to Southwest, Ohio only. Survivors in the VOD group were from different regions than the Support Group survivors. The survivors were recruited by somewhat different means. The VOD participants only had a letter from me that was sent out from ODRC. I also used a flyer for the Support Group survivors, but some of the Support Group survivors may have seen me in person at a support group meeting before agreeing to call me about the study. Perhaps their agreement to participate was influenced by the here-and-now bias (Hoffman, 2000) of seeing me in person. Certainly support group members in other parts of the state who did not see me in person did not come forward to participate.

Also, generally, the survivors who agreed to participate, both the VOD and the Support Group survivors, may be the ones who function in the most optimal way. Part of participating in the study is a way to give positive meaning to the loss of their loved one and these survivors, in many instances, are quite adept at looking for ways to give valuable meaning to the loss. Czillinger pointed out that some survivors essentially lose
their lives when their loved one is a homicide victim and some never find a way back to a worthwhile life after the loss. The despairing survivors may not have the energy to participate in a study such as this. So this study was limited to a small number of participants who in many ways are exemplars of how to move forward in a healing process after the loss. Their experiences are not necessarily representative of survivor experiences in general.

After Death Communications and the End

As mentioned earlier, the question about the After Death Communications (ADC) seemed sort of tacked on to the interview with most of the participants. It was my question, and not necessarily something that most survivors would have thought to tell me. Most were, however, conversant with the topic. In my interview with Ken Czillinger, I asked if he could speak about his experience related to ADC and survivors. Here is what he said.

Well here again, I think that listening to their (the survivors’) experience is important, and I think that there are a variety of ways in which people can experience their loved one’s presence in things like dreams or different signs – people will pray for a sign, you know. So I would be very open to that experience.

One caution would be though, you can’t guarantee it, and so on the one hand people can experience great joy, other people are frustrated.

So those who believe in ADC and do not have contact with deceased loved ones can wonder why they did not have any sort of communication with the deceased. What does
that lack of contact mean? Czillinger recommends that helpers can affirm that experience so those who believe get the message that the experience can be trusted. The participants in this study demonstrate that survivors know about and, in some instances, have first hand, significant occurrences of what they experience as an ADC. Hopefully it will be useful for helpers to know that an ADC might be a relevant part of the survivor’s experience and conversation.

That being said, I will turn to an ADC story to bring this writing to a conclusion. One day when I was meeting with a survivor for this research, a mighty storm blew up and there were periods of darkness, wind, and rain and at times there was sunshine and calm as the interview progressed. When we got to the question about ADC’s, this particular survivor, who did believe in the presence of her lost loved one, had many interesting things to say on the ADC topic. She mentioned that at times when she was feeling most dejected, she would see a sign of some sort and she would think that her lost loved one was trying to console her. A rainbow was one of those signs that brought her hope on an occasion when she was close to despair.

After leaving that interview, I saw the most magnificent rainbow. I wondered if the survivor saw it, too. Then an internal dialogue ensued. I asked myself, “How should I take the experience of seeing the rainbow at this moment when, truthfully, I am wondering if it’s actually possible to complete this research? Should I take it as an encouragement for the survivor possibly from some other realm? If the survivor was getting encouragement, would that mean that I should feel encouraged to continue, or would that be way too egotistical of me to believe that there was support from another
dimension for my efforts? C.G. Jung (Greeley, 1976) did not want to rudely ignore some significant communication, and I surely would not want to do that either. The participants in Dever’s (1994) study questioned whether they could believe that something spiritual might be happening and wondered if what they were experiencing was just a strong psychological wish. Am I engaged in wishful thinking here?

Whatever the case may be, the memory of the rainbow remained with me throughout the rest of the time spent on conducting and writing about this research. If the rainbow was a sign of support from a loved one from another dimension, the hope is that this writing will be worthy of that support and the effort will shed some light on concepts and practices that will help survivors and add to possible ways of nourishing life for all concerned. If the rainbow was simply a coincidence that happened at a time when I needed a bit of a psychological boost, the wish for the endeavors here remains the same—that something in this research will be helpful to survivors and will add to understandings of ways to nourish life for all concerned.
Appendix A

Interview Questions
Interview Questions for the Survivors Who Did Not Pursue VOD

The plan was to make the interview as conversational as possible. What follows is an outline of the types of questions I planned to ask. The order of the questions depended on how the conversation unfolded. The interview started with a basic explanation such as:

I am interested in knowing what happened to your loved one and what helped you to carry on after the loss. As you know from my flyer I’m interested in thoughts about forgiveness and any kind of spiritual life that might have come into play here in this experience. So overall I’m telling you all this at once so you can just tell me your story and then I’ll go back and remind you if there’s something that I want to know that I didn’t hear. So that’s basically it. I was just hoping you would tell me your story.

Other questions that were covered were:

What helped you to carry on?

- Were there any services that helped (e.g., therapy, a victim advocate)?
- Any support group affiliations?

I have been told that many people who have lost a loved one to violence have strong feelings about the word forgiveness. What do you think the word forgiveness means?

What do you think about forgiveness in connection with (the offender in the case)?

- Depending on the response, follow up questions might ask if the victim could imagine ever forgiving the offender.
- If the person is working on forgiveness, the questions would be directed at learning more about the details of that process.
- If the person has forgiven, more about how that came about will be explored.
- In this discussion about forgiveness, a question will be directed at perceptions of the offender and how the offender should be treated as a result of committing the terrible act.
- What influenced the views about forgiveness?
• Were there religious or spiritual teachings that influence your views of forgiveness?
• Have the views about forgiveness shifted over time?
• How has the stance of forgiving or not forgiving relate to where you are in the process of healing?

This may seem like an odd question, but I learned at the Parents of Murdered Children conference that some people report either having a sense of presence of the deceased loved one or receiving some type of communication from the deceased. Have you or anyone close to you had such an experience?
  • If so, I will ask – Can you tell me about it?
  • Also, if so, I will ask if the experience impacted life decisions.
  • Did having such an experience impact the healing process in any way?

To return to the subject of services, are you aware of some of the services offered by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) Office of Victim Services?
  • If so, how did you find out about the services?
  • What services do you know about?
  • Have you used any of the services?

I say that the ODRC Office of Victim Services offers Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD) and explain what that is. The question will then be, can you imagine yourself ever asking to speak to the offender?
  • If yes – say more about what would be good or maybe helpful about going through VOD.
  • If no – can you say more about why you would not want to pursue a dialogue with the offender?
Interview Questions for the Survivors Who Completed VOD

The plan was to make the interview as conversational as possible. What follows is an outline of the types of questions I planned to ask. The order of the questions depended on how the conversation unfolded. The interview started with a basic explanation such as:

I am interested in knowing what happened to your loved one and what helped you to carry on after the loss. Of course I am interested in how you got to Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD). As you know from my flyer I’m interested in thoughts about forgiveness and any kind of spiritual life that might have come into play here in this experience. So overall I’m telling you all this at once so you can just tell me your story and then I’ll go back and remind you if there’s something that I want to know that I didn’t hear. So that’s basically it. I was just hoping you would tell me your story.

Other questions that were covered were:

What helped you to carry on?

- Were there any services that helped (e.g., therapy, a victim advocate)?
- Any support group affiliations?

How did you hear about the ODRC VOD Program?

What made it possible for you to pick up the phone to request the VOD?

What helped you to follow through with the intention to pursue the VOD?
I have been told that many people who have lost a loved one to violence have strong feelings about the word forgiveness. What do you think the word forgiveness means?

Do you recall what you thought about forgiveness in connection with (the offender in the case) before you had your dialogue session?

Did the thinking about forgiveness change at all as a result of the session?

Do you recall what happened in the dialogue that made you feel (whatever the experience was, e.g., more forgiving, less angry, less forgiving)?

- Here I will want to learn more about the recall of the VOD session. For example, did the offender seem remorseful? Did the offender apologize?
- Depending on the response, follow up questions might ask if the victim could imagine ever forgiving the offender.
- If the person is working on forgiveness, the questions would be directed at learning more about the details of that process.
- If the person has forgiven, more about how that came about will be explored.
- In this discussion about forgiveness, a question will be directed at perceptions of the offender and how the offender should be treated as a result of committing the terrible act.
- What influenced the views about forgiveness?
- Were there religious or spiritual teachings that influence your views of forgiveness?
- Have the views about forgiveness shifted over time?
- How has the stance of forgiving or not forgiving relate to where you are in the process of healing?

This may seem like an odd question, but I learned at the Parents of Murdered Children Conference that some people report either having a sense of presence of the deceased loved one or receiving some type of communication from the deceased. Have you or anyone close to you had such an experience?

- If so, I will ask – Can you tell me about it?
• Also, if so, I will ask if the experience impacted life decisions including the decision to pursue VOD.
• Did having such an experience impact the healing process in any way?

**Interview Questions for VOD Facilitators**

The plan was to make the interview as conversational as possible. What follows is an outline of the types of questions I planned to ask. The order of the questions depended on how the conversation unfolded.

I am interested in anything you can tell me about how loved ones of homicide victims get to VOD. How do they know about VOD and what makes it possible for them to carry out their intention to pursue dialogue?

- Was dialogue considered after other service options were tried?
- What other services seemed to support victims in their efforts to pursue dialogue?

I have been told that many people who have lost a loved one to violence have strong feelings about the word forgiveness. Without revealing identifying information, can you tell me about cases where forgiveness issue surfaced? What happened?

- Clarification questions related to the timing of forgiveness would come in here.
- Did the thinking about forgiveness change at all as a result of the session?
- Do you recall what happened in the dialogue that might have made the victim feel (whatever the experience was, e.g., more forgiving, less angry, less forgiving)?
- Here I will want to learn more about the recall of the relevant VOD session. For example, did the offender seem remorseful? Did the offender apologize?
- Were there religious or spiritual teachings that influence the victim’s views on forgiveness?

What have you notice about how the VOD might be helpful or perhaps not helpful to the victims?
Interview Questions for Ken Czillinger

The plan is to make the interview as conversational as possible. What follows is an outline of the types of questions I planned to ask. The order of the questions depended on how the conversation unfolded.

I am interested in knowing what helps people carry on after a loved one has been lost due to homicide. Based on your experience, what have you noticed about what people go through as a result of the loss?

What is helpful to them?

Are there specific services that many people find helpful?

