

Domestic Violence Homicide Response Plan: A Toolkit for Domestic Violence Programs



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Domestic Violence Homicide Response Plan: A Toolkit for Domestic Violence Programs

End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin

www.endabusewi.org

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Introduction

Every survivor that domestic violence programs work with is a potential homicide victim. Advocates know this as they work with survivors, advocating on their behalf and building relationships with them and often their families. Domestic violence programs deal with the reality of knowing that a homicide could happen at any time, yet not allowing this knowledge to overpower their work with victims. When this most tragic violation occurs the traumatic impact is profound. ***This is felt by everyone - no matter the nature of their relationship with the victim.*** The needs of those closest to the victim, including their children, family and friends are of utmost importance. In addition, domestic violence programs, their clients and staff, and the communities they work within are deeply impacted. A homicide can change organizations and communities forever.

During this time, programs are asked to fulfill a variety of roles and often at the same time are dealing with their own sense of loss. An important part of responding and coping with these events is to realize there is no single “right” answer. Each of these tragedies is as unique as the human being whose life was taken, and all aspects of this person’s life and death need to be acknowledged, respected, and addressed as your program and community decide how to respond. It is also critical for the domestic violence program to utilize the tools and skills of trauma-informed care in their interactions with colleagues and others impacted by the death.

The objective of this document is to ***provide a framework for domestic violence programs to develop a plan*** for how they will respond to a homicide in their community, ***whether the victim had been a client or not.*** Additionally, many of the elements of this plan can be adapted for use when programs experience a death of a client in shelter, as often the effects felt are similar.

This document includes information that will assist programs with:

- addressing immediate concrete needs after a domestic violence homicide or death of a client
- responding to the needs of those most directly affected
- providing supportive attention to all involved in the response
- developing ongoing follow-up support practices for all who may request it
- proactively collaborating to create a community wide response before it is needed

End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin (End Abuse) can work with organizations on several levels in the aftermath of a domestic violence homicide or client death, including:

- identifying what needs to be done immediately
- addressing legal issues that may be involved
- working with media

- providing resources specific to marginalized populations
- finding peer support and program coverage as needed
- meeting with staff and volunteers to process the event
- supporting programs and staff on an ongoing basis

Call on End Abuse for support and assistance at any time: 608-255-0539.

A. Needs Within a Domestic Violence Program

It's important to recognize and acknowledge the traumatic impact of a domestic violence homicide or death of a client. Programs must also consider the reality that a staff member or volunteer experiencing domestic abuse may become a homicide victim. Think about ways to have conversations with staff and volunteers on an ongoing basis and solicit ideas regarding what they feel needs to be a part of the discussions. Doing so can solidify a program's responses to these crises in addition to strengthening relationships throughout the organization.

Proactive planning within an organization is critical. It is important to always remember that each situation is unique and there is not one "right" way to handle these tragedies. The communication and support that grows by developing an organization-wide plan increases everyone's sense of confidence in responding.

End Abuse can work with organizations on a number of levels, including:

- identifying what needs to be done immediately
- addressing legal issues that may be involved
- working with media
- providing resources for working with marginalized populations
- finding support in surrounding programs
- meeting with staff and volunteers to process
- supporting programs and staff on an ongoing basis

Resources are also often available in communities that assist with processing traumatic events, such as mental health therapists or an employee assistance program. Whether or not the program has access to such resources in their community, reaching out to End Abuse and surrounding domestic violence programs may also be an important source of support.

Suggestions for preparing a consistent, thoughtful and supportive response to a domestic violence homicide or death of a client:

- Identify one or two staff members to partner with the Executive Director, forming a small internal team to work together in the event of a homicide or client death.
- Involve staff in developing the organization's internal plan. Utilize the items on the following pages to create a customized plan.
- Seek input and ideas from clients via support groups and/or a client advisory committee on what they feel is important to address and consider.

