

Recommendations for Law Enforcement

Law Enforcement Officers 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.

Be Part of a Coordinated Community Response

- + Ensure all law enforcement officers have the resources, training and information they need to respond to domestic violence calls. Because officers are often the first point of contact victims will have with “the system,” how their case is handled often sets the tone for future requests for assistance or intervention by victims. Ensuring officers have a dynamic understanding of the problem of domestic violence and how to intervene is vital. Providing any additional resources and support they need to do their job effectively is imperative.
 - 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 all officers are aware of the breadth of local domestic violence resources, particularly services beyond shelter. Be aware of how language about the programs may impact the victim's choice to seek supportive services. Use language such as “domestic violence program” rather than “battered women's shelter,” as the latter implies a victim must be a woman, must be experiencing physical abuse, and must leave the relationship -- none of those are requirements of state-certified domestic violence programs.
- + Provide warm referrals to domestic violence advocates for ongoing supportive services and safety planning.
 - Provide information about victims' rights and supportive services to victims on-scene. Partner with your local domestic violence agency to develop materials such as palm cards and brochures.
 - Connect the victim to an advocate at a local domestic violence program and provide them with Georgia's statewide 24-hour domestic violence hotline: 1-800-33-HAVEN.
 - Georgia teens experiencing abuse can contact the Breaking Silence Teen Textline any time at (706) 765-8019 for confidential support.



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- Make brochures and materials on domestic violence program services available in offices. Posters and other awareness resources are also available for download at GeorgiaFatalityReview.com.
- + 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.
 - Request assistance from your local domestic violence program to ensure that any staff, including administrative staff who may have contact from a potential victim, have been trained on the basics of how to provide triage when safety issues arise.
- + Include messaging in public education and outreach efforts directed to family members and friends. Incorporate tips for how to support a victim, where to call for help, and recognizing signs of escalating danger. Provide supportive resources which assist bystanders in processing helpful ways to support someone close to them experiencing or perpetrating violence, and when to reach out for law enforcement assistance.
- + 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.

Documenting the Abuse

- + During all contacts with victims:
 - Obtain excited utterances.
 - Obtain the basics: who? what? when? where? Why?
 - Ask open-ended questions such as “And then what happened?” and use statements such as, “Tell me more about that.”
 - Ask victims if they have reported the issues to anyone else, police or otherwise. Obtain contact information for others who may have been informed of the issues.
 - Avoid stopping the victim in the middle of explaining an incident. You can always go back and correct the timeline of events.
 - Maintain a nonjudgmental attitude during the interview.
 - Take precise notes and use quotations in incident reports when possible.
 - Use techniques that build rapport with the victim and demonstrate your concern and care.



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- + Ensure all parties involved have a private interview and are separated for questioning to ensure neither party can see nor hear the other.
- + Minimize how often a victim has to tell her story, particularly when she has just experienced a traumatic event.
- + Regardless of the classification of the offense, treat each call as if responding to a crime scene. Document key observations such as the state of the scene, the demeanor and physical appearance of the victim and perpetrator, and the identity and contact information for any witnesses. Whenever possible, take photographs and seize evidence such as damaged property, torn clothing, and any weapons.
- + Complete reports for all family violence calls, including calls during for which there is no probable cause to arrest, as mandated.
 - o Consider obtaining a handwritten statement. If the victim changes her mind about prosecution, the statement may prove helpful in an evidence-based prosecution.
- + Ensure proper primary aggressor identification and charges for all family violence crimes.
 - o When an officer is unable to determine who the primary (dominant) physical aggressor is, they should include in their report why they were unable to do so.
 - o Dual arrest in cases of intimate partner violence should be exceptionally rare. Engage your chain of command and prosecution for input prior to a dual arrest.
- + Rather than refer a victim to seek warrants for the arrest of her abuser, take warrants yourself in any circumstance where probable cause exists. This not only reduces the level of danger to the victim, but also increases likelihood the case will be successfully prosecuted due to your experience in evidence documentation and collection.
- + If the victim is still engaging with the abuser, understand this may be the best way for the victim to remain safe. The most dangerous time for victims in an abusive relationship are when she leaves or when the abuser perceives she may be taking steps to end the relationship.
- + Partner with Child Advocacy Centers to provide forensic interviews for children exposed to domestic violence crimes, to greatly reduce the level of trauma experienced by children during investigative interviews.