I have been told that many people who have lost a loved one to violence have strong feelings about the word forgiveness. What do you notice about the process of forgiving or not forgiving the offender in cases where the loved one was lost to violence?

Different possible forgiveness scenarios will be explored here.

Some people report either having a sense of presence of the deceased loved one or receiving some type of communication from the deceased. Do the people you work with tell you about these kinds of experiences?

- If so, I will ask – Can you tell me what you know about the experiences?
- Also, if so, I will ask if the experience impacted life decisions.
- Did having such an experience impact the healing process in any way?
To return to the subject of services, do you know about the services offered by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) Office of Victim Services?

- If so, how did you find out about the services?
- What services do you know about?
- Do bereaved individuals you know use the services?

I will say that the ODRC Office of Victim Services offers Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD) and explain what that is. The question will then be, do you know victims who have chosen to use this service?

- If yes – say more about what the victims report about going through VOD.
- If no – what do you think about the idea of victims having dialogues with the offender?
Appendix B

Codes and Coding Process
Codes: Level I

The following codes are from the first round of coding all interview texts. General codes were assigned in the first round.

Key to Codes:

ADC: After Death Communication
F: Facilitator
O: Offender
P: Participant
S: Survivor
V: Victim
VOD: Victim Offender Dialogue

Abstract
ADC
ADC – Coincidences
ADC - Demons can possess loved ones
ADC - Do not believe in mediums
ADC - Do not believe in that
ADC - Don't tell cause of what others might think
ADC - Dreamed of Deceased
ADC - Dreams - wishes for dream
ADC - Feels deceased’s support
ADC - Knows about the phenomenon
ADC - Light Observed
ADC - Never sensed presence
ADC – Not Just Coincidence
ADC - No Dreams of Deceased
ADC - Odd Occurrence
ADC - Others reporting Communications
ADC - Senses the Presence of V
ADC - Symbol ADC
ADC - V still around
Church - does not support the bereaved
Clergy Explanation
Closure
Coda
Complicating Action
Death - What is correct word?
Detective Helpful
Dreams - Tell S to talk to O
Emotional Distance from Offender
Emotional Distance from Offender - Cannot Achieve
Emotions - Emotional Reaction to Crime
Evaluation
Forgiveness - Blank - No thoughts
Forgiveness - Cannot Forgive
Forgiveness - cannot impose on an S
Forgiveness - Believes it's right, but cannot do it
Forgiveness – Betrayal
Forgiveness - Definition Important
Forgiveness - Like an instinct
Forgiveness - Not a good word
Forgiveness - not necessary to get on with life
Forgiveness - Others do not understand forgiving O
Forgiveness - S's Definition
Forgiveness - Still hold offender accountable
Forgiveness - The Right Thing to Do
Forgiveness - Is for Healing Self/ Changing One's Own Life
Forgiveness - O Asked for Forgiveness
Forgiveness - O's Behavior Unforgivable
Letter - O tells S she should forgive
God - Angry with God
Guilt - Others Say Don't Feel Guilty
Guilt - P Feels Guilt about Not Protecting V
Healing
Injury Inflicted on Victim
Justice - Advocated for Death Penalty in all Murders
Justice - Decision
Justice - an eye for an eye
Justice - Community Failure led to Crime
Justice - God will judge
Justice - Not individualized
Justice - Prosecutor did not understand forgiving attitude
Justice - S can be victim of justice system
Justice - System Not Helpful
Justice - Unfair to Some Offenders
Justice - Unfairness
Justice - Unfairness in Sentencing for Different Crimes
Justice for Offender
Law Enforcement-Change in Policy
Letter - O apologizes in letter to S
Letter - O writes to S
Letter Policy on Letters

310
Letter - S writes to O
Letter - Sorry she did not answer O's letter
Mental Health Help Needed
Mental Health Help Received
Murdered - use murdered - not loss
Offender - Apology - no Apology in Court
Offender - Contact with offender's relatives
Offender - difficult prison life is what offender deserved
Offender - Does Not Think of Harm to Others
Offender - First Impression
Offender - How P Sees Offender
Offender - Need to Keep in Prison
Offender - Offender's Story of Crime
Offender - P does not believe the offender's story of crime
Offender - Sentence
Offender - Taxpayers support
Offender - What P believes will happen to offender
Offender - What Will He Be Like After Prison
Orientation
P - Just the type of person I am
Parole Opposed by Survivor
Parole Process Stressful for S
Parole – Survivor Family Opposed Parole
Parole - Survivor's Family Opposed to Parole
Parole – Survivor Family Supported Early Release
Parole Watch Life Long & Children Inherit
Parole - Survivor will not oppose
Parole - wants O to be in prison so he cannot hurt others
Place of Murder
Police – Can’t Always Share Info
Police - Angry with Police
Police - Helpful
Psychic Consulted
Reactions of others affected by the loss
Recovery
Resolution
Spiritual - Devil Explanation
Spiritual - is linked with forgiveness
Spiritual - spiritual meaning for death
Spiritual - Not Spiritual
Spiritual - Pastor Supports
Spiritual - Source of Support
Spiritual - Strong Spiritual Life
Spiritual – Unconditional Acceptance of Others
Spiritual - Victim's Spirit Lives On
Support Groups have different cultures
Survivor - Acceptance
Survivor – Anger
Survivor – Contact with O’s family
Survivor - Contributions/Growth in Aftermath
Survivor - Death Penalty Opposed
Survivor - Deceased would want survivor to be happy
Survivor – Difficulty Getting Information
Survivor - Divorce
Survivor - Does not believe O's story of crime
Survivor - Does not dwell on anger
Survivor - Does not hold onto negative feelings
Survivor - Donated V's Organs
Survivor - DV for V discovered after death
Survivor - DV Victim
Survivor - Education Level
Survivor - Emotional Adjustment Present Day
Survivor - Empathy for Offender
Survivor - Empathy for Offender's Family
Survivor - Expresses Concern for O's Well Being in Prison
Survivor - Fears Police Won't Help - V's Hx
Survivor – Survivor Family Opposed Parole
Survivor - Forgives
Survivor - Forgives before VOD
Survivor - Generous
Survivor – Helped Survivor
Survivor - Honoring Death by Helping Offender
Survivor - Hopes O dies in prison
Survivor - Knows about services
Survivor - Knows Offender's Whereabouts
Survivor - Learns Truth Eventually
Survivor - Life Long Experience
Survivor - Long term adjustment
Survivor - Maintained Contact with O after VOD
Survivor – Managed without help
Survivor - Meaning after the death
Survivor – Media Involved
Survivor – Misses Loved One
Survivor - Misses Loved One Every Day
Survivor - need to talk to O
Survivor - New Normal
Survivor - No One Asks for Input
Survivor - Not eligible for V comp cause V had record
Survivor - Not Guilty
Survivor - Not Helpful
Survivor - O - hopes O gets help in prison
Survivor - Offender's Return to Community/Concern
Survivor - O's return to community - hope he's rehab
Survivor - Others Do Not Understand
Survivor – Others Reacted Differently than P
Survivor - Pain never ends
Survivor - Pain never ends, but it's not constant
Survivor - Premonition of death
Survivor - Realistic about V's Criminal Behavior
Survivor - Recommendations for Change
Survivor - Remembers difficult times
Survivor - Remembers good times
Survivor - Revenge Wanted
Survivor - Seeking Ongoing Visitation of O
Survivor - Sees other offenders & likes them
Survivor - Spiritual
Survivor - Testifying Difficult
Survivor - The Lord will judge, not her
Survivor - Trying to Not Feel Guilty
Survivor - Thoughts about how crime committed
Survivor - Thoughts about why crime committed
Survivor - Unfairness Focus
Survivor - Upset returns with reminders
Survivor - Victim Awareness - Has not done
Survivor - Victimized by Court Process
Survivor - Victimized cause O had all the rights
Survivor - Volunteer - Advocacy
Survivor - Volunteers related to crime
Survivor - Volunteers to help other prisoners
Survivor - View of Death Penalty
Survivor - Wants O to remain in prison
Survivor - Wants to visit O
Survivor - What could I have done?
Survivor - Why - Asks God
Survivor - "why" - may never know
Survivor – Why – Do not ? God
Survivor - will never know why
Survivor - Wishes O would die in prison
Survivor - Would help offender after release
Time of Interview
VOD - Assessment
VOD - Burning Desire to talk to O
VOD - Survivor has empathy for offender
VOD - Offender Story of Crime Truthful
VOD - Cured PTSD
VOD - Emotion during
VOD - Forgiveness - O asks for Forgiveness
VOD - Forgiveness Spontaneous after VOD
VOD - Forgiveness talk - P won't forgive
VOD - How she learned about it
VOD – Length
VOD – O did not own crime, but P expected that
VOD - offender helped by VOD
VOD – O mannerly & forthright
VOD - O Shows No Remorse
VOD - offender during dialogue focuses on harm he caused
VOD - Offender during dialogue focuses on self-concerns
VOD - Offender Story of Crime Dishonest
VOD - Offender follows through with agreement
VOD - Others Reactions to Decision to do VOD
VOD - P allowed to write to O one time
VOD - P felt O made extra effort to be honest
VOD - P not prepared for first moments and days after
VOD - P & O plan future contact
VOD - P plans contact to help rehab
VOD - Prep Time Too Long
VOD - Reason for Seeking
VOD - Reason for Timing
VOD – S knows about VOD
VOD - Spiritual Experience
VOD - Survivor does not know about it
VOD - Survivor Keeps Contact with Offender
VOD Initial Moments
VOD - Not the norm
VOD - O refuses VOD
VOD Offender's Process of Preparing
VOD Offender Apologizes
VOD Offender during dialogue focuses on self-concerns
VOD Outcome - P will not oppose parole
VOD P does not accept apology
VOD P process of preparing
VOD - Plans
VOD P tells offender it's his own fault that he's in prison
VOD Preparation O agrees to tell truth
VOD Preparation P wants truth
VOD – S knows about it
VOD - S's Process of Considering
VOD - S would not do it
VOD - S would not want to do it - reason
VOD - Would Recommend for Others
Volunteered to Help Other Victims of Crime
Weapon used