- Provide opportunities for staff, volunteers and board members to learn about different cultural practices in relation to death.
- If one has been completed, introduce the community-wide homicide response plan to staff, volunteers and board members. Thoroughly discuss and solicit questions and comments. *See Section F of this document, “Creating Our Community Foundation,” and Appendix 4, “Exercise: Developing a Community-Wide DV Homicide Response Plan” for more information.*
- Review the program’s confidentiality policy with staff, clients, volunteers, board members and community partners, so that everyone is aware of what can and cannot be shared in the event of a domestic violence homicide or death in shelter, and/or in the event of law enforcement search warrants related to the incident.
- Have ongoing conversations with staff addressing not only the “to do” things, but also the realities of these situations and the effects on the program’s activities and the community in general. Seek input from staff and volunteers regarding how to best support them if/when these incidents occur. Explore what “support” means to the organization, as well as what it means for clients, staff, volunteers and board members specifically.
- Be clear in identifying each person’s role, especially around responses and messages to the community and the media.
- Practice for a “critical incident” to ensure things run smoothly.
- Include discussion about the organization’s homicide response plan during staff and volunteer trainings and answer any questions.
- Refer to Appendix 1 for resources and Appendix 5 for media talking points.
- Develop a “script” for responding to calls for information from the media or others regarding a domestic violence homicide or death of a client:
 - Identify who within the organization should be contacted to respond to the call or inquiry.
 - Put together a “script” for staff or volunteers answering the phones. In addition to your agency’s “Cannot confirm or deny” statement, an example would be:

“All questions and concerns regarding this situation are being handled by our Executive Director. I can take a message and your phone number and they will get back to you.”

- Provide current contact information for the director or staff member designated to respond to media inquiries on the script so that the message can be relayed to them right away.

Internal Plan of Action

See Appendix 2 for a Sample Internal Homicide Response Plan and Appendix 3 for an Internal Homicide Response Plan Template that can be customized to meet the needs of your program.

Initial priorities:

- Inform the Executive Director if they haven't already been informed. As soon as possible, the previously identified one or two staff person(s) meet with the Executive Director to discuss next steps.
- Review the facts: What's known and not known? What do you need to know that you don't? How can you get the information that you don't have?
- What is the immediate "need to know" information for people involved at all levels?
 - *Think critically about what can be shared, considering confidentiality and non-disclosure laws. Keep in mind that not everyone needs the same level of detail.*
- Notify staff, board & volunteers. Discuss what information needs to be given to whom at this time and how it will be done (i.e., in-person, by phone or e-mail).
- When the necessary information to do so has been gathered, decide what the organization's message will be to media and if relevant, social media, regarding the incident.
 - *Develop clear and concise messaging for the media and ensure everyone is clear on who the organization's media spokesperson is. See Appendix 5 for sample media talking points.*
 - *Advise staff, board & volunteers to use social media with caution at this time and not respond to any comments or messages on social media regarding the incident.*
- Identify and contact key community partners and together identify how to respond to the community's needs. Refer to any community-wide domestic violence homicide response plans that are in place.
- Consider whether the victim had children and if they are known to your program. How can they be supported by your program at this time? Have others reached out to your program, or should proactive outreach be conducted to those in the victim's support network?
- Determine a plan for having follow-up conversations regarding the incident at regularly scheduled intervals with all staff, volunteers, clients, and board members.
- Will a vigil or memorial be held, and if so, who will be the point person within your program? If the family has not contacted your program, be sure to try and make contact with them before organizing a vigil. Check if they're comfortable with you hosting one and if they'd like to be involved.

Attending to the needs of clients:

Supporting survivors that your program is working with or previously worked with after a homicide may be an ongoing process. Each person's needs will be unique to their life experience and the level of trauma they are feeling. There are times when someone isn't able to call for months and when they do it's important to be there to help them process through their feelings. Programs must be there to support and assist each person whenever it is needed. *Resources for supporting individuals experiencing trauma are included in Appendix 1.*

Considerations for supporting clients after a domestic violence homicide:

