

Recommendations for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Advocates

Advocates are uniquely positioned to impact safety for victims and accountability for perpetrators of domestic violence.

The Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project has developed recommendations geared to reduce incidents of domestic violence and domestic violence-related homicide. To affect change, local communities must work diligently to implement these recommendations, which were developed by fatality review teams across the state. Acting on established best practices and calls to action from the Project's 15-year history is how Georgia will see real change in the future.

Safety Planning and Risk Assessment

- + Offer comprehensive, survivor-centered safety planning strategies to all victims and their friends and families who you come in contact with.
- + Engage in safety planning every time you talk with a victim.
- + Integrate awareness of risk factors — such as accusations of infidelity, separation, stalking, shared parenting, and mental health or substance use of the abuser — into advocacy, risk assessments and safety planning with survivors at all points of contact.
- + Ensure that safety plans are victim-centered and survivor driven.
 - A successful safety plan must address the issues that the victim sees as adversely affecting their safety as well as the victim's real life experience and activities.
 - Issues such as the age of the victim, their support network, and the resources they have access to should be considered.
- + Ensure that the victim's safety plan is specific.
 - A great safety plan prompts the survivor to evaluate specific steps they can take to reduce future risk of abuse.
 - The more a victim can mentally rehearse their plan, the more likely it is to be followed, so consider things such as the safest location in their home when violence begins to escalate, where to leave an escape bag, how to safely grow an emergency fund, and determining ways the victim can alter their daily routine to minimize contact with an abuser, which are specific enough to be rehearsed.



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- + Ensure that the victim's safety plan is practical.
 - The safety plan must be able to be achieved by the survivor with minimal barriers.
- + Ensure that the victim's safety plan is built around risk assessment and lethality indicators.
 - Safety planning success hinges on addressing current risk. It must be rooted in known risk and should take into account any lethality indicators which may be present.
 - Consider use of appropriate threat or risk assessments which can be implemented in your practice, including Jacquelyn Campbell's Danger Assessment (dangerassessment.org) or Gavin de Becker's DV MOSAIC (mosaicmethod.com).
- + Implement longer-term safety planning and advocacy beyond leaving.
 - Ensure victims who remain in the relationship or who remain in contact with their abusive partner receive a safety plan.
 - Domestic violence and sexual assault advocates must be well versed in safety planning beyond times of acute crisis. Because risk and safety fluctuate over time, it is necessary that advocates are skilled in safety planning with victims who are both in and out of the relationship. Resources such as Jill Davies' book, *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices* provide skill-building reading which will increase safety planning capacities.
 - For a sample safety planning template for victims who remain in contact, refer to "Advocacy Beyond Leaving: Helping Battered Women in Contact with Current or Former Partners: A Guide for Domestic Violence Advocates" (Jill Davies, 2009).
- + When working with survivors who are experiencing surveillance and technology abuse, utilize the "Technology Safety Plan: A Guide for Survivors and Advocates" from the National Network to End Domestic Violence and other resources available in their toolkit, "Technology Safety & Privacy: A Toolkit for Survivors" available online at techsafety.org/resources-survivors.
- + Understand that safety planning with victims goes hand in hand with accountability for perpetrators. Advocates must use their role to increase opportunities for accountability of batterers.
 - To comprehensively address the problem, system responders must assess their unique position to determine how they can impact change.
 - All stakeholders must take immediate steps to address abusers' issues of non-compliance with court orders or new incidents of abuse.



Community Education and Client Outreach

- + Include the varied definitions of abuse in public presentations to address common misconceptions. Many people believe that abuse must be physical and that to receive services a survivor must both be physically battered and a woman.
- + When conducting community education and outreach activities, articulate a clear message about what your program does that can be easily understood by anyone in the community.
 - Ensure that the full breadth of supportive services is publicized in your community.
 - Evaluate the use of the word “shelter” and how it does not accurately convey the full range of services provided, instead consider “domestic violence program.”
- + Ensure you engage marginalized communities such as women of color, Deaf survivors, LGBTQ victims, male victims, people of limited English proficiency, victims of varied physical or mental abilities, and others who may be less aware that your services are available to them.
 - Ensure photos and language on agency literature and websites are reflective of all victims of domestic violence.
 - Ensure information is accessible to limited English communities or communities with low literacy levels.
 - Distribute domestic violence brochures at vocational schools and in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Organizations such as Caminar Latino, Tapestry, Raksha, and Refugee Family Services should be consulted to provide training about assessing community needs and initiating relevant outreach to multicultural communities.
 - Conduct outreach and provide presentations to ESL Teachers and classes.
 - Make sure services and brochures are available in your community in all needed languages.
 - Include culturally specific materials and resources in community outreach presentations and events.
 - Ensure accessibility of services to victims with criminal histories, particularly when they have been identified as perpetrators by the criminal justice system.
 - Build mutually beneficial relationships and partnerships with culturally specific and LGBTQ community organizations. Engage in cross training and build relationships with one another and collaborate when advocating for victims of domestic violence from marginalized communities.
- + Include messages in public education and outreach efforts directed to family members and friends.