Facilitator Codes

F Forgiveness comes up 1/2 the time with VOD O's
F Forgiveness definition
F Forgiveness definition important
F Forgiveness for the Forgiver
F Forgiveness includes self-protection
F Forgiveness not mentioned in cases that do not proceed
F Forgiveness - Offender Reaction
F Forgiveness Some Survivor do not forgive
F Has empathy for O's
F Length of Time doing VOD
F loves the VOD work
F O must take responsibility
F POMC members do not forgive
F Reason for being an F
F S wants to know "why"
F sees generous mothers who forgive O youth
F Similarities between VOD & executions
F Spiritual is linked w/ forgiveness
F Survivor & O wrote before VOD
F Survivor - Empathy for Offender
F Survivor – Forgives
F Survivor - Forgives before VOD
F Survivor - generosity multiplies
F Survivor Reason for not wanting VOD
F Time of interview
F Wants peace for S & O
Letter - O's letter answer to S's prayer
Letter - O not supposed to write to S
Letter - O writes to S Asks Forgiveness
Letter - Policy on Letters
Letter - S writes to O
Letter – V of sex a writes to O
Meaning - S wants to find meaning
O remorseful
Offense - Drunk Driving
Parole - S's Family Opposed to Parole
Parole - S will not oppose
S is Christian - wants to forgive
Spiritual - Link between spirit & forgive
Survivor - Burning desire to speak to O
Survivor - Forgives before VOD
Survivor - Forgiving Person
Survivor - Forgiving Type/Other Generosity
Survivor - Others reacted differently than survivor
Survivor - Realistic about V's Behavior
Survivor - VOD Prep Sparks Empathy
VOD - 1st VOD Beautiful
VOD - 2 cases S meant harm to O
VOD - All get some help even if no meeting
VOD – All VOD’s good experience
VOD – Anger involved in request
VOD - Anger is reason for request
VOD - Beautiful experience
VOD - Differences for 1st & 3rd Survivors
VOD – Experience
VOD - F sees healthy/spiritually involved
VOD - F sees people get peace
VOD - Follow-up
VOD – Forgiveness comes from process before meeting
VOD - Forgiveness comes up in most cases
VOD – Forgiveness frequent issue
VOD- Forgiveness spontaneous after VOD
VOD - Genuineness Important
VOD - Goes better when S has worked on self
VOD - Healing Benefits
VOD – How she learned about it
VOD - Initial Moments
VOD - Most S's want to tell impact of crime
VOD - O Apologizes
VOD - O's Apology Genuine
VOD - VOD lessens anger
VOD - O during VOD focuses on harm he caused
VOD - Offender Reaction
VOD - O's Process of Preparing
VOD - Others Reactions to Decision to do VOD
VOD - OVS matches facilitators well with S's
VOD - Partner Facilitator Important
VOD - Points where forgiveness occurs
VOD - Prep Process
VOD - Process can yield forgiveness
VOD - Process changes goals for VOD
VOD - Process for O
VOD – Process gives some answers
VOD - Process Humanizes O
VOD – Process prepares S
VOD – Process Promotes healing
VOD – Promotes personal growth
VOD - process when O not truthful
VOD - Reason for seeking
VOD - S did same as O drink & drive
VOD - Say no when O does not take responsibility
VOD - Say no when S too angry
VOD – W wants rehab for O
VOD – Sparks S's empathy for O
VOD - Spiritual Aspects
VOD - Spiritual Experience
VOD - Spontaneous Healing
VOD - S's process of preparing
VOD - S's who see O as monster do not ask for VOD
VOD - Survivor Keeps Contact with Offender
VOD – Timeframe
VOD - Timing for O
VOD - Timing of request
VOD - Timing of VOD
VOD - VOD time was right
VOD - Why VOD does not happen
VOD - when people have forgiven go smoother
Ways Survivor Copes w/ trauma
Codes Level II for All Groups

In the second round of coding, more detail was assigned to the codes that emerged in the first round of coding. The following are the Level II codes for all participants

Codes Level II for VOD Participants

Key to Codes:

ADC: After Death Communication
F: Facilitator
O: Offender
S: Survivor
V: Victim
VOD: Victim Offender Dialogue

Note: Some codes or parts of codes were removed because the information contained in the code would make the participant identifiable. Some codes were changed slightly to make the references in the code more general to avoid revealing identifying information.

ADC - Bed went down 3 different times/questioned self
ADC - Believes V's do try to communicate: not just coincidences
ADC - Daughter had sign from V - Balloon movement
ADC - Demons can posses loved ones
ADC - did dream of V/ no recent dreams
ADC - Do not believe in that cause demons can possess
ADC - do not dream of V anymore
ADC - Does not dream about V
ADC - Does not sense presence
ADC - Don't tell re: ADC- people will think I'm off my rocker
ADC - Dream of V right after death
ADC - Electrical game belonging to V went off by itself
ADC - in 1st dream, V trying to explain why she died
ADC - Knows some people believe they smell or sense presence
ADC - light in corner/ happened 1st yr & no more
ADC - Light in corner/ no explanation for it
ADC - Light in corner/ scared her/she screamed
ADC - Light in corner - wasn't sleeping/mind can play tricks
ADC - Lot of strange experiences (vague)
ADC - never felt sense of presence
ADC - no ADC, but psychic foretold the death
ADC - Others report communication w/ deceased loved one
ADC - Parents’ questions-Is child OK- Will I see child again after death
ADC - S does not believe in mediums - against religion
ADC - S does not sense presence of lost loved one
ADC - S notices days full of coincidences {e.g. hears name often}
ADC - Short dream & then no more dreams
ADC - Sign - penny with V's birth year
ADC - Sign during special family event - rain & double rainbow
ADC - Spirit told her son was gone
ADC - there's definitely something, sometimes bad or good
ADC - Third party ADC - child communicated with V at cemetery
ADC - Weird coincidences (vague)
ADC - You get great comfort know they're around: around when you need them

Clergy- Asks do you think you can ever forgive?
Clergy Explain - God can't stop it/will be rectified down the road

Closure - not a good word - no closed door

Death - what is correct word - not loss

Detective Helpful

Difficulty getting info

Emotion - After 5 years people can let go of grief

Emotion - after months pain starts to lessen & it lessens each year

Emotion - letting go of grief is like letting go of V

Emotion - Pain is 24/7

Emotions - 1st year S out of her mind/focus on death for O1

Emotions - acceptance - mediation is the key to that

Emotions - acceptance, but it took a long time to get there

Emotions - after 6 years feels joy, but still misses V

Emotions - anger gone

Emotions - Angry, not w/ O, but with God

Emotions - angry/ V got no compassion at end of life

Emotions - at 1st did not break down/had to be strong for others

Emotions - at first plots revenge/wanted O to die

Emotions - believed after verdict life would be normal

Emotions - believes that putting on a face helped her avoid bitterness

Emotions - cannot achieve emotional distance from O

Emotions - does not get better over time

Emotions - doubt/would not want someone to go to jail unfairly
Emotions - every holiday, birthday
Emotions - feels no bitterness or rage - never did
Emotions - feels nothing about O/pushes thoughts of him away
Emotions - feels sad for O's family & for harm to S's family
Emotions - go through suicidal thoughts - I can't live through this
Emotions - in beginning make choice to die or survive
Emotions - initial grief horrific
Emotions - joyless for 6 years
Emotions - just the type of person I am
Emotions - life did not go back to normal after sentence
Emotions - now peace & harmony w/in self
Emotions - Others tell S not to feel guilt
Emotions - PTSD dx when asked for parenting help 20 yrs out
Emotions - PTSD felt normal to her/did not identify trauma
Emotions - put on a face/acted fine when not - helped
Emotions - resolution refuses negative focus so V's did not kill her, too
Emotions - resolution -can talk about V & it's OK
Emotions - S does not get along with people as a result of crime
Emotions - S does not trust as a result of crime
Emotions - S feels guilt for not protecting
Emotions - S not bitter
Emotions - S pushed people away
Emotions - sad
Emotions - spent years being angry

Emotions - S's mother weak/S had to be strong

Emotions - summer pain will lapse a bit

Emotions - thinks about it every day

Emotions - wanted O to feel pain

Emotions - wanted to know why did O do this

Emotions - weak people re: grief made her angry

Empathy for O: he was young/development stage limited good choices

Empathy for O's family/dinner with 02 parents 2x

Empathy for O's family/mom lost son, too

Empathy for O's family: OK to have O's sis on her side for VOD

Forgiveness - for O's: hope their situation is best it can be

Forgiveness - a gift you give to yourself/O's life didn't change/mine did

Forgiveness - best thing I ever did for myself

Forgiveness - Clergy explanation: Nothing required of O

Forgiveness - Definition: don't hold grudge but not put self out for re-offense

Forgiveness - discussed with clergy: a monk

Forgiveness - does not deal with negative people

Forgiveness - doesn't have forgiveness

Forgiveness - doesn't want O out/that now comes from different place

 Forgiveness - feels peace re: forgive/doesn't want O out/O could harm

Forgiveness - felt God took away pain/owed forgiveness

Forgiveness - For my heart & Right thing to do
Forgiveness - forgives but wants O held accountable
Forgiveness - had to forgive/it felt like instinct
Forgiveness - if you can forgive your fellow man everything will fall into place
Forgiveness - is typical mode for S
Forgiveness - knows forgive/let go might help: cannot do it
Forgiveness - not a decision
Forgiveness - not forgiveness, acceptance
Forgiveness - now she is a nut case like Oprah's guests
Forgiveness - O showed no remorse
Forgiveness - O will be judged by God
Forgiveness - Oprah dialogue - people crazy to forgive
Forgiveness - Others do not understand forgiving attitude
Forgiveness - Others do not understand/V's family feels it's betrayal
Forgiveness - S does not forgive/ but doesn't hold on to negative
Forgiveness - S does not forgive/ does not know how
Forgiveness - S doesn't think she can forgive ever
Forgiveness - S holding onto negative would be like S killed, too
Forgiveness - S saw Amy Beal's mom forgave/ saw that 15 yrs earlier
Forgiveness - S tells O she will not forgiven @ VOD
Forgiveness - saw dialogue w/ forgiveness on Oprah
Forgiveness - shows role model for her children
Forgiveness - spontaneous after VOD
Forgiveness - wants to see some remorse to forgive
Forgiveness - was not a whole person before VOD & forgiveness