- What is on schedule for today/next few days? Are staff able to carry through on their scheduled activities?
- Who will take the lead on identifying others who can cover for those needing time away?
- Is there a need to call in volunteers? Who will do that?
- Are there individuals who you work with now or have worked with in the past that may be especially impacted by the news? Identify someone that they are comfortable with to contact them.
- Who will be responsible for ensuring clients that have been impacted are regularly communicated with?
- Is there a need to call in support from another domestic violence program in the area? Who will do that?
 - *Ensure that volunteers from another program sign a confidentiality agreement and inform them of relevant program policies that they'll need to know.*
- Does anything need to be cancelled or rescheduled? Who will handle that?
- Will the program provide time for clients to come together? In what way?
- What feedback has been received from clients regarding what would be helpful to them at a time like this?
- Will any clients be attending the funeral(s)? How can the program's staff support them?

Attending to the needs of staff and volunteers:

This is an important time to emphasize that there is a wide range of individual responses to trauma; there is no "right" way to react to a domestic violence homicide or death of a client. How and when to offer support to those in your organization can vary for each person and each incident. Staff and volunteers often question themselves and their work – "What could we have done that may have prevented this homicide? How could this happen when we work so hard?" etc. Other times they are overcome by feelings of hopelessness, frustration, anger and sadness. Advocates may speak of just feeling numb initially and only later are able to experience and express their feelings. For some, a homicide brings the realization that this is not the work for them, and they choose to move on. It is important for the program to

recognize and acknowledge the enormous impact this tragedy has on the entire organization, and the reality that for many things are forever changed. This is why it is critical for those in the program as well as the members of a community-wide homicide response team to process through the experience together in those groups at some time.

Considerations for supporting staff and volunteers after a domestic violence homicide or death of a client:

- Meet with staff and volunteers to discuss their wishes around what support they need.
- Plan how and when to meet for processing and support. Do they want to bring in someone from outside of the agency to facilitate the discussion?
 - *Most programs find it beneficial to have time together soon after, allowing for each person to participate as they wish and feel able. They also recognize the need to gather at a later time. Discuss how to monitor these needs on more long-term basis.*
- All staff can provide a supportive environment by continuing to check in with each other and offering support to other staff and volunteers as needed.
- For directors, this is a time to reach out to other program directors for support and assistance. A director can feel the overwhelming responsibility of taking care of everyone else.
- Other domestic violence programs may contact your program to offer assistance. Ask for what you need, and if you are unsure, ask for help processing through what is happening. It is very common at these times to not even know what you need, but other directors and advocates are often willing to just listen and help problem solve.
 - *One program director who heard of a homicide in a nearby county immediately contacted that program and was able to send a staff person to cover their crisis/phone lines for the day. This was an enormous help and allowed them the time they needed to make arrangements for the next few days.*

Quotes from DV program staff:

“I didn’t realize how deeply it affected me personally as I was so busy worrying about everyone else. It was not until several months after the death that I was consumed by the hurt and frustration.”

“DV homicides raise the level of awareness in communities of how dangerous these cases can become. Our program experienced a higher number of callers to the hotline who were scared that this situation could also happen to them. Other programs may experience fewer calls because of increased fear of repercussions. Managing this ripple effect in the community is challenging.”

B. Outreach & Support for Victims' Family & Friends

When a community experiences a domestic violence homicide, whether the victim is/was a client or not, it is important to thoughtfully define the program's role and level of involvement, especially with surviving family, friends, co-workers and anyone of significance in the victim's life. The type and degree of involvement during this time is dependent on their feelings about the incident, the trauma that they are experiencing and their openness to receiving support from a domestic violence program.

Considerations regarding outreach and support to family, friends and others:

- Was the victim a current or past client? If so, is there a staff member that already has a relationship with the client's family?
- Does the family acknowledge this as a domestic violence homicide?
- What about the family of the alleged perpetrator?
- Can our organization offer supportive counseling to those who were close to the victim, and/or are there other community resources available to fill this need?
- How can we assist them in having their voices heard and telling the victim's story?
- Always be mindful of and sensitive to the cultural norms and religious practices of the victim's family.
- Keep in mind that this experience is triggering for communities as a whole and emphasize to the public that your agency is there to connect anyone with the resources and support they need to heal.
- Consider attending court appearances even if not supporting/working with those that were close with the victim. This sends a message to the courts that the program is impacted by each of these tragedies.