Address Abuser Access to Firearms

- + Address abuser's access to firearms at all contacts. Collect information on firearms access from both the victim and offender.
 - o When responding to domestic violence incidents and while parties are separated, ask victims about



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. Include these details in your incident report.

- + If a Temporary Protective Order (TPO) prohibits possession of a firearm and an abuser/Respondent is found in possession of a firearm, arrest him on either an aggravated stalking charge, if appropriate, or violation of a family violence order. Seize the weapon and notify the U.S. Attorney's Office.
- + If an officer finds an abuser to be in possession of a weapon after being convicted of a qualifying misdemeanor family violence offense, seize the weapon and notify the U.S. Attorney's Office.
- + Develop countywide protocols with community partners to establish how each agency will cooperate to restrict access to firearms by domestic violence offenders and protective order Respondents.
 - o Georgia's communities must carry the torch for this important issue until legislative and legal system actions catch up with the risk firearms pose to citizens of our state. Develop a plan to address abuser access with your local task force or coordinated community response.
 - o Prioritize removing firearms from abusers who have made homicidal or suicidal threats.
 - o Offer "take and maintain" opportunities both in response to TPOs and in cases where the perpetrator agrees to safekeeping when no order is present.

Responding to Allegations of Stalking

- + Ensure officers 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.
- + Develop or utilize existing screening tools for stalking behaviors which can be implemented at all points of contact with potential victims. Assessments such as the Stalking and Harassment Assessment and Risk Profile (SHARP) (available free of charge at CoerciveControl.org), Jacquelyn Campbell's Danger Assessment (DangerAssessment.org), or the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA) (odara.waypointcentre.ca) assess the big picture of the stalking situation by examining the course of conduct and provide a framework to educate victims about risks and safety.
- + When responding to any type of case where a victim reports harassing behavior, consider the possibility of a stalking case. Determine whether it is an isolated incident or repeated conduct.
 - o If stalking is identified, provide the victim with resources and connect the victim to an advocate at a local domestic violence program.



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- When obtaining the basic answers to who? what? when? where? and why?, pay special attention to the question of “why?,” which is often more important in cases where stalking is suspected.
- Develop the context of the stalking. Ask victims why they are afraid, even if their fear appears unreasonable.
- + Prepare for the future of your case by preserving evidence of stalking behaviors at each and every contact.
 - Take photographs of text messages or written communications.
 - Photograph any items that have been vandalized, damaged or written on.
 - Collect any physical evidence, such as items left for the victim.
 - Guide the victim to look for information in phone records and emails.
 - Encourage the victim to use a stalking log (available at GeorgiaFatalityReview.com/resources) and to identify witnesses who can corroborate the stalking behaviors.
- + Interview the suspect at home when possible.
 - Be observant: take note of his vehicle, what type of phone(s) and computer(s) he uses, presence of cameras, journals which may detail the stalking, and photos or videos of the victim.
- + Use search warrants for the suspect’s residence, vehicle and workplace when appropriate.
- + If you are unable to determine probable cause, take time to discuss how to document and report the offending behavior with the victim, so that you may build a case.
- + Investigate co-occurring incidents such as vandalism, burglary, or violation of a protective order, to determine if the behaviors establish a course of conduct.
- + At subsequent calls for service, look for escalation.
 - Ask the victim what has changed since the last call.
 - Connect the dots to previous calls in your report and check in with others involved in the case.