Healing - a good word

Helped - in VOD she got to tell O impact of crime

Helped - POMC right after death-nice be with people like you

Helped - S volunteered to be Victim Witness

Helped - to do something to honor V rather than wallow in self-pity

Helped - turned judgment over to God

Helped - Victim Witness sent that night

Helped - Victim Witness was survivor

Helped - Victim Witness/survivor knew what S going through

Helped S - can't wear blinders re: V's bad choices

Helped S - Church family & friends surrounded her

Helped S - Community Support

Helped S - Community Support/Opposed Parole

Helped S - connected with individual survivor who listened

Helped S - friends listened

Helped S - go to Heavenly Father to ask for comfort

Helped S - insisted that husband listen

Helped S - most others can do is listen

Helped S - Scholarship in V's name

Justice - an eye for an eye

Justice - at 1st advocated for law change/death penalty for all

Justice - community failure leads to criminal behaviors
Justice - community failure led to crime
Justice - death penalty applied unfairly/look at each case individually
Justice - if O died it would be too easy
Justice - now thinks earlier view wrong/death penalty for some cases
Justice - O chose prison life
Justice - O confessed, but death penalty case, many court dates
Justice - O must answer for crime, but he is not a threat - sentence too long
Justice - O needed to go to prison - he was out of control
Justice - Parental failure led to crime
Justice - S angry that her taxes support O
Justice - S angry that O did not get death penalty
Justice - S left out of justice process/no one asked S re: type of hearing
Justice - S tried to get O an early release w/o success
Justice - unfair that S's taxes support O
Justice - Unfair the drug dealers get more time than murderer
Justice - Want O to get more than 3 yrs. -5 OK - surprised at long sentence
Justice - wishy washy on tried as adults/O's are kids
Justice - S sees that parents may get blame even if they tried
Letter - 01 asked to write S at VOD
Letter - 01 writes S every year on his B-day: S does not reply
Letter - O wrote to S to ask forgiveness, S just got it in VOD
Letter - S & O continued to write after VOD 4 yrs. Several times a year PO Box
Letter - S 02 could write yearly & S wouldn't oppose parole
Letter - S 02 follows through with agreement to write

Letter - S allowed to write to O 1x after VOD/S would like to write O

Letter - S replies to 02 letters every year: does not know what's diff.

Letter - S would like to get letter re: how VOD was for O & what he took

Letter - S wrote to 01 to say, be man enough to talk to me

Letter - While writing thank you realized that she forgave

Letter - Wrote letter to thank O after VOD

Mental health help received for 2.5 years

Mental Health help received w/ focus on parenting her children

Not helpful - church does not support bereaved

Not Helpful - friends put up wall - can't talk about it

Not helpful - negative people/she does not deal w/ them

Not helpful - POMC conventions too expensive

Not Helpful - POMC not for her

O - acknowledges that he did crime

O - does not think of harm to others

O - says he did not commit crime

O - Says he did not do it -

Others Affected - V's Friends had hard time

Parole - family member will oppose parole

Parole - not sure she wants to waste more time on him to oppose

Parole - Opposed by survivor

Parole - Opposed by survivor's family too
Parole - S did not oppose parole
Parole - S does not ever want O’s out of prison ever
Parole - S’ s family members oppose parole
Parole - S will not oppose parole
Parole - S will not oppose/ wants to focus on positive
Parole - S will testify to keep O in as long as she can
Parole - will show up at parole hearings to keep O in prison
Parole watch life long and children inherit
Police - Angry at police
Police - change in policy about stalking since V's death
Recovery - a good word/ S is recovered/ I do not hurt
Resolution - anything S can't control - gives it to the One
Resolution - content within self - opposed to vengeance
Resolution - peace & harmony w/in
S - 01’s mom called to tell S she should be patient with
S - Anger - Did have periods of anger
S - avoids contact w/ her own sibs: differences re: child rearing
S - Believes justice not individualized
S - Believes O did crime
S - Believes O did not understand justice process
S - Believes O is trying to change
S - Believes O needs to answer for what he did
S - Believes O not a danger to her
S - Believes sentence too long - O not a danger
S - Contact w/ O's family - O's mom called & S civil/kind
S - Contact w/ O's family - S called O's sister - S empathic
S - Contact w/ O's family - S called O's sister: Did sister believe guilt?
S - Contact w/ O's family/S refuses to try for early release
S - Contact w/ O's family/they call around holidays: upsetting
S - Contact w/ O's family/they call wanting O out
S - Divorce 4 years after V's death
S - Empathy for O - many of O's family members in jail
S - Empathy for O w/ conscience: different from O w/o conscience
S - Empathy for O/offered to visit when O's mom moved away
S - Empathy for O's family too
S - Empathy for O
S - employment related to meaning after death
S - expressed concern about O1's well being in prison
S - Expresses concern about O in prison
S - expresses concern for Os' when they return to community
S - expresses concern that O grew up on prison
S - expresses desire for Os' wellbeing when they get out
S - Feels bad for O & Others do not understand that
S - Felt bad for O since beginning
S - Forgave before VOD
S - Forgiveness - Prosecutor did not understand forgiving attitude
S - Forgiveness - Christian - prayed for forgiveness right away
S - Forgiveness - Church family & friends surrounded her
S - Forgiveness - Forgive right away
S - Forgiveness - others did not understand forgiving attitude
S - Forgiveness began at court when g.f. Thanked S - S said nice things re: her kids
S - Forgiveness definition: Easier to forgive cause O did not intend to kill
S - Forgiveness definition: frees yourself/allows joy to return/ grudge eats at you
S - Forgives O in VOD & S thinks forgiveness helped O
S - glad that O connected with Christian men in prison
S - Growth/ went to graduate school since death & teaches
S - Heart aches for lost loved one
S - honors V by trying to make O16 a better person
S - honors V by trying to show prisoners a different way
S - How S sees O2: abandoned by parents @ early age
S - How S sees O2: society did not act on signs of trouble
S - How S sees O - do not feel sorry for O: O chose this life
S - How S sees O - O's family member died; S: now O know how it feels
S - How S sees O/believes O1 does not think of harm
S - How S sees O/S tells O know me-I am in your life
S - How S sees O: Compassion/Empathy for O
S - How S sees O: a different character to do such harm
S - How S sees O: after VOD/the man who screwed up really bad
S - How S sees O: before VOD/the monster that destroyed my life
S - How S sees O: both O's killed 2 people: still accountable for crimes
S - How S sees O: child of God misguided
S - How S sees O: concern that O grew up in prison
S - How S sees O: family was a gang
S - How S sees O: Felt nothing/Did not want to waste time thinking of him
S - How S sees O: he's a dangerous character
S - How S Sees O: his faith blossomed in prison
S - How S Sees O: his mom was enabler when he was young
S - How S sees O: I looked at him as a mother
S - How S sees O: O acts macho, but puppy underneath
S - How S Sees O: O did not intend to kill V
S - How S Sees O: O does not think of harm he did to many others
S - How S sees O: O wild/his family tried to redirect
S - How S sees O: OK to keep O in prison as long as possible
S - How S sees O: S - Maintained contact with O after VOD
S - How S Sees O: S agrees w/ J-O was not put together well
S - How S sees O: S's husband knew O in childhood
S - How S Sees O: Turned out bad cause of mom's enabling
S - How S sees O: young & got on wrong path
S - How S sees O1 in court apologized to parents/not to S
S - How S sees O1/sees on TV 1st/O looks normal
S - How S sees O2 as a person, but not sorry he's in prison
S - How S sees Os/ as 1 & 2 even though life details known
S - How S sees O's: maybe adult trying to correct them/who knows
S - How S sees O's: never been an adult in the world
S - How S sees O's: see them as little boys
S - How S sees O's: boys on their own/problems in family
S - How S sees O's: stepfather beating them
S - Ideal reciprocity: stops treating others in ways that hurt her
S - Information - S cannot access info about O
S - Is OK that O cannot admit that he did it
S - Knew that O did not intend to kill loved one
S - Learns truth from parole board/detective - not through VOD
S - Misses loved one every day
S - Misses V everyday: it never goes away
S - Not guilty - was a good parent
S - Not helpful - homicide survivor meetings/ too much crying
S - Notes that sibs had different reaction than she did
S - O's mother unkind to S/O's stepfather apologetic
S - Others react differently to similar crime/S ? Self
S - Pain never ends, but it's not constant
S - Pain never ends, but it's not every moment now
S - Realistic about bad choices V made
S - Recognized that family can get blame even if they try
S - Recognizes O's personal limitations
S - Recommends mental health help for children of murder V
S - resolution- that she will never know why O's killed V
S - Resolution -we've moved on -day to day is normal
S - Sad for her own family, this will never go away
S - sibling had much difficulty with loss
S - Still misses V esp. on special occasions
S - thinks about V a lot some days
S - trying no to feel guilt
S - Understanding of why O had gun
S - V would want her to grow; can't stay stuck on day of V's death
S - V would want her whole & to find some happiness/forgive not betrayal
S - Visited a prison & saw how "gray & cold" it is
S - volunteer to help others/Finding God newsletter article
S - Volunteered to do crime prevention work
S - Volunteered to help crime victims for V
S - Volunteered to help crime victims
S - Volunteered to help other Victims of Crime
S - Volunteers - Speaks on crime prevention & forgiveness with O
S - wants O's to have support so they will not be forced to go wrong
S - wants to believe V has better life now
S - What Could I have done?
S - What S believes will happen to O/ O not likely to get out
S - Why he did it - no reason - drinking
S - Will never know why
S - Wonders how O feels daily: is he sorry or does he just let it go
S - working toward more contact with O
S - would help O if needed when he is out of prison
Spiritual - an eye for an eye in the Bible
Spiritual - Asking why would be like questioning God
Spiritual - church does not support bereaved
Spiritual - Consulted w/ clergy
Spiritual - go to Heavenly Father to ask for comfort
Spiritual - God's Will be done - faith never failed
Spiritual - Had a battle with Heavenly Father
Spiritual - Has faith
Spiritual - Heavenly father - source of support
Spiritual - Heavenly Father has all control
Spiritual - Look at life the way Christ would/turn other cheek - forgive
Spiritual - most important thing - parents, walk in faith, believe in God
Spiritual - My counselor was my Father/felt comfort from Father
Spiritual - not spiritual/not significant influence
Spiritual - S - church makes her feel too guilty
Spiritual - S lives life by what feels right
Spiritual - spiritual meaning of death/God had plan
Spiritual - Strong spirit life/does not go to church
Spiritual - Strong Spiritual Life - practicing Catholic
Spiritual - Strong Spiritual Life - prayed when upset
Spiritual - turn it over to God to judge