This is where an established community response plan can be beneficial. If the victim was not a client, or if they were but their family was not aware that they were working with the program, you may be able to let other organizations know of your willingness to offer support and ask that they communicate that to any of the victim's loved ones that they have contact with.

Ways that programs around Wisconsin have supported those close to a domestic violence homicide victim:

- Going to court with the family during the trial, or attending when the family couldn't and then meeting with them after
- Spending time with a homicide victim's co-workers, individually and as a group
- Organizing and hosting vigils and memorials
- Attending funerals

If family members or others whom were close to the victim are engaged with your program, look to them at each step of planning any vigil or memorial to ensure that they are comfortable with what is being planned and to determine the degree to which they want to be involved.

Reaching out to those in the victim's cultural community is essential at this time. The relationships you have built throughout your community can be a tremendous resource. In many cultures, there are specific traditions that are observed as well as additional circumstances to be considered for each family and their community. For example, if the victim is an immigrant, an issue may involve the family needing to send the body abroad. Does the embassy need to be contacted for assistance? What are the legal issues the family may need to address? Consider how immigration status may affect how families approach their situation and interactions with law enforcement and other systems. It's important to take into consideration the family's primary language during this process. Bilingual advocates in your program, or in nearby programs, as well as members of that cultural or immigrant community are excellent resources – ask, ask, ask.

There are also statewide resources such as UNIDOS Against Domestic Violence, American Indians Against Abuse, Deaf Unity, and the Refugee Family Strengthening Project that can provide support (see Appendix 1 for more information on these programs). End Abuse is available to assist you in making these connections if requested.

Additionally, pay attention to deaths in your community when you see or hear the term "roommate," and any death in your community involving people perceived as the same gender that seems intimate in nature, or if there is a homicide of a transgender or gender nonconforming person. Often when a trans or gender nonconforming person is killed, police may report the victim as one gender, but comment that the victim was wearing clothing of another gender. When these situations occur, it is helpful for domestic violence programs to reach out to local or statewide LGBTQ anti-violence programs (like Diverse & Resilient – see Appendix 1) to alert them of a possible LGBTQ homicide that caught your attention, because it may be intimate or a partnership not named or inaccurately named. Even if you are unclear, alerting LGBTQ advocates to the possible link is helpful. LGBTQ Anti-Violence advocates often have connections to LGBTQ community members in your area. Together, this form of co-advocacy can help lift up the stories of marginalized LGBTQ victims of violence.

If and when a relationship is established with family, friends, or others close to the homicide victim, keep in touch with them. If they plan to acknowledge the anniversary of the death, ask how the program may be a part of the event. Allow staff to attend and participate if requested.

Example: Outreach & Support for Victims' Family & Friends

Cherie Griffin, former Executive Director at the Women's Resource Center in Racine, offers up the following traditions honored in their community.

"In Racine, when there is a DV related homicide (an individual has been arrested or identified as being domestically related to the victim), the Women's Resource Center plans a vigil as soon as possible. If the victim belonged to a faith community, we reach out to that community to co-host it. Otherwise, the Racine Interfaith Council (mostly led by our local Unitarian church) hosts with us. The vigil always happens at evening. The vigil includes candles and a silhouette with the victim's name and positive information on it (sometimes a poem) and includes teddy bears at the foot if there were children connected. The pastor of the Unitarian church brings his guitar and sings songs. At the last vigil for a teenager, we had a contemporary Christian artist to lead the songs. Following Native American tradition, we pour water on the ground from a specific pitcher and do a water ceremony (with permission from our tribal sisters to do so). We try to connect the vigil to the people who were close to the victim, so our use of songs, poems, "brief comments" and the like are usually tailored fit to the situation.

- *I contact the staff and Board to let them know that it is happening.*
- *I send a press release to announce the vigil.*
- *Sometimes I need to plan for time to meet with the press before the vigil.*
- *The staff work together to contact family, friends, work places, and social groups so that all feel welcome.*
- *The family decides what they do or do not want to happen within the vigil itself.*

We have found that vigils are very powerful steps in the healing process for the entire community."