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- Incorporate tips for ways to support a victim, where to call for help, and how to recognize signs of escalating danger.
 - Provide supportive resources which assist bystanders in processing helpful ways to support someone close to them experiencing or perpetrating violence, such as a friends and family support group.
 - Provide materials such as the brochure, “What to do if Friends and Family Members are Being Abused,” available at GeorgiaFatalityReview.com/resources.
- + Make contact information for domestic violence programs available on a widespread basis in all of Georgia’s communities.
- Both traditional and non-traditional systems will benefit from referral information for supportive services such as the statewide domestic violence hotline 1-800-33-HAVEN (1-800-334-2836) and local domestic violence programs.
 - Consider developing materials such as palm cards, resource guides, and other awareness materials which can be distributed in your community.
 - Posters and other awareness resources are also available for download at GeorgiaFatalityReview.com/resources.
- + Expand awareness that co-occurring issues increase risk of lethal incidents of domestic violence. Conduct an awareness campaign and continuing education for stakeholders which includes messaging that while other issues co-occur with intimate partner violence, they do not cause it.
- + Collaborate with community partners
- Develop materials about services, which can be distributed to victims on-scene by local law enforcement.
 - In communities where multiple agencies provide similar services to victims, develop partnerships and conduct assessments of strengths and needs together.
 - Collaborate and share referral and resource information to ensure barriers for victims are minimized, regardless of their point of entry into the judicial process.
 - Cross-train on services provided and utilize each other’s expertise to improve all services.
 - Consider ways which you can assist your community partners to develop their basic safety planning skills. Training on safety planning provides an excellent opportunity to bridge the gap between domestic violence programs and other agencies in contact with victims, and enhances the coordinated community response to intimate partner violence.



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- Encourage victims to seek follow-up through personal referrals between agencies. Use existing relationships with other advocates and service navigators to provide warm referrals and “pass the torch” between agencies.
- Develop relationships with and build capacity of local school boards, teachers, faith agencies with youth groups, after-school programs, camp counselors, coaches, and teen parent program staff to provide resources and programs on healthy dating relationships.
 - Programs are available to teach students to recognize healthy, safe qualities and behaviors in relationships. Many, including the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence’s “Take a Stand FOR Healthy Teen Relationships” are designed for in-school use. Visit [NCADV.org/teens4healthyrelationships](https://www.ncadv.org/teens4healthyrelationships) to download the program’s materials for students grades 6–12. School personnel including teachers, counselors, School Resource Officers, office staff, coaches and school leadership should also receive training on identifying and responding to relationship violence among students.
- Learn about new and existing VAWA housing protections, which now include Low Income Housing Tax Credit properties, and work with local public housing authorities, local HUD Continuums of Care, and landlords to help them understand their obligations under VAWA.
 - Offer training to local landlords, property managers, and housing authorities about domestic violence and relevant state and federal laws protecting domestic violence victims’ housing rights.
- Engage your local domestic violence task force.
 - If you are not an active member, attend a meeting.
 - Organize an open house at your agency, and invite task force members to attend or provide a presentation at a task force meeting about your agencies’ programs and services.
 - Information about Georgia’s domestic violence task forces is available at gcfv.georgia.gov/family-violence-task-forces.
- Ensure responders from across the spectrum receive training on the issue of intimate partner stalking.
 - The training should incorporate both the identification of stalking behaviors and how to respond to intimate partner stalking in accordance with best practices within their field.
- Sponsor domestic violence in the workplace trainings.
 - With help from your local Chamber of Commerce, this type of outreach will empower employers to develop a plan for addressing domestic violence which makes sense for their company.