Responding to Incidents Involving Mental Health

- + Take additional precautions when responding to domestic violence incidents where either depression or suicidal ideation is known to be present. Suicidal abusers are a risk not only to themselves, but also the victim, other family members and responding officers.



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- + Obtain training on mental health and suicide to assist in identifying needed interventions for suicidal perpetrators.
 - + Routinely ask all parties and witnesses about depression and suicidal ideation of abusers to increase officer and victim safety.
 - + Relay concerns about a suicidal and depressed perpetrator to the victim, along with a referral to a domestic violence program, to improve her safety.
 - o Expand awareness that co-occurring issues increase risk of lethal incidents of domestic violence. Conduct an awareness campaign or continuing education for stakeholders which includes messaging that while other issues co-occur with intimate partner violence, they do not cause it.
 - + Develop specialized protocols for response to domestic violence incidents in which mental health is a factor, like those developed for Crisis Intervention Teams (CITs) by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and the Georgia Chapter of National Alliance on Mental Illness.
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Civil Orders

- + Receive training on where/how victims can obtain a Temporary Protective Order (TPO) and on procedures and safety considerations when serving and enforcing them.
 - o Prioritize TPO service and ensure all officers know that any sworn officer can serve a TPO.
 - + When responding to a domestic violence-related call, assess whether any court orders have been violated. If they have, take swift action to enforce the order.
 - + Never mediate an alternative to an existing court order involving the parties.
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Protocols and Policies

- + In communities where the caseload is large enough to warrant it, specialized domestic violence units should be created using national models for detectives, prosecutors and judges. This approach should focus expertise, improve interagency cooperation and provide a system that's better prepared to hold offenders accountable.
- + Incident Reports
 - o Review policies and practices for monitoring the accuracy and completeness of family violence incident reports.



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- Institute offense report reviews on an ongoing basis to monitor adherence to policy, and to reduce liability and danger to officers and victims.
- + Warrant Taking
 - Review policies and protocols to ensure responding officers, upon finding probable cause for domestic violence, immediately prepare arrest warrants for the perpetrator.
 - Policies should direct officers to complete warrants rather than directing victims to seek their own warrants.
- + Dual Arrests
 - Monitor the level of dual arrests and female arrests, and consider implementing training and accountability mechanisms to counteract any identified issues.
 - Develop policies for handling cases where it is later believed a victim of domestic violence was arrested for a domestic violence-related crime. Engage domestic violence advocates to assist with this.
- + Abusers Who are “Gone on Arrival”
 - Develop “gone on arrival” protocols to ensure officers are following up on cases where the abuser fled the scene prior to law enforcement response.
 - These protocols should include both provisions for swift apprehension of an abuser who fled when a warrant was issued, and follow-up with parties in circumstances where the abuser fled and no probable cause was determined.
 - This type of protocol is implemented in the Blueprint for Safety created by Praxis International.
- + Abusers with Mental Health Issues
 - If departmental protocols for mental health response exist, incorporate screening for domestic violence lethality indicators into the protocol.
- + Language Access
 - Provide ongoing culturally specific training and information to all staff addressing the intersection of domestic violence and marginalized and underserved communities.
 - Develop a language access plan ensuring language services are provided for all Limited English Proficient (LEP) persons during initial law enforcement response, follow-up investigations, and in written materials.
 - Screen to make certain victims can read their own language and make sure that materials are written for a lower reading level. Have a backup plan for when victims are unable to read their language.



+ Death Cases

- Implement partnerships so that prosecution-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.
 - Make surviving family members aware of services available through the Georgia Commission on Family Violence's Support for Survivors of Murder-Suicide Program.

- + Ensure that any personnel responsible for death notifications is trained in trauma and that the agency has protocol in place for return of personal effects and evidence in a trauma-informed manner.
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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, 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 briefing, roll call or 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.
- Identify other agencies with which you want to collaborate, and discuss specific goals you can work toward together.



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- 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.