C. Legal Considerations

When a domestic violence program experiences the death of a client, legal issues arise that must be addressed. Programs must immediately focus on these legal issues to protect the privacy and the legacy of the deceased victim and the agency. A program's involvement with and consideration of the legal system may vary greatly depending on the circumstances of the death. The death of a shelter resident adds a level of complexity to the agency's legal responsibilities. While the specifics of the situation will largely impact what legal ramifications an agency must consider, there are several issues that typically arise. Agencies should create policies to address the legal issues associated with the death of a client, being mindful of any federal and state laws that govern such actions.

It is a good idea to review intake paperwork and determine if helpful information could be obtained through that process. Refer to the End Abuse [Legal Manual](#) (and Appendix 6 of this document) for a [Sample Intake Form](#). The Sample Intake Form includes a section to list trusted emergency contacts and space for clients to denote what they wish the program to do with regards to the client's children and personal property in the event the program cannot locate the client, or the client is incapacitated.

Confidentiality

The Legal Manual has a [Sample Policy on Confidentiality](#), and a [Sample Release of Information and Waiver of Nondisclosure](#) available in English, Spanish, and Hmong. It is important for a program to preemptively create a Policy on Confidentiality. Having an existing policy makes it easier to thoughtfully and consistently respond in urgent situations.

- What does the confidentiality form that the resident signed when they began working with the agency include?
- From the National Network to End Domestic Violence's [FAQ's on Survivor Confidentiality Releases](#): "Advocates may have [a] discussion [about release of information upon death or disappearance], in a delicate way, with a survivor if the survivor is fearful for their life. It is not best practice to ask every survivor that comes to your program to sign a release of information in the event of death or disappearance. It is a best practice to ask the survivor what they would want the advocate and program to do with their information in the case that something happens to them. It would be important to discuss how the advocate would know if the survivor is missing or deceased vs. if they fled and just didn't tell anyone. Not knowing and releasing their information could be dangerous to the missing person or surviving family members of a deceased victim, or to a living victim who has gone into hiding. Additionally, emphasize to clients that they can change their mind and change their instructions about what you should or should not do if they go missing or are deceased. FVPSA, and VOCA confidentiality provisions do not address the issue of deceased victims. VAWA regulation 28 CFR §90.4 permits disclosure of identifying information to fatality review teams only when specific requirements are

met, indicating that VAWA confidentiality is expected to be protected after death of a client.”

- Common provisions include client’s wishes on:
 - Whether information may be released upon the client’s death
 - To whom information may be released upon death (such as to press, police detectives, family members, spouse’s family, etc.)
- Did the client sign a reasonably time-limited and specific Release of Information?

Advocate-client Privilege [Wis. Stat. Sec. 905.045]

- Advocate-client privilege survives death of client.
- Using attorney-client privilege case law analysis as a guide, an advocate can assert advocate-client privilege after the death of a client. This would become relevant if the advocate were to be subpoenaed after the death of a client regarding the client’s work with an agency.
- See, *Swidler v. Berlin and James Hamilton v. United States*, 524 U.S. 399, 118 S. Ct. 2081(1998).

Non-Disclosure [Wis. Stat. Sec. 995.67]

- Wisconsin non-disclosure law prevents the disclosure of the location of past and present clients or their minor children without the express written consent of the client.
- The provisions of non-disclosure will not be an issue regarding the deceased client but may be relevant for the deceased client’s children, family members and other shelter/program clients.

Legal Considerations Regarding a Client’s Possessions

- Did the client state their wishes for personal property in an intake or other form?
- Does the program have a policy for disposal of a client’s property in the event of death?
- Is there a policy guiding proper disposal of any of the client’s medications?
- How much information can be given to the individual designated to collect a deceased client’s belongings?
- Is there a policy for responding to requests for collection of possessions as evidence in the course of a law enforcement investigation?
- Is there a policy for responding to mail that you may receive for a deceased client?