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- This plan may include the development of a model domestic violence in the workplace policy such as those found at WorkplacesRespond.org.
- You can request the Domestic Violence in the Workplace Train the Trainer Toolkit at GeorgiaFatalityReview.com/resources.
- Provide domestic violence training to faith leaders and engage them in the work to end domestic violence.
 - Safe Sacred Space: A Training Guide for Family Violence Task Forces is available for download at GeorgiaFatalityReview.com/resources and additional information can be obtained at FaithTrustInstitute.org.

Intake

- + Evaluate how agency policies and practices may prevent victims from reaching out or create barriers to them receiving the services they need when they do reach out.
 - Examine your program's intake forms, questionnaires and outreach materials for accessibility and visibility for different languages, abilities and cultural representations.
 - Ensure Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act is being followed.
 - Develop a language access plan to ensure language services are provided for all Limited English Proficient (LEP) people and develop a plan to better serve victims with disabilities during systems contacts including crisis or 911 calls, initial law enforcement response, follow-up investigations, prosecution-based case preparation and decisions, court proceedings, court and prosecutor-based victim advocacy services, and in written materials such as outreach letters and TPOs.
 - For adequate translation, use "I Speak" booklets to help identify which languages the victim and perpetrator speak, available for download at dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/crcl/crcl-i-speak-booklet.pdf.
 - Ensure that intake forms and assessments include language and categories which reflect a variety of relationships in which abuse occurs and demographics of the victim and perpetrator.
- + Ask victims about presence of firearms at home and develop safety plans specific to the presence of weapons.
 - Work with victims to document perpetrators' access to and possession of firearms, including firearms the perpetrator owns, shares with others, or otherwise has access to; specific make, model and caliber of firearms; and the specific location and how to access the firearms.



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- + Incorporate suicide risk factors into existing domestic violence lethality assessments and intake questions about history of abuse.
 - Educate victims on homicide-suicide connections and additional safety risks when mental health issues are present.
 - Ask direct questions about threats to kill or cause harm, recent financial or employment changes, looming court dates, declining health and any changes in the abuser's perception of reality.
 - Provide access to in-house counseling or a list of local mental health resources available. Include varied options for assistance and include phone numbers such as the Georgia Crisis and Access Line (1-800-715-4225 or www.mygcal.com).
 - Draw awareness to walk-in clinics or hospitals, which provide emergency mental health intervention and treatment.
- + Include questions about stalking behaviors in your initial screening for abuse. Consider asking questions such as:
 - Have you had concerns that your partner has utilized a phone, computer, app, GPS device or other technology ("technology") to place you under surveillance?
 - Has your partner ever used technology to track your location?
 - Has your partner ever used technology to monitor your behaviors or actions?
 - Has your partner ever used technology to listen in on your conversations?
- + Develop a plan to document stalking behaviors the victim may be experiencing and preserve existing evidence.
 - Guide the victim to look for information in phone records and emails, and identify witnesses who can corroborate experiences. Encourage the victim to consider video surveillance if out of the relationship with the stalker. Encourage use of a stalking log, such as the one available GeorgiaFatalityReview.com/resources.

Advocacy

- + Ensure that equal attention is paid to victims and their needs, regardless of whether they are in or out of their relationship. Risk and safety fluctuate with time and additional followup contacts may be needed as the relationship dynamics change.
- + Prioritize economic empowerment in ongoing client advocacy



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- Learn about and advocate for victims to obtain the full range of services and exemptions for domestic violence victims in economic assistance programs such as TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families).
 - Ensure that victims are aware of services and support available through the Georgia Crime Victims Compensation Program.
 - Provide referrals to and assistance with filing for Crime Victims' Compensation through the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC). Information about the program can be obtained at crimevictimscomp.ga.gov
 - Cultivate resources that can fill gaps in what Crime Victims' Compensation can pay, such as relocation expenses and safety improvements. Maintain ongoing contact with the victim for periodic safety checks outside of times of acute crisis.
- + When working with victims and their support systems, actively screen for indicators of depression, suicide, and substance abuse issues in abusers. Talk with them about how these factors may affect their safety and conduct safety planning accordingly.
- Refer to “Intervention Strategies When Working with Victims” on page 61 of the 2014 Annual Report, available at GeorgiaFatalityReview.com
 - Discuss with victims how mental health issues and substance abuse issues often co-occur with issues with domestic violence. Addressing this co-occurrence often requires partnering treatment interventions with Family Violence Intervention Programs.
- + Cross-train with professionals responding to co-occurring issues with domestic violence, including substance abuse or mental health issues. Because of the high likelihood that your respective populations of clients will experience multiple co-occurring issues, Georgia's professionals should be equipped not only to provide triage to a co-occurring issue outside of their expertise, but also be knowledgeable on the local, state and national resources appropriate to provide additional support alongside their targeted interventions.

