

Addressing Domestic Violence in the Media: Resources for Reporters, Editors, and Media Professionals

Why do domestic violence stories matter?

Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive, controlling behavior that can include, but is not limited to, [physical violence](#). The impact of domestic violence, including its stigma, can result in lasting trauma. Sharing stories of violence and abuse can help reduce stigmatization and silence, let survivors know they are not alone, and inspire policymakers and community leaders to create change.

It is crucial, however, that writers and media use storytelling, story-collecting strategies, imagery, and headlines that are trauma-informed and **do not cause harm**. Sensationalizing trauma or perpetuating victim-blaming narratives do more harm to survivors and their families.

What considerations are there for reporting on domestic violence?

Do no harm. The goal of any story related to domestic violence should be to promote public health and public good by increasing understanding and awareness of the complex realities of domestic violence. When seeking background information, sources, or further resources, start with these two important questions: 1) Is there a chance that publishing any of this information could put the survivor(s) in my story at risk? 2) Does my story contribute to increasing public health by providing the necessary context to understand domestic violence and resources to get help?

Personal accounts of domestic violence can humanize a story, but this must be done with compassion and thoughtfulness. Allow the survivor to set whatever boundaries they need, and ensure they feel included and respected in every step of the process. Fact-checking stories can put survivors at great risk. Unless given explicit permission by a survivor, never attempt to contact anyone else related to their story – including but not limited to the perpetrator. If a survivor has asked to remain anonymous, thoroughly check your story for details that may allow someone to discover their identity (e.g., details about their clothing, hometown, job, or family structure, etc.). Tell any survivor who wishes to remain anonymous that there is no way to guarantee complete anonymity, and respect their right to pull their story if it puts their safety at risk.

Recognize the broader context of domestic violence, and use language of accountability. Stories often focus on a specific incident, usually physical violence, and don't place it within the context of a pattern of abuse. This can reinforce the notion that domestic violence only includes physical abuse and that these incidents are isolated. Use *language of accountability* when applicable (For example, "He threatened her repeatedly with violence," instead of "She feared his threats"). Also, describe domestic violence without sensationalizing it. For example, characterizing an assault as "a domestic dispute" implies mutuality, and it doesn't reflect the actions of the perpetrator or the severity of the physical or psychological harm. Ensure that headlines and accompanying images also follow these guidelines. Never use photos of injuries and avoid threatening imagery and headlines.

Where can I learn more?

Accurate and fair journalism is essential to creating more awareness and compassion. Please see these resources for further reading, and thank you for your work.

www.NNEDV.org/media_resources | www.NNEDV.org/media_furtherreading