Spiritual - You get angry with God

Spiritual - S not a spiritual person

VOD - advocate referred S to VOD

VOD - affected negative view 100%/ helped

VOD - Assess: believes in it: believes it part of healing

VOD - Assess: helped - some questions answered

VOD - Assess: helped/O's had to listen to her/ that was huge

VOD - Assess: helped/ she got to tell O's who V was

VOD - Assessment - it was good but may not be for some people

VOD - Assessment - it was good even though S did not get some info

VOD - Assessment - process of preparing helpful

VOD - Assessment/helped even though words were awful/act barbaric

VOD - Assessment: Had Ideal VOD - no harsh words, no accusing

VOD - Assessment: learned # of stabs at home: helpful

VOD - Assessment: Talk was healing for both of us

VOD - Assessment: didn't get info she wants, but glad she went

VOD - Assessment-S's wouldn't need VOD if they had info from trial

VOD - Both O's said they don't remember details of crime

VOD - contacted advocate to ask re: visiting

VOD - different with 2 different O's

VOD - Forgiveness - S tells O she will not forgive

VOD - Forgiveness spontaneous after VOD - see Forgiveness codes
VOD - Forgiveness/ Did not forgive while in VOD, but after she got home

VOD - Forgiveness-was not a whole person before VOD & forgiveness

VOD - God made change in her from VOD/she could not do that

VOD - Going to prison, she is not in a good heart place

VOD - Healing - healing for both S & O

VOD - helped - in VOD she got to tell O impact of crime

VOD - How Learned: mental health therapist

VOD - How learned-S never heard of it: VOD new

VOD - How She learned - just wanted to meet O- she initiated search

VOD - How she learned - she started process by asking

VOD - How she learned - the ladies: victim adv.

VOD - How she learned - was referred after request to visit

VOD - How she learned about it: S doesn't know

VOD - How she learned/ Probation officer in her Co.& OVS tape

VOD - How she learned: Called OH after seeing Oprah

VOD - How she learned: Don't remember/Contacted lawyer & victim adv involved

VOD - How she learned: OH did not have VOD when she first called

VOD - How she learned-called prison & asked to visit

VOD - Initial Moments - felt like she would have heart attack

VOD - Initial Moments - S cries when O enters

VOD - Initial Moments - she shook his hand

VOD - initial Moments :01 extended hand, but S refused handshake

VOD - Initial Moments :w/ 01 briefly thought she couldn't do it
VOD - Jumped at chance for VOD  {note: like burning desire}
VOD - Later learned OH had VOD/called again: VOD not in super-max
VOD - Later offered VOD trial in Super Max
VOD - O apologizes in VOD
VOD - O apologizes, then says how bad prison is
VOD - O apologizes/starts VOD with apology
VOD - O apologizes: S now? Is he sorry for killing or b/c he's in prison
VOD - O continued to insist he did not do crime
VOD - O did S favor by not having family @VOD so he could say truth
VOD - O during dialogue apologizes
VOD - O during dialogue focused on harm he caused
VOD - O during dialogue focuses on harm he caused
VOD - O focused on self: how difficult to be in prison
VOD - O sacrificed by not having sis at VOD
VOD - O said I can't ask you to forgive me
VOD - O showed no facial expression until S mentioned O's mom
VOD - O showed no remorse
VOD - O story of crime truthful
VOD - O tells S he is doing VOD cause he owes it to her
VOD - O tells S his family did not want him to do VOD
VOD - O very mannerly in VOD
VOD - O was truthful and that helped
VOD - O1 apologize 3x (S cries as she tells this)
VOD - O1 not in any trouble/prison like juvenile detention
VOD - O1 self-focus in VOD: wild rationalization during VOD
VOD - O1 so choked up he could not say what led to crime
VOD - O16 apologizes/cries/remorseful
VOD - O2 did not apologize
VOD - O2 focused on he's rehabbed, not harm he did
VOD - O2 focused on present/he's beyond past
VOD - O2 in trouble a lot
VOD - O2 like son: I've learned, but then son would do it again
VOD - O2 more focused on self
VOD - O's story of crime dishonest
VOD - Others discouraged her from doing VOD
VOD - Others react: friend would not go to VOD2 cause disapproval of O2
VOD - Others reactions: aunts asked was she going to try to get O's out
VOD - Others reactions: varies from disapproval to admiration & concern
VOD - Others see VOD as betrayal of V
VOD - Prep time too long - needs better communication about reasons for delays
VOD - Prep time too long
VOD - Preparation: O agreed that he would tell the truth
VOD - Preparation: S said she did not want O lying to her
VOD - Preparing Process too long
VOD - Preparing Process/did not sleep night before
VOD - Preparing Process/not prepared for 3 days after processing
VOD - Preparing Process/not prepared for heart attack feeling

VOD - Profound exp.- it was instant/went in with hate/came out no hate

VOD - Reason - Burning Desire to talk to O

VOD - Reason - compared O's hx to her family member's

VOD - Reason - curious about what happened that day

VOD - Reason - Find out if V died to save another soul

VOD - Reason - Find out what happened

VOD - Reason - I gotta' do it. I wanna' meet him

VOD - Reason - I have to do it

VOD - Reason - knew from day one we wanted to talk to him

VOD - Reason - mainly to sit w/ O & have him say why

VOD - Reason - no trial so S did not get information

VOD - Reason - not about why, she knew why

VOD - Reason - pursued it/had no voice when V lost/protected

VOD - Reason - S was pulled to go there

VOD - Reason - To find out if he knew God

VOD - Reason - to know O's background, family, education

VOD - Reason - to see if V OK & to let him know they are thinking of him

VOD - Reason - wanted t know how O's are now

VOD - Reason - wanted to know the person (88) the human being

VOD - Reason - wanted to know what took place

VOD - Reason -What would make you do this? Why?

VOD - Reason: questions of how long V suffered/scared
VOD - Reason: To yell at someone
VOD - Reason: 2nd dialogue w/ 02, still ? Is why
VOD - Reason: somebody needs to tell me why V died
VOD - Recommends for others
VOD - S & O plan future contact
VOD - S did not expect O to say he did it
VOD - S does not accept 02 apology/S offers he can write
VOD - S does not accept O's apology
VOD - S does not believe O's story of crime
VOD - S forgave long before VOD
VOD - S gets angry during VOD
VOD - S is not sure if she believes O's remorse
VOD - S recommends for others for forgiving, curiosity, not battering O
VOD - S tells O she doesn't care: O put himself in prison
VOD - S thinks it was great - a good meeting
VOD - S thought O was sincerely remorseful
VOD - S thought O was sincerely remorseful, genuine
VOD - S told O's she hopes O's will be prepared for release
VOD - S wanted O's to know that no one was wishing them ill
VOD - S wanted to visit - victim status prevented visiting O
VOD - says difference maybe she was feeling different
VOD - Sensed a lack of genuine in O2's talk
VOD - shook 01 hand at end of VOD
VOD - Spirit Exp. - asked O to read Bible
VOD - Spirit Exp. - something took away hate
VOD - Spirit Exp. Wants O to ask God's forgiveness/don't need him in hell
VOD - Spiritual - in O1 VOD, Bible reading discussed
VOD - Spiritual - in O2 VOD, nothing religious discussed
VOD - Spiritual Exp. - God in room cause O wanted to do prevention talks
VOD - Spiritual Exp. - O initiated prayer to end VOD w/ prayer
VOD - Spiritual Exp. - prayed to be directed by Lord in VOD
VOD - Spiritual Exp. - started VOD with prayer
VOD - Spiritual experience - Lord has a long table
VOD - Timing - had to plan to wait until year
VOD - Timing of request was right: it matched personal situation
VOD - walked out that day & I was whole
VOD - Went as she expected - it went well
VOD - would recommend
VOD - Would recommend for others

**Codes Level II: Facilitators**

Key to Codes:

ADC: After Death Communication
F: Facilitator
O: Offender
S: Survivor
V: Victim
VOD: Victim Offender Dialogue
ADC - F as survivor had a premonition of her V's death

Burning desire - most people come with a desire that's burning them up; anger or a desire to forgive

Burning Desire - no one tells V's to contact O's they have a need/drive to work it out

Burning desire - S's feel that this is something they have to do even if family doesn't understand

Burning Desire - wells up & they have to meet w/O

Burning Desire to speak to O - need to speak to O is so great, S's just ask

F - as survivor - a spiritual person before V's death

F - as survivor - it's hard to forgive

F - as survivor concludes that ongoing review of forgiveness-forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting

F - as survivor did not want to be hateful from the beginning

F - as survivor did not want VOD - Believed O's would not be truthful

F - as survivor does not want to hold on to negativity/spend energy to hate

F - as survivor forgave, but finds she has to forgive all over again

F - came to VOD from rape crisis as a skeptic

F - Completed 1 VOD

F - fell in love with VOD

F - has empathy for O

F - has empathy for O's; recognizes that they are human; O's did not have good structure

F - if F can bring comfort to V or O it's wonderful

F - loves the VOD work

F - notices POMC members in her area do not forgive & do not request dialogue

F - Sees generous mothers who do not want to waste another life - O's life

F - VOD - e.g., was totally the most beautiful thing I'd ever been involved with
F- shows empathy for O

F- VOD - e.g., where forgiveness occurred an out of body experience

F- VOD - e.g., where forgiveness occurred spiritual; God is present

Follow-up - call after a week

Follow-up - long term resolution case by case; depends on what happens to O

Follow-up - may call on important dates

Follow-up - never observed an S who fell apart due to VOD

Forgiveness - S just looking at O in VOD changes their feelings about everything

Forgiveness - 3 points in VOD where it occurs - before VOD process starts, as part of process, during meeting