Legal Advocacy

- + Provide an adequate number of legal advocates to assist victims who wish to file a Temporary Protective Order (TPO) and conduct survivor-centered safety planning and risk assessment for victims seeking legal interventions.
- + Take action to increase the availability of quality civil legal assistance to victims.
 - Establish a relationship with the local legal services/legal aid office to refer victims to a lawyer for the 12-



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- month hearing and other types of cases such as eviction, child custody, legitimization, and divorce.
- Approach the local bar association about providing private attorneys continuing education training on best practices responding to domestic violence.
- + Routinely ask victims about abusers' access to firearms and help victims understand the Court's ability to restrict access to firearms.
 - Collect information on firearms access from both the victim and offender, including locations where weapons are stored.
 - Ensure victims who are seeking a TPO include relief specific to firearms in their Petitions.
 - Until Georgia codifies the federal firearms prohibitions into local law, much of the work of reducing abuser access to firearms will be done from the bench. Meet with local judges to encourage them to proactively address firearms access in TPOs and hold compliance hearings to ensure prohibitions are followed.
 - Engage other systems providers with your local task force or coordinated community response to develop countywide protocols to establish how each agency will cooperate to restrict access to firearms by domestic violence offenders and protective order respondents.
- + Conduct an evaluation of the TPO process to determine whether it is victim-centered and whether relief requests are comprehensive.
 - Ensure up-to-date TPO forms are being provided and utilized by Pro Se victims.
 - Assess the ease of access to not only the TPO process for victims, but also the contempt process.
 - Ensure that civil avenues to enforce orders are readily available to victims.
 - Ensure the Court provides forms for victims interested in self-petitioning for contempt issues, along with referral information for victim services to be distributed by court staff.
 - If multiple organizations provide assistance in obtaining a TPO in your area, collaborate in your evaluation to ensure that victims receive a similar level of service regardless of their point of entry to the civil legal system.
- + When processing violations of existing orders with victims, encourage criminal accountability rather than civil contempt, when appropriate. Assist the victim by making a warm referral to law enforcement if criminal action is pursued.
- + Document all issues of contempt or violations of TPOs, regardless of if enforcement is addressed immediately.
- + Explain the victim's rights, including modifying or extending their order.



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- + Implement procedures to follow-up with victims while their TPO is in place; TPOs are a part of a process for increasing victim safety and not a single event.
 - o Offer services beyond the TPO and check in with victims during the course of their TPO to determine if emerging safety issues have developed, if contempt or violations have occurred and whether the victim would like to extend the order.
 - o Make follow-up contacts with victims to determine if new safety issues have emerged and assess additional services which may benefit victims.
 - + Learn about immigration relief available to survivors and educate immigrant survivors about their rights (including immigration relief for survivors), the U.S. court system, and available services.
 - o Support their connections to their cultural community and ensure their safety plan includes safety planning around immigration status and potential deportation.
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Shelter Services

- + Avoid implementing restrictive policies that control or limit survivor access to cell phones, social media or other technology. Instead, educate survivors about the risks and benefits of technology and safety plan with them (and their children) in an empowerment-based and realistic way.
 - + When safe to do so, help survivors rebuild connections with support systems. Evaluate programmatic policies and practices that may hamper the victim's ability to stay connected or reconnect with these key supporters, especially when the victim is utilizing shelter services.
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Children's Programs

- + Ensure child victims perceive their victimization to be of equal importance as the adult victim. If they have experienced a traumatic event, making statements like "This is already hard enough on your mother" minimizes the impact the event has had on them and eliminates opportunities to discuss ways you could help them feel supported.
- + Children exposed to violence, particularly those who have been impacted by a lethal incident of violence, may experience a delayed processing of events. Conduct follow-up with child victims or their guardians six months to a year later, to determine if emerging needs for services exist.
- + Provide referrals to additional resources if a victim has not been satisfied with the services they received from prior referrals. This is especially important if a victim did not bond with a counselor.



