

Responding to Media Requests about Domestic Violence Homicides

Reporters can make you feel like you've got to move fast with no time to think. But remember, they want your knowledge and perspective, so you should take a bit of time to make sure you're prepared to answer their questions.

What WSCADVSA can do to help:

- Support you in preparing to speak with a reporter.
- Support you in preparing to address domestic violence homicides with your program staff, local system partners, or your community.
- Provide information and [recommendations](#) learned from [fatality reviews](#).

Tips for speaking with media:

Don't just start answering questions, even really simple ones.

- Find out their timeline. When are they aiming to publish/air the piece?
- Ask what the article is about. What angle are they taking? What are they hoping you'll contribute?
- You don't have to do it. Don't agree to an interview if you don't have an opinion or expertise on the subject.
- If you do agree to talk, set up an appointment and ask them if they will email the questions ahead of time.

Take some time to prepare:

- Don't just think about how to answer the interviewer's questions. Think about what it is that you want to say to the people reading/listening.
- Simplify your message. Think of the one top thing you want to be in the article. Does it make sense without any other explanation?
- Write down your top two or three points in full sentences, in your own voice. Read them aloud and rewrite any spots that you stumble over.
- Also, note down a few stories that illustrate your point. Reporters love stories.

During the interview:

- Don't feel you need to answer every question. You can just say: "I'm not sure about that, but what I can tell you is [your message]"
- Consider not commenting on specific cases since you don't know all the details of what happened. You can get to your message by saying: "While we don't know what brought him to this point, in our experience domestic violence abusers..." or "what domestic violence survivors tell us is..."
- Pause before answering each question. It's fine to say, "That's a great question. Just let me think for a minute on how to best answer it."

Talking points for addressing domestic violence homicides:

Domestic violence homicides:

- About half of homicides of women in Washington State are related to intimate partner violence. You can find current numbers of domestic violence homicides and suicides by year and by county here: <https://wscadv.org/resources/fatalities-county-updated-every-6-months/>
- About a third of domestic violence homicides are murder-suicides.

Firearms:

- Consistently, more than half of DV homicides each year are committed with firearms. In 2022, about 70% of DV-related homicides were committed with firearms. Keeping firearms out of the hands of domestic violence abusers is one of the most critical things we can do to reduce dv homicides and murder-suicides.
- Firearms in the hands of domestic violence offenders are a deadly combination. This danger extends beyond survivors and families. These firearms pose risks to law enforcement, the community, and offenders themselves.
- In Washington State, firearms are used in domestic violence homicides more often than all other weapons combined.
- A 2013-2014 study shows 54% of these perpetrators were already not allowed to own firearms under Washington State law.
- Research shows the risk of homicide for women increases by 500% when a firearm is present in a domestic violence situation. The risk is highest when she is trying to end the relationship.
- "Recent separation" is the single most important red flag to predict a lethal response, according to the highly respected Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA). 45% of domestic violence homicides occur within 90 days of separation, most within the first few days.

Protection Orders:

- Protection Orders can be a powerful tool that courts can use to keep survivors and their families safe, but we know that that doesn't always stop someone who is intent on harming their partner.
- Access to firearms, threats, violations of no-contact orders, suicide threats – these all indicate a potential for a more dangerous situation. It is important to take that elevated risk into account when making decisions. Courts and prosecutors should use all the tools they have available to protect survivors' safety and hold abusers accountable.
- Whenever a protection order is put into place, it is important for survivors to also get connected to a domestic violence advocate. Advocates can support a survivor in understanding what the court order does, as well as its limitations. They can work with a survivor to develop strategies for staying safe if an abuser violates the order or if the order is dropped and can help connect survivors with other resources they need for their safety and healing. Advocacy and safety planning are especially critical when victims don't get the protection they need from courts or law enforcement.

WASHINGTON STATE COALITION AGAINST
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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT

What do we need to do to improve safety for survivors and prevent homicides?

- Service providers, systems professionals, advocates, prosecutors have been looking at domestic violence fatalities for many years to try to answer this question. Check out the [Washington State Domestic Violence Fatality review findings and recommendations](#) for issues like firearms, mental health, housing, etc.
- Listen to what survivors need: sometimes that is a criminal legal response, sometimes it is civil legal assistance, affordable housing, childcare, economic justice...
- Connect survivors with advocates.

What people can do? How to help & where to get help.

- Help is available. Anyone can reach out for support if they are in danger, need support, or are worried about a friend or family member who may be experiencing domestic violence. Advocacy services are always free and confidential.
- Survivors go to friends and family members for support first before contacting services, so when we know where to go for help, and are ready to listen and support, we can make a big impact and let a survivor know that they are not alone.
- There are over 75 local programs providing domestic violence and sexual assault victim advocacy, emergency support, housing, community education and prevention work in Washington State.
- Every county has community based domestic violence and sexual assault advocacy programs. Services are free and confidential, and separate from the legal system. You don't have to make a police report or go to court to get help from an advocate. [Advocacy program directory](#).
- Anyone can call a local program or the [National DV Hotline](#) (800-799-7233) if they need help or are concerned about a friend or family member. The hotline can help with safety planning, finding resources, or thinking through how to support someone who is being abused.
- [National and regional hotlines that are available 24/7](#).
- Everyone has a role to play in ending domestic violence. If you have a friend or family member who is in an abusive relationship, stay connected and listen. Learn more about what you can do to help a friend or family member:
 - WSCADV - [Friends & Family Guide](#)
 - National DV Hotline - [Tips for Intervening if you witness domestic violence](#)
 - National DV Hotline – [Safety planning for friends & family](#)

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