

# DV & THE MEDIA

Media reports often minimize the complexity of domestic violence and unwittingly perpetuate domestic violence stereotypes. The following outline can be helpful for journalists covering domestic violence crimes in order to further explore the dynamics of domestic violence and the impact domestic violence has on the family and community at large.

### **1. Ask Law Enforcement**

Establish if the homicide or assault is legally considered family violence in Georgia. Ask if there are any previous documented instances of domestic violence in the current relationship or previous relationships. Know that prior documented history of violence is not needed to establish a crime as domestic violence.

### **2. Engage Local Domestic Violence Experts**

Local and state experts can provide you with local trends in domestic violence and services available to assist victims.

### **3. Establish the Scope of the Problem**

Domestic violence is not a private problem. Include background data to establish the scope and dimension of domestic violence in the local community. For example, include how often law enforcement officers respond to domestic violence calls. Address how this homicide or assault relates to other domestic violence homicides and assaults in the local community and in Georgia.

### **4. Interview Relevant Sources**

Victims' friends, family members, and co-workers can often provide significant insight into the history of controlling and

abusive behaviors exhibited by the abuser. However, it is best to wait a few days after a homicide to interview them due to possible trauma. When interviewing a domestic violence survivor, consider the safety and confidentiality needs of the interviewee. Avoid using sources emotionally connected to the abuser or sources that do not have significant information about the crime or those involved.

### **5. Illustrate the Warning Signs of an Abusive Relationship and Increased Danger When Leaving**

Cover common patterns of violence in abusive relationships and common barriers for a victim leaving the relationship. Convey that domestic violence is a pattern of behavior that often escalates when a victim is trying to leave or has left the relationship.

### **6. Highlight Patterns of Domestic Violence**

Discuss recurring patterns of abusive behavior which put the more vulnerable members of families — particularly women, teens, children, and elders — at risk. Explore why many abusive relationships are not seen by law enforcement.

### **7. Be Aware of the Impact of Domestic Violence on Children**

When the media covers domestic violence homicides, phrases such as, “the child at the scene was unharmed,” do not accurately convey the trauma experienced by the child. In fact, many of the children who were present on the scene of the homicide witnessed the homicide, discovered their deceased parent(s), called 911, or attempted to resuscitate their parent – involvement that inflicts some level of harm, if only emotionally. Read more about the Impact of Domestic Violence on Children on page 10 in this report.

## 8. Always Provide Domestic Violence Resources

Include information for the local domestic violence program at the end of all domestic violence-related articles and cover the services they provide beyond shelter. A list of state-certified domestic violence programs can be located here <http://children.georgia.gov/dv-crisis-assistance>, and the statewide hotline number is 1(800) 33-HAVEN (1-800-334-2836). Include what family and friends can do if they suspect abuse (see page 54).

## 9. What to Avoid When Covering Domestic Violence Crimes

- Avoid calling domestic violence a “relationship problem,” “lover’s quarrel,” “love triangle,” etc.
- Avoid saying “no motive has been determined;” the motive in domestic violence is almost always power and control.
- Do not focus on the victim’s behavior or engage in victim-blaming.
- Do not assume some cultures or economic classes are more violent than others.
- Avoid treating domestic violence crimes as an inexplicable tragedy beyond the reach of community action.
- Avoid focusing only on the life and position of the perpetrator.

Adapted from: Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Telling the full story: An online guide for journalists covering domestic violence. Available at <http://dvonlineguide.org>.

Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. (2008). Covering domestic violence: A guide for journalists and other media professionals. Available at [http://www.wscadv.org/docs/Media\\_Guide\\_2008.pdf](http://www.wscadv.org/docs/Media_Guide_2008.pdf)

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