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- Consider linking the child to peer support as a supplement to traditional counseling.
- + Build your program's capacity to respond to teens experiencing relationship violence, as well as those who witness violence in their own homes.
 - The expansion of teen dating violence prevention programs should include teen-centered interventions for victims experiencing dating violence. Examples include safety planning options specifically for and hosting support groups for victims of teen dating violence and/or teens who have been exposed to domestic violence involving adults in their home.
 - Georgia domestic violence programs interested in expanding services to teens should consider contacting the Georgia Teen Advocate Network (GTAN), a cohort of advocates who are working to implement and improve local teen dating violence awareness and prevention programs and empower youth as allies in their efforts. For more information on joining GTAN, contact the Partnership Against Domestic Violence (404) 870-9600 or Project Safe (706) 549-0922.
- + Evaluate community resources available to children who have been exposed to domestic violence and/or survived domestic violence homicide. This is imperative to break the cycle of domestic violence and prepare children to have healthy relationships.
 - Communities should develop protocols for outreach and response to child witnesses of domestic violence and for child survivors of domestic violence homicide.
 - Protocols should make certain children are referred to counseling with therapists who specialize in grief and trauma, and ensure surviving family members who are raising children are aware of kinship care resources and the Crime Victims Compensation Program.
 - Protocols should also include strategies for conducting follow-up with families at six months, one year, 18 months and two years after the homicide. Consider reviewing the model protocol "When Children Witness Domestic Violence Parental Homicide," developed by the House of Ruth (Maryland) and the Baltimore City Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team to assist with this process.
 - Develop new resources and services which benefit child witnesses.
 - Proactive responses to children exposed to domestic violence require significant commitment from their community and local service providers. Every system can play a role in assisting children exposed to domestic violence. Family connections, local school boards, teachers, faith-based youth groups, after-school programs, camp counselors and coaches are each positioned to develop resilience in children and to provide warm referrals to existing resources. Every system should promote programs for children and teens which teach coping skills, positive and healthy



relationships and how to identify and manage emotions.

Use the Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project Annual Report

+ Read and Remember

- Read the fatality review reports and remember the stories of those who have lost their lives to domestic violence.
- Share victims' names and stories at events that honor domestic violence victims and survivors.

+ Share with Others

- Copies of this report and prior reports are available at GeorgiaFatalityReview.com. Email the link to coworkers, advocates, judges, police officers, mental health professionals, substance abuse counselors, attorneys, health care workers, religious leaders, teachers, family, and friends.
- Print the sections you think are relevant to others' work and share these sections with them.
- Print sections as handouts and use them in community presentations.

+ Discuss with Coworkers

- Discuss the report during a staff meeting at your workplace.
- Identify which recommendations are most relevant to your agency, and develop specific steps forward and work toward their implementation.

+ Incorporate into Strategic Planning

- Use the recommendations as a tool for strategic planning.
- If you work in a nonprofit agency, share the fatality review reports with your board of directors.
- Identify other agencies with which you want to collaborate, and discuss specific goals you can work toward together.
- Use fatality review statistics and recommendations in grant proposals.

+ Develop Task Force Initiatives

- As a group, identify areas in which the community is doing well and areas in which improvement is needed.
- Identify two to four recommendations that are priorities for your community and implement them.



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- Create a subcommittee for your priority areas and report your progress to the Georgia Commission on Family Violence.

+ Increase Community Awareness

- Create discussion groups in your community to talk about the fatality review reports and recommendations for change. These groups can be interdisciplinary groups of professionals or groups of community members interested in making their communities safer and healthier.
- As a group, identify action steps toward implementing the recommendations in this report.
- Contact the Georgia Commission on Family Violence or the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence for further conversations and presentations.

+ Alert the Media

- Alert the local media about fatality review findings, recommendations, and local work being done to help victims of domestic violence.
- For additional suggestions about working with the media download our Domestic Violence and The Media tip sheet here GeorgiaFatalityReview.com/resources/.