Legal Considerations Regarding Law Enforcement Involvement

- If the client died while physically in the shelter, emergency responders will be called to remove the body. Inviting law enforcement onto the shelter premises raises several issues:
 - What areas will law enforcement want access to?

- How much information can/will be provided to law enforcement about the deceased resident?
- How can law enforcement's interaction with other shelter residents be restricted to uphold confidentiality and non-disclosure requirements?
- Law enforcement may want to interview other residents that were in shelter at the time of the death.
- How will the agency respond to requests from law enforcement to search other residents' rooms?
- If the client was a shelter resident but did not die on the premises, law enforcement may still attempt to gather information from the premises through an informal request or a search warrant.
- Is there an existing release of information that pertains to law enforcement? If so, what information is covered by that release?

D. Working with and Responding to the Media

This is a time when the media can be of great influence on the community, in either a positive or negative way. While interactions with the media at this time can be especially powerful, programs must also be thoughtful around their interactions with the media. Contact End Abuse for support around working with the media at any time: (608)255-0539. End Abuse staff can also assist with handling media inquiries related to the incident, as needed.

Before an incident occurs:

- What policies and procedures are in place within the organization for handling media inquiries?
- Given the structure of the agency, does someone within the domestic violence program have the authority to speak on behalf of the entire agency?
- Is there a relationship with local media, including any culturally specific media?
- Are there media contacts in the area that can help to ensure accuracy?

Tips for preparing to speak to media representatives:

- Remember to relax, take a breath, and run through what you plan to say with someone else before responding to the request if you are feeling at all unsure or uncomfortable.
- You may want to contact another domestic violence program director or advocate at this time for support and help preparing.
- Take the time you need and call the reporter back if necessary.

After an incident occurs:

- Designate one spokesperson. As soon as possible, communicate who will be handling any media inquiries to all who need the information, and be sure to include the agency media contact's telephone number.
- The agency's media spokesperson should develop a statement related to the incident.
 - *See Appendix 5: "Media Talking Points" for samples that can be used.*
- Put together a "script" for staff or volunteers answering the phones, so that no information is shared inadvertently. In addition to the agency's "Cannot confirm or deny" statement, an example would be:
 - *"All questions and concerns regarding this situation are being handled by our Executive Director. I can take a message and your phone number, and they will get back to you."*
- Provide the "script" to staff and volunteers in an e-mail and/or written down in the location where agency phones are answered so that it can be quickly and easily referred to if they receive a call from media. Direct all staff and volunteers to refrain from comment beyond that statement.

- Advise staff, board & volunteers to use social media with caution at this time and not respond to any comments or messages on social media regarding the incident. The agency's media spokesperson should determine if any social media response is warranted and who within the agency should be the designated point person for this.
- If the incident involved a client death, is there a need and opportunity to advise any other clients that may have known the deceased to exercise caution if approached by the media?
- Depending on the situation, it may be an appropriate time to proactively reach out to the community via newspaper, radio or television or social media, if not contacted directly.

Considerations for crafting a media statement:

- Consider making it a practice to first and foremost acknowledge the traumatic impact of the homicide/death in their community.
- Consider what those close to the victim and/or the victim's next-of-kin have granted permission to share, if anything.
- Consider what information is available via public records and the facts about the case that have been made public.
- Keep the message clear and concise, sentences short, and concepts simple. Think in terms of sound bites.

For further information, including media tips and talking points, please refer to [Appendix 5](#), which includes sample talking points related to the following:

- Traumatic impact of a homicide
- Basic domestic violence background information
- Domestic violence homicide talking points
- Terminology
- Talking points for specific scenarios:
 - Murder-suicide
 - Multiple homicide victims
 - LGBTQ homicide
 - Victim using self-defense
 - When children are killed
 - Teen dating violence homicide
 - Alcohol/drug/overdose
 - Mental illness-related
 - Law enforcement-involved

Anecdote from a DV program:

"We learned that it's helpful to alert family members and others close to the victim about what's going to be covered in the media regarding the homicide, and when it will be covered, so that they can feel prepared."

