

Recommendations for Victim Witness Advocates

Prosecution-based 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.

Victim Contacts

- + Obtain multiple methods of contact for victims, including friends or family members who will know how to reach them, even if they change their own contact information.
 - + Maintain regular contact with victims to conduct safety checks and to offer advice on how they can best document the offending behaviors to help build a stronger case.
 - + Make contact with the victim prior to court if there are provisions in place, to verify there has been no contact by the abuser.
 - + Despite the usual efforts to reduce their time in court, in those cases where children are also primary victims, consult them about their desire to participate in the court process. Avoid making statements to child victims like "This is already hard enough on your mom." Remarks similar to those may imply to the child victim that trauma they have experienced is less important than that of the adult victim.
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Safety Planning and Risk Assessment

- + Secure basic safety planning training for all responders and service providers. 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.
- + Offer comprehensive, survivor-centered safety planning strategies to all victims and their friends and families who contact your program. Involve a domestic violence or sexual assault advocate in the safety planning when appropriate.
- + Engage in safety planning every time you talk with a victim.



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- + 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 the victim’s safety plan is 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 victim 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.
- + Ensure that the victim’s safety plan is practical.
 - The safety plan must be able to be achieved by the victim 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.
 - 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).



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- + 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.
 - o To comprehensively address the problem, systems responders must assess their unique position to determine how they can impact change.
 - o All stakeholders must take immediate steps to address abusers’ issues of non-compliance with court orders or new incidents of abuse.

Partner with Other Advocates

- + Work collaboratively with domestic violence programs to implement measures to hold offenders accountable and increase victim safety.
- + 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. Posters and other awareness resources are also available for download at GeorgiaFatalityReview.com.
 - o Make brochures and materials on domestic violence program services available in prosecution offices.
 - o Provide warm referrals to domestic violence advocates for ongoing supportive services and safety planning.
 - o Increase awareness of resources available to teens who have experienced abuse. Georgia teens can contact the Breaking Silence Teen Textline any time at (706) 765-8019 for confidential support. Love Is Respect also offers teens a safe place to connect with an advocate via text. Users can text “loveis” to 22522 to receive assistance from a peer advocate.
- + Partner with your domestic violence program to obtain training on the dynamics of domestic violence and lethality indicators, impact of trauma, identifying mental health issues and intervention strategies.
- + 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



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accordance with best practices within their field.

- + Implement partnerships so that community-based advocates are notified when there is a domestic violence murder-suicide in your community. Reach out to family members to provide them with information on the Georgia Crime Victims Compensation Program and other services available to them such as the Support for Survivors of Murder-Suicide Project through the Georgia Commission on Family Violence.

With the Prosecution Team

- + Provide contact information to the victim for all staff who will be handling the case, but identify a point person who will be the best contact.
- + Minimize how often a victim has to tell her story, particularly when she has just experienced a traumatic event.
- + To comprehensively address the problem, systems 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.

Use the Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project Annual Report

- + Read and Remember
 - o Read the fatality review reports and remember the stories of those who have lost their lives to domestic violence.
 - o Share victims' names and stories at events that honor domestic violence victims and survivors.
- + Share with Others
 - o 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.
 - o Print the sections you think are relevant to others' work and share these sections with them.
 - o Print sections as handouts and use them in community presentations.
- + Discuss with Coworkers
 - o Discuss the report during a staff meeting at your workplace.



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- 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.
 - 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.
 - 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/.