Forgiveness - e.g. of incest case; forgiveness result of whole VOD process

Forgiveness - e.g. of S forgiving before VOD in vehicular homicide case

Forgiveness - e.g. of vehicular homicide - O sincere apology & S forgave

Forgiveness - e.g. of vehicular homicide - Spiritual linked to forgiveness

Forgiveness - e.g. rape case - V forgave; she wanted to forgive before VOD

Forgiveness - e.g. rape case in VOD, O apologized

Forgiveness - e.g. rape case in VOD, V could empathize with O

Forgiveness - e.g. rape case V saw in VOD that O was not a monster

Forgiveness - e.g. S Christian; wants to forgive drunk driver

Forgiveness - e.g. S mom wants to forgive young O who killed son

Forgiveness - e.g., mom of son killed by O had husband who did not forgive

Forgiveness - e.g., mom will not oppose early release for young O who killed son

Forgiveness - F gives 2 e.g. w/ spiritual - forgiveness connection

Forgiveness - F gives e.g. of forgiveness & no religion in incest case
Forgiveness - F gives e.g. of incest case; forgiveness contains protection
Forgiveness - F gives e.g. of S who forgave before VOD & wants to keep contact w/ O
Forgiveness - F gives e.g. of S who forgave before VOD meeting
Forgiveness - F never observed S leaning toward forgiveness & change mind due to VOD
Forgiveness - F notices S who forgave had great concern (empathy) for O
Forgiveness - F says forgiveness is a journey; everybody's different
Forgiveness - F sees link: forgiveness & spirituality
Forgiveness - F tells story: hazards of clergy pressing forgivingness
Forgiveness - F thinks definition important
Forgiveness - F thinks S who forgave before VOD has forgiving heart
Forgiveness - F thinks spontaneous forgiveness due to humanization for both S & O
Forgiveness - F thinks spontaneous forgiveness more likely if O accountable
Forgiveness - Family members may not understand S's need to forgive
Forgiveness - frequent issue in VOD
Forgiveness - F's definition - agrees that forgiveness does not mean reconciliation
Forgiveness - F's definition - does not mean S wants O released
Forgiveness - F's definition - not ok that V is dead, but S wants O to have a good life; S won't hold crime against O
Forgiveness - F's definition - O is accountable and V is accountable in the case example
Forgiveness - F's definition - S can't hold onto hurt & anger; want to see some good
Forgiveness - if person is a person of faith, it comes up
Forgiveness - In VOD requests - had quite a few V/S talk about forgiveness
Forgiveness - includes self-protection; does not mean reconciliation
Forgiveness - Linked w/ spiritual/ you see it in those who were spiritual before offense
Forgiveness - never saw anyone w/o some sort of faith who forgave

Forgiveness - not mentioned in cases that do not proceed

Forgiveness - O's often feel that victims should forgive

Forgiveness - out of all cases, in most forgiveness comes up, but that does not mean O is forgiven

Forgiveness - out of all cases, in most forgiveness comes up, by S or by O

Forgiveness - results from process before face to face meeting

Forgiveness - S may not have intended to go there, but it surfaces

Forgiveness - S/V comes to VOD w/ faith, but not forgiveness - forgiveness result of humanizing process

Forgiveness - Some O's can't imagine forgiving what they have done

Forgiveness - some S's come to offer O forgiveness

Forgiveness - Some S's do not forgive

Forgiveness - Some S's forgave before VOD, don't plan to tell, but tell due to humanization

Forgiveness - some S's forgave years ago, but want to meet O

Forgiveness - some S's say forgiveness is for them not for O

Forgiveness - some S's say I'll never forgive & by end of process forgiveness happens

Forgiveness - some S's say minister said to meet with O & forgive

Forgiveness - Some S's very negative about O & get to VOD & forgive

Forgiveness - some victims forgave long before calling for VOD

Forgiveness - sometimes happens in VOD process as a result of info sharing

Forgiveness - spontaneous forgiveness happens cause questions answered before VOD & now S is just looking at O

Forgiveness - S's feel they need to forgive to move on w/ their lives; seen w/ people of faith

Forgiveness - VOD process can result in forgiveness

Forgiveness - VOD process of getting to know O yields forgiveness
Forgiveness - part of discussion w/ O in little over 1/2 the cases

Forgiveness - F's definition - does not mean S doesn't want system to work

Forgiveness - e.g., in the mom of shot son case, O focused on harm he did during VOD

Forgiveness - F's definition

How S's Learn About VOD - Ask at Institutions to visit O

How S's Learn About VOD - defense attorneys, esp. in death penalty cases

How S's Learn About VOD - media such as 20/20

How S's Learn About VOD - referred by victim advocates, prosecutor's offices, DV shelters, Rape Crisis

How S's Learn About VOD - self referrals after hearing about VOD

Letter - F gives e.g. of inmate drunk driver who wrote to S to ask for forgiveness

Letter - F says O's are not supposed to write to S's

Letter - O's letter to S an answer to S's prayer

Letters - e.g., in sex assault case V wrote to O dad about anger

Letters - If there is a cease order or protection order- letters a violation

Letters - ODRC does not like it to happen - tell O don't write S, but it happens

Letters - O's could write to S's & S's could write to O's

Letters - S & O write to each other before VOD meeting

Marketing - OVS tries to make community aware of services

Meaning - S's want to know if O has been in worthwhile activities to see some good come of situation

O's process - O often blindsided by request/ not prepared

Spiritual - F again notes spirituality gotten people through a lot

Spiritual - F gives e.g., w/ spiritual being great support

Spiritual - respect S's spirituality, where ever they are
S's process - S's have talked to family, clergy, therapy before calling

S's process - S's think a lot about it before calling for VOD

Timing - F's slow down/ work through process/preparation to get better VOD

Timing - O's need 2 years to get used to prison before VOD can work

Timing - see some VOD immediately & some years down the road

Timing - S's waiting 2, 5, or 10 years can harness anger & ask better questions

Timing - will rush case if execution or terminal illness involved

Timing - "for us, just as witnesses, it makes it easier to slow it down . . ."

VOD - A lot involve spirituality or connection w/ higher power

VOD - Anger - say no when S too angry; O would shut down

VOD - Anger - won't offer VOD if S ballistically angry

VOD - Assessment - all VOD's go well cause F's have skill at knowing when to say "no"

VOD - Assessment - always been a good experience; no cases went badly

VOD - Assessment - changes lives on both ends - O's are different - better

VOD - Assessment - excellent program; offers something people can't get elsewhere; not for everyone

VOD - assessment - only one case where F wonders if it was beneficial for S; O not remorseful

VOD - Assessment - O's have to be accountable for VOD to happen - that makes it successful

VOD - Beautiful experience for F

VOD - Connections made between S & O

VOD - Do not proceed if O is not truthful, but give O a couple of visits to see if story changes

VOD - e.g. vehicular homicide; discussed in VOD S wants O to get rehab

VOD - e.g., S asks to hug O at beginning of VOD meeting

VOD - e.g., S tells O about all people who received O's organs
VOD - F gives example where VOD involved much spiritual discussion
VOD - F had 2 cases where S/V meant to do harm to O
VOD - F has never had anyone come out of VOD still so angry, ever, ever
VOD - F mentions 2 VOD's process w/ no face-to-face meeting- S's got all info. Wanted
VOD - F notices VOD process brings a lot of healing, forgiveness, & closure for both
VOD - F sees different family reactions to crime, e.g., forgiving one wants VOD; non-forgiving interfering
VOD - Family members may not understand S's need for VOD
VOD - Follow-up at one month and one year for both V & O
VOD - Follow-up: every follow up F did at one month and one year said experience positive
VOD - Follow-up; may not do one year follow-up if it would stir up boundary issues
VOD - F's partner imp. Have to be in sync
VOD - Genuine open to individual interpretation
VOD - Goes more smoothly if V/S has forgiven; V/S has done much work to get to that point
VOD - Goes more smoothly when V/S has done much work through counseling, church, family members
VOD - Healing - not a real word that describes transition between beginning & end -she calls it "transformation"
VOD - Healing - S/V go away feeling different
VOD - Healing - S/V go away feeling different; e.g. anger gone, fear gone; addressed what brought them
VOD - Healing - see a lot of dramatic healing in sex assault cases
VOD - Healing - some say I release all these things I've been feeling
VOD - Healing Benefits -for O/O has to see harm done to S
VOD - Healing Benefits -for S/S sees O accept responsibility for human life
VOD - Healing different in sex assault vs. homicide: sex assault V's can take back their lives
VOD - Healing from flashbacks and limited life observed 88 & sleep improved
VOD - How S's learn about it - Attorney General Conf. 2 Days in May
VOD - How S's learn about it - OVS website, brochures, community ed.
VOD - How S's learn about it - parole board gives info at victim's conf
VOD - How S's learn about it - see something similar on Oprah & call
VOD - in death cases can't guarantee O will tell S the truth
VOD - in death cases we work w/ S re: can't guarantee truth
VOD - Not the norm
VOD - O needs support after VOD cause difficult info about impact of crime might be told
VOD - Process - creates forgiveness & O accept responsibility, not just the in person meeting
VOD - prior to VOD, S's create scary O in their minds; when S learns reality of O's life, S no longer scared
VOD - prior to VOD, V's create scary O in their minds; when V learns reality of V's life, V no longer scared
VOD - Process - a lot of V's go in wanting details; at in-person meeting discuss impact of crime & how V is doing
VOD - Process - Changes goals for VOD
VOD - Process - E.g. goal changed from facts & telling harm to concern for O's spirituality
VOD - Process - e.g. sex assault case/ F saw emotional growth
VOD - Process - e.g. sex assault case/ F saw personal growth
VOD - Process - e.g. sex assault case/ goals for VOD changed from express anger to tell impact
VOD - Process - e.g. sex assault case/ V starts process w/ anger
VOD - Process - e.g. sex assault case/ V took control of her life, gave up anger and forgave
VOD - Process - F sees goals change as prep process goes on
VOD - Process - F's job is to give as much truth as S chooses to receive
VOD - Process - good part of the dialogue takes place before the meeting
VOD - Process - humanizes vs. making people exhibits in justice system