E. Support from Sister Organizations in Wisconsin

The culture of domestic violence programs throughout Wisconsin is one of networking, supporting and reaching out to each other in times of need. If you've just experienced a homicide in your community, know that you are not alone and that you have a community of support in your sister domestic violence programs. When a homicide occurs, everyone involved in this work thinks of the program in that area and what they must be experiencing.

As soon as possible, End Abuse reaches out to local programs when they've experienced a homicide to offer support and assistance. Programs will often reach out to other programs in their region to do the same. There are a couple of important things to keep in mind regarding this practice. First, the director and staff are likely juggling multiple needs within their program and community in the aftermath of a homicide and may not respond to an offer of assistance simply due to competing demands for their time and attention. Additionally, it's important to be clear about what you or your program can assist with and to not offer assistance if there are reasons you are unable to follow through with that offer.

Ways for WI Programs to show solidarity following a domestic violence homicide:

- Send cards/emails to the program acknowledging the trauma of the situation and offering your support
- Share readings, poems, etc. expressing your caring and respect
- Display lanterns, purple flags, or other symbolic gesture
- Honor the victim at your support groups through a moment of silence
- Discuss the event at your staff meetings and honor the victim through a moment of silence
- Inform your Board and honor the victim through a moment of silence

Follow the local program's lead. If your program is contacted by media or through social media, do not respond without first consulting with the program in the area where the homicide occurred, to ensure your response considers and respects a victim's surviving family member and friends' wishes as well as any local dynamics within that community.

During the process of building a homicide response plan within your program and community, be sure to keep in touch with other directors and advocates for ideas of what is happening in their area. It may be a good idea to discuss this topic at regional director meetings. Remember that End Abuse is also available to facilitate connections between programs prior to and after a homicide occurs and will continue to work with programs to develop ways to best handle these very complex events.

Quote from a DV program:

“We weren’t sure what we needed and initially thought we didn’t need other DV programs’ assistance. But we weren’t prepared physically or mentally for the ongoing trauma felt by staff and the community. So, we decided to take other programs up on their offers to help out. That may have been the only way we got through it.”

–Jessica Honish, Lead Advocate at Rainbow House in Marinette & Oconto Counties reflects on the experience of losing their Interim Executive Director, Trish Waschbisch, to a domestic violence homicide in 2013.

F. Creating Our Community Foundation

Developing a community-wide homicide response plan provides an opportunity to examine and thoughtfully process through potential situations that may arise and decide what will determine your individual and collective responses. Building these relationships prior to a crisis is of utmost importance. Approaching these discussions from a victim-centered and trauma-informed perspective enables your community to establish the foundation and spirit in which your individual and collective responses will be based in.

The time to develop a community plan is *prior to the homicide*. It is better to have a plan for a crisis that never occurs than to try to develop it while you are in the midst of the crisis.

If a Coordinated Community Response (CCR) team exists in your community, consider using this venue to develop a plan and generate ongoing discussion regarding what roles each agency and individual will play in the event of a dv homicide.

If a CCR or other multi-disciplinary team does not exist in your community, we encourage you to refer to the [Coordinated Community Response Toolkit](#) published by End Abuse and the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault for suggestions of ways to develop and sustain multi-disciplinary team collaborations.

Building a thoughtful and proactive community-wide homicide response plan may include:

- Building and solidifying relationships that will promote a respectful and appropriate response to a domestic violence homicide
- Developing or deepening relationships with cultural community leaders
- Creating a plan for your community's immediate response to the event, along with a plan for providing longer term follow up and support
- Developing ongoing community education about the dynamics of domestic violence homicide
- Agreeing on community-wide media talking points so that any person approached by the media would provide consistent and accurate responses to domestic violence homicide situations

See Appendix 4, which includes an activity that can be a springboard for development of a community-wide domestic violence homicide response plan.

Appendix 1

Resources

A Practical Guide for Creating Trauma-Informed Disability, Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Organizations

Published by Disability Rights Wisconsin, this guidebook is designed to highlight and explore effective trauma-informed conditions or core values that victims, survivors and people with disabilities are finding essential for safety and healing.