348
VOD - Process - in back & forth w/ O gives S chance to sort out what is truthful
VOD - Process - in back & forth w/ O questions answered, info digested before meeting
VOD - Process - S's get to know O as person vs. what O did
VOD - Process - S's share memories with F's
VOD - Process - V's goals may change from wanting info about crime to something else
VOD - Process allows S to deal w/ everything before meeting so anger doesn't overshadow
VOD - process humanizes O
VOD - Process may give some answers even if no in person meeting
VOD - Process prepares S by saying O does not look entirely truthful, do you want to proceed
VOD - Reason for seeking - Everybody's journey is different
VOD - Reason for seeking - most want to know answers no matter what the crime
VOD - Reason for seeking - most want to know why no matter what the crime
VOD - Reason for seeking - most want to tell impact of crime
VOD - Reason for seeking - S wants to see O cause S forgave O
VOD - Reason for seeking - start off wanting to confront O
VOD - Reason for Seeking - want the facts
VOD - Reason for seeking - want to be sure O won't harm V again
VOD - Reason for seeking - Wants to know more about O's life
VOD - Reasons for Seeking - questions can only be answered by O
VOD - Reasons for seeking -S's want to know did V suffer, last words
VOD - Spiritual - F gives e.g. of S who prays for O in dialogue
VOD - S's looking for genuineness
VOD - Timeframe - after request made varies depending on S's life
VOD - Timeframe - do not meet when O up for parole
VOD - Timeframe - do not schedule until both individuals in good place
VOD - Timeframe - VOD on the timeframe of S & O
VOD - Timing - don't bring anybody to the table until time is right
VOD - Timing - sometimes say no
VOD - Timing - Say no when O does not accept responsibility or O won’t tell truth
VOD - V's get good out of VOD process even if they do not have an in-person meeting
VOD - What was tried before VOD - some had counseling
VOD - won't fill void - gives one more thing to explore to get answers
VOD - Beautiful experience for F - witnessing lives being changed
VOD- How V's get to VOD - V asks to be put on O's visitor list; OVS contacts V
VOD- How V's get to VOD - writes letter to O & O tells someone in authority; OVS contacts V
VOD- O's process - O has to admit to himself what he did
VOD- O's process - stress trying to imagine telling S what O did
VOD- Reason for seeking - others came to look O in the face/hold accountable
VOD - Timing - Say no when S is too angry
What S's tried before VOD - counseling
What S’s tried before VOD - drugs & alc. To self medicate
What S's tried before VOD - support groups
What S’s tried before VOD - turn to spirituality or away
What S's tried before VOD - varied as human beings on earth

Codes Level II: Support Group Participants
Key to Codes:

ADC: After Death Communication
O: Offender
S: Survivor
V: Victim

Note: Some codes or parts of codes were removed because the information contained in the code would make the participant identifiable. Some codes were changed slightly to make the references in the code more general to avoid revealing identifying information.

ADC - "I do feel that there is a presence"
ADC - "she has a presence. I think that she watches over me."
ADC - Dreams of deceased people and dreams of V
ADC - dreams of deceased people cause you have it on your mind
ADC - feels V had a part helping her through the trial
ADC - feels V had a part in preventing suicide
ADC - hardest thing - S & some of her family get no dreams
ADC - intuitions -feel her presence - ended up where I needed to be
ADC - it's almost like V appears, e.g., rainbow
ADC - knows about phenomenon
ADC - knows others who speak about ADC
ADC - Letters [that V left] V allowed S to see them as explanation
ADC - no experience of ADC
ADC - S - a child in the family said he was talking to V at age 3 or 4
ADC - S consulted psychic after V's death
ADC - S does not dream about V
ADC - S feels that V sent Dr.
ADC - S had premonition of death: evil in V's apt.
ADC - S knows Vs in heaven & they are here
ADC - S loss of touching Vs, but gain inner part in their spirit
ADC - S wishes she had a dream about
ADC - S Women in store feels V/s presence
ADC - S: helpful: Feels like V watches over her children
ADC - S: V contacts [a person] a lot/ closet contents on floor & dreams
ADC - Sharing a song/ that's V contacting me/letting me know he's there
ADC - S: Sometimes I know he's there/ I can feel him
ADC - S's mom dreams of V & shares her dreams w/ S
ADC - Talk of dreams led back to nudge from God to visit O
ADC - Things about V around & she's always near me
ADC - wonders why she is not hearing from her loved one
Advocate - S assigned advocates that were not helpful
Anger - S sees others dwell on anger & have breakdowns
Clergy - Does recommend forgiveness to get unstuck
Clergy - Notes S took a negative & made it into a positive
Clergy - OK to ask God why
Clergy - OK to be angry with God
Clergy - OK to question God
Clergy - says S will come to grips with it / S is not feeling that
Clergy -Sunday School message: do crime, do time
Clergy -Sunday School: forgive others so God can forgive you
Clergy: told S bad wishes for O natural
Clergy: told S forgive = healing for self
Clergy: told S forgive does not = forget
Clergy: told S forgive doesn't = let off hook
Clergy: told S he couldn't forgive if loved one killed
Closure - never closure: learn to live with it
Closure - not helpful word, no closure on life
Death Penalty - life in prison harder than death
Death penalty - OK cause O has no respect for life
Detectives - trusted work of detectives
Detectives - believed they worked hard on case
Detectives: Response was slow; WKK asked for advocate, got one & situation improved
Detectives: S was lucky; detectives got back to S quickly
Divorce
Emotions - 1st 5 years a constant replay of facts & then lessens
Emotions - [X # of yrs], but it's like yesterday
Emotions - adversity is just something you work on changing
Emotions - After 10 years new normal: remember, but don't dwell
Emotions - anger at 1st cause O got away with crime
Emotions - anger went away after O was arrested
Emotions - Angry with God, threw Bible
Emotions - Could not sit through trial/sis & husband went
Emotions - Daily does well

353
Emotions - Doesn't affect her that much anymore
Emotions - doesn't hold onto anger: just the way I am
Emotions - Emptiness in our lives
Emotions - for the 1st several years I cried
Emotions - I got this armor that I wear & nothing can get through
Emotions - I still cry, you never get over it
Emotions - in past up 1 minute, down the next
Emotions - is aware every day that V is absent in the flesh, but moves forward
Emotions - it's been long enough that I'm pretty much OK
Emotions - knows something was lost, but we gained
Emotions - living through death made her strong for other adversity
Emotions - misses V
Emotions - most troubling; have to keep fighting to keep O in prison
Emotions - O unknown for 1.5 yrs./difficult/suspected everyone
Emotions - O well contained & S doesn't spend day in anger
Emotions - rather than move on, move forward, bring V with us
Emotions - roller coaster emotions
Emotions - Roller coaster, but got depressed when family member asked for VOD
Emotions - S cries less often, but still have days & times
Emotions - S good days & bad days
Emotions - S lives every day for V by what she does for others
Emotions - S not angry
Emotions - S says you don't ever get over it
Emotions - S: it's been [X # of yrs]; it's like yesterday

Emotions - S: still very angry

Emotions - S: we don't dwell on anger/wouldn't get out of bed

Emotions - S: every year at anniversary, edgy, irritable

Emotions - S: goes smooth & then land mine; it's all back

Emotions - says those who stay angry have a harder time

Emotions - stopped going places to avoid hearing, I'm sorry

Emotions - we chose to move forward

Emotions - willing to make life about Vs, but remain present for children & grandchildren

Emotions - I'm gonna' start moving forward; I'm going to make a difference

Emotions- S attempted suicide 2X cause no one would give her info

Emotions- thought of ways to kill O during church

Emotions -who I was died that day, but I decided I wasn't going to stay gone

Emotions: stay active/ help others helps: you won't forget V anyway

Empathy -S sees human side of other criminals in volunteer work

Forgiveness - a bitter word to others in organizations

Forgiveness - after Sunday School lesson: I guess I have to forgive

Forgiveness - at first cannot forgive/turned it over to God

Forgiveness - changed over the years

Forgiveness - Definition - to omit from; she says she'll never omit that

Forgiveness - Definition - you're parting from it cause you're omitting it

Forgiveness - definition: I didn't hold it against him (O)

Forgiveness - definition: O must still be accountable

355
Forgiveness - faith taught S forgiveness word
Forgiveness - God's place to judge/ S does not hate O, is not bitter
Forgiveness - has no intentions to forgive
Forgiveness - if someone forgave what would that look like: no answer
Forgiveness - not a good word
Forgiveness - now same: it's in God's hands
Forgiveness - O knew devastation he would cause; O made choice
Forgiveness - Organization members bitter/ don't want to hear forgiveness
Forgiveness - people know if they did or they didn't
Forgiveness - S able to get on with life w/o forgiving
Forgiveness - S definition/you forget what happens maybe
Forgiveness - S didn't feel need to forgive to get on with life
Forgiveness - S forgives O if he is truly sorry, but not her place: God is judge
Forgiveness - S is blank
Forgiveness - S might forgive if O truly sorry & he served time
Forgiveness - S says O asked for forgiveness
Forgiveness - S told O, I will not forgive - you need to ask God
Forgiveness - S will never forgive O
Forgiveness - S will not forgive: lists O's offenses
Forgiveness - S will not forgive
Forgiveness - S: They say you're supposed to forgive
Forgiveness - Turn it over to God
Forgiveness: S - harder to forgive cause O went so long w/o admitting crime
Forgiveness: S - time before O admitted crime prevents forgiveness
Forgiveness - God will take care of it
Helped - Faith in God
Helped - people at church
Helped - Bday party a cemetery each year
Helped - counseled with down to earth pastor
Helped - counselor advised tell people, I can't deal with that
Helped - Counselor who just listened
Helped - CS (and maybe POMC); people who could relate to story therapeutic
Helped - keeping busy w/ helping others helps a lot
Helped - keeping busy w/ leader roles
Helped - one year after death anniversary celebration
Helped – POMC
Helped - POMC - others understand what you are going through
Helped - POMC, Compassion Friends, WKK: these people connect
Helped - POMC; WKOK - wants to help others
Helped - Religion has been a major part of healing
Helped - S talks about V in family/good memories
Helped - S: sense of presence of V on bad days
Helped - support of POMC for murder support
Helped - support of Women Helping Women; YWCA for DV support
Helped - supportive pastor
Helped - volunteer related to crime prevention
Helped - volunteering - look at volunteer codes
Helped - Police exceptionally nice at death notification
Helped: S - Family supportive - did not pull apart
Helped: S - joining POMC
Helped: S - many crime prevent activities help keep memory alive
Justice - Court proceedings - high profile
Justice - if a V was involved in drugs, it's like he/she had no worth
Justice - Legal team don't care how many people they hurt
Justice - Legal team says O will be convicted to pacify S
Justice - not individualized
Justice - O's get less time for killing someone involved in drugs 50
Justice - perpetrators have all the rights
Justice - Process hard on S's; many continuances difficult
Justice - S agreed to plea after hearing prosecutor's logic
Justice - S does not want to be bitter/stopped court accompany to avoid bitter
Justice - S felt victimized cause O had all the rights
Letter - In letter O says it was accident
Letter - In letter O wrote about finding Jesus; turning life around
Letter - O said S should forgive as a Christian
Letter - O wrote to S
Letter - O wrote to S a few times
Letter - O wrote to S after in prison did not ask please forgive
Letter - O wrote to S after in prison & told S she should forgive
Letter - S - does not open letters from O for a couple of days

Letter - S believes crime no accident

Letter - S did not write back to O - Letter [date of letter]

Letter - S received letter of apology from O - Letter [date of letter]

Letter - S says O is making all the decisions here

Letter - S sorry she did not answer letter

Letter - S thinks he wrote letter in prison class: S won't forgive

Letter - S writes to O & asks what happened

Letter - S: O asked forgiveness in letter

Letter - S wrote to O: she wanted to know

Letter - When S got letter she wasn't ready to read it.

Letters - V's letters that she kept

Media - coverage about O upsetting

Media - inaccuracy could not be corrected

Murdered - use word murdered, not lost

Not Helpful - Advocates who don't care about S

Not helpful - counseling could not connect, but POMC helped

Not helpful - counselor/ saw 1 time

Not helpful - grief counselor who says I know what you're going through

Not helpful - grief counselor who speaks about stages of grief

Not helpful - S tried 4 counselors before finding one she liked

Not helpful - they're in a better place or she's away from abuser

Not Helpful - to say now you can go on with life
Not Helpful - to say S has closure

Not Helpful - VINE program malfunction/said O released

Not helpful - wouldn't want a therapist w/o 1st hand exp. Of murder

Not helpful - O gets court transcript free; S's pay $1 per page

O - apology: did not apologize to family

Other's reactions:

Parole - biggest thing/ does not want O to hurt another

Parole - Have petitions signed & that seems to work

Parole - Parole watch life long

Parole - S hopes O dies in prison so her children don't inherit parole

Parole - S left info for OVS so parole can be opposed if S not alive

Parole - S Opposes

Parole - stressful, troubling to keep fighting

Parole - survivor will not oppose parole

Recommendations - allow S to see body sooner after death

Recommendations - have advocate accompany S to viewing of body

S - focus on unfairness: O still has life & family

S - a generous person

S - active for S's

S - volunteers; everything we do is volunteer

S - wishes O would die in prison

S - Difficulty getting info from police

S - Discovered 10 years of DV after V's death through letters
S - Does not believe O's story of crime
S - Does something positive from adversity - others choose death
S - doesn't believe murderers & pedophiles can be rehabbed
S - donated V's organs: questions at time of shock difficult/later glad
S - don't say I know how you feel, you don't know
S - Got death threats from O's
S - had known O's family for years
S - How S sees O - does not think O feels guilt
S - How S sees O - doesn't think O can change
S - How S sees O - don't call him by 1st name; de-familiarize
S - How S sees O - don't call him by 1st name; he's not family
S - How S sees O - nobody has right to take another's life
S - How S sees O - not a good person
S - How S sees O - O confessed. He had no concern for [family member]
S - How S sees O - O has no respect for life
S - How S sees O - O made a choice to be an abuser
S - How S sees O - O should not be allowed to return to society
S - How S sees O - O's story of crime not believable
S - How S sees O - Profiler says he's a serial killer
S - How S sees O - psychopath
S - How S sees O - very demeaning in his talk about V
S - How S sees O - very intent into himself (self-focused jm)
S - How S sees O - he controlled the situation
S - How S sees O/O supposedly found Jesus in jail
S - How S sees O/S has no hatred in heart for O: let God judge
S - How S sees O: don't know what's in O's background/make-up
S - How S sees O: knew him [in the past]
S - How S sees O: no hatred in her heart/ will visit O before release
S - How S sees O; hopes O helps himself before release
S - How S sees O; hopes she never sees O
S - How sees O; crime no accident
S - knows about services for survivors
S - living w/ murder a lifelong experience
S - O's family did not acknowledge death till 1 yr. later
S - O's family -no ill feelings toward O's family
S - O's family threatened S during court process
S - Realistic about V's dangerous behavior
S - Remembers good times with V
S - Remembers hard times with V
S - unfairness - O's mom sees him: V's in cemetery
S - Volunteered for POMC
S - volunteered/ active at church at time of V's death
S - Volunteers - advocates for change in policy
S - Volunteers - in prisons to save one more family from harm
S - Volunteers – [for support groups]
S - Volunteers - speaks in prisons
S - Volunteers - speaks re: DV & homicide
S - Volunteers - testified for legislature
S - Volunteers - to make sure laws don't change (to let O out)
S - Volunteers - was shy/now brave; feels V is within
S - Volunteers in V's memory to make a difference in someone's life
S - volunteers to break the DV cycle
S - Volunteers to prevent drug use for youth
S - volunteers: crime prevention activities
S - volunteers: speaks at prisons
S- How S sees O: O is not like family
S- How S sees O: O says he's like family
S -O's family only focus on anger at S re: their son
S- Volunteered in POMC so long to show that you can get over this
Sheriff - won't give info for 3.5 yrs.; it's evidence
Spiritual - 2 Dreams: God giving S the nudge to go see O
Spiritual - always been religious person
Spiritual - Angry with God: volunteered at church 1
Spiritual - counseled with down to earth pastor
Spiritual - Did not question God at all
Spiritual - evil happens: God cries w' you
Spiritual - feels that V is with her
Spiritual - Generous; never know if Jesus is asking you to help
Spiritual - God has a plan for S's life: it's written
Spiritual - got a religious background/that helped me

Spiritual - kept praying: faith there, Trusted the Lord

Spiritual - left church & joined new church where pastor supportive

Spiritual - no hatred in heart for O: Religion got S through that

Spiritual - original church did not support

Spiritual - problem w/ the Lord: turned it over when V abused & now V gone

Spiritual - religion has been a major part in my healing

Spiritual - S can't make a judgment on anyone

Spiritual - S goes to [denomination of] church

Spiritual - S had & has strong spiritual life

Spiritual - S had period of being angry with God

Spiritual - S has not been to church since V died

Spiritual - S knows that V's are in heaven

Spiritual - S not religious, but spiritual

Spiritual - S not spiritual

Spiritual - S saved from suicide 2x/ why is God keeping me here 154

Spiritual - source of support/God helps get through volunteer work

Spiritual - support: Lord will carry her through

Spiritual - Trust in the Lord; some good would come of death

Spiritual - volunteered at church: Why did God allow V's death

Spiritual - Feels the lord has the last say on events

Spiritual - I'm the most normal due to belief in God

Spiritual - after 18 months decided the devil encouraged it
Support Groups have different cultures

VOD - S wonders about timing of VOD - would allowing more time to pass be better

VOD - 1st learned at 2 Days in May '05

VOD - Family member says" I just really need to do it. I have to do it."

VOD - Family member wants to meet O

VOD - friend told her re: OVS & she contacted 1 week after murder

VOD - has heard about it: does not know how she heard

VOD - Knows about it

VOD - knows about VOD; thinks she knows more than most S's

VOD - Not interested: Has nothing to say to O

VOD - O: could not proceed because of situation with O

VOD - O: troubling that O has all the rights

VOD - part of S wants to go face to face w/ O (in spite of family discouraging her)

VOD - S Does not know about VOD

VOD - S has discussed VOD w/ OVS

VOD - S initiated request b/c family member interested

VOD - S knows about VOD

VOD - S learned about POMC through OVS

VOD - S not interested: was not ready to hear what O had to say

VOD - S now keeps up w/ OVS; sends info to survivors re: OVS

VOD - S thinks S's go to VOD to get truth & her O would not tell truth

VOD - S would like to know, but will O tell truth

VOD - S: her family member says why talk to O/ O will lie
VOD - will request
VOD - would not VOD: don't want to give O chance to gloat
VOD - would not want VOD
VOD - would not want VOD for her own wellbeing
VOD - would not want VOD: it would cause her upset

Why - what has happened since & who S met (S finds meaning)

Codes – Final Categories for VOD Participants and Support Group Participants

Reports of experiences in the following categories were compiled for the final review.

- Time of Homicide
- Details Surrounding the Crime
- Emotions
- Understanding the Offender’s Circumstances
- Empathy for the Offender
- Forgiveness
- Justice
- Parole
- Spiritual
- VOD
- Volunteer
- Refuses to Be Negative
Codes – Final Categories for VOD Facilitators

Assessment

Behavior of O

Burning Desire - wells up & they have to meet w/ O

Follow-up

Forgiveness - F thinks definition important

Forgiveness - F thinks spontaneous forgiveness due to humanization for both S & O

Forgiveness - some S's say I'll never forgive & by end of process forgiveness happens

Forgiveness linked with spiritual - see it in S's spirit before VOD

How S's Learn About VOD

Humanization

Letters - If there is a cease order or protection order- letters a violation

Letters - ODRC does not like it to happen - tell O don't write S, but it happens

Letters - O's could write to S's & S's could write to O's

Process changes goals

Spiritual - example of spiritual VOD

S's process - S's have talked to family, clergy, therapy before calling (sometimes drug & alcohol addiction occurs)
Some Themes that Occurred in Survivor Groups

- Clergy – Discussed forgiveness with clergy, but did not forgive: 5 survivor participants
- Emotions – Feels better, but continues to miss V: 11 survivor participants
- Emotions – Holidays & birthdays difficult: 6 survivor Participants
- Letters: 7 survivor participants
- Justice: Angry that taxes support O – 3 survivor participants (2 VOD & 1 support group)

After initial review, I went back and examined additional themes that appeared to be relevant more thoroughly to consider nuances. Differences were found in the survivor groups for the following themes:

- Forgiveness Definition – different for VOD and Support Group Survivors
- Forgiveness – Turn it over to God
- Releasing Negative Emotions
- Volunteer Work
Appendix C

Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction

Adult Parole Authority Regions and Units Map

(Reprinted with Permission)
References


Sims, D.D. (2009). Wallowing: How to have a good bad day. Presented at the 23rd Annual National Parents of Murdered Children Conference on 8/22/09, Cincinnati, OH.