<http://www.disabilityrightswi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/A-Practical-Guide-For.pdf>

After the Injury – A Project of the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia

The information and guidance included in this website are based on a growing body of research about children and parents' reactions to pediatric injury and other medical events.

<http://www.aftertheinjury.org/>

American Indians Against Abuse (AIAA)

AIAA is the Wisconsin tribal domestic violence coalition, providing support and assistance to all eleven Native American tribes in Wisconsin.

<https://www.facebook.com/AIAAWI/>

<http://www.niwrc.org/content/american-indians-against-abuse>

(715) 634-9980

Consulate of Mexico

The Consulate can offer information regarding the transfer of deceased persons to Mexico.

- Milwaukee, WI: <https://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/milwaukee/index.php>
(414) 944-7586
- St. Paul, MN: <https://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/saintpaul/index.php/info-english/infoeng>
(651) 771-5494

Deaf Unity Wisconsin

Deaf Unity provides services to and advocates for Deaf victims in Wisconsin.

<https://deafunitywi.org/>

Text: (608) 466-2881 (9am-10pm M-F) E-mail: help@deafunitywi.org

Diverse & Resilient’s Anti-Violence Program: Room to Be Safe

Room to Be Safe is a statewide initiative designed to help connect survivors of all violence to services, advocacy, and safety planning for LGBTQ communities in Wisconsin.

<https://www.roomtobesafe.org/>

LGBTQ Anti-Violence Resource Line: (414) 856-LGBT (5428)

Guidebook on Vicarious Trauma: Recommended Solutions for Anti-Violence Workers

This guidebook explains vicarious trauma, associated effects and consequences, and effective coping strategies. It is designed to assist anti-violence workers to recognize and address their own vicarious trauma experiences.

http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2008/phac-aspc/H72-21-178-2000E.pdf

Headington Institute

The Headington Institute bridges cutting edge academic research with practical application at the field level, in order to strengthen the impact of humanitarian response and promote the long-term wellbeing of humanitarian personnel.

<http://www.headington-institute.org/Default.aspx?tabid=2651>

HOPE Domestic Violence Homicide Help

Hope's role is to help surviving families navigate the overwhelming decisions they face after a domestic violence homicide. Provides resources for dealing with media, crime scene clean up and victim resources. They also provide information about the impact of a domestic violence homicide on children.

<https://domesticviolencehomicidehelp.com/>

National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma and Mental Health

The National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma and Mental Health seeks to build the capacity of systems and agencies to address the traumatic effects of abuse and to facilitate healing, recovery, justice, and safety.

<http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org/>

National Funeral Directors Association

Information regarding regulations and requirements for shipping human remains internationally.

<http://www.nfda.org/resources/operations-management/shipping-remains/international-shipping-regulations>

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

From the Front of the Room: A Survivor's Guide to Public Speaking provides a basic overview of the issues that face survivors who desire to speak publicly about their experiences with intimate partner violence. It provides guidance for the survivor speaker to maximize their physical and emotional safety and ensure the overall success of the speaking engagement.

https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/materials/files/2016-07/NRCDV_SpeakersGuide-Survivors.pdf

Parents of Murdered Children (POMC)

POMC provides support and assistance to all survivors of homicide victims while working to create a world free of murder.

<http://www.pomc.com/support.html>

<http://www.pomc.com/survivors.html>

Refugee Family Strengthening Programs in Wisconsin

Located throughout Wisconsin, Refugee Family Strengthening Programs address specific needs of refugee communities, and help refugees maintain self-sufficiency by addressing family violence through prevention, education, and intervention.

<http://s3-us-east-2.amazonaws.com/edaw-webinars/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/17135437/RFSPsOrwiDc.pdf>

Service Master Recovery Services

With locations throughout Wisconsin, Service Master offers trauma scene and biohazard cleanup services.

<https://www.smrecover.com/trauma-biohazard-clean-up>

(888) 998-1714

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has an online “Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator,” a confidential and anonymous source of information for persons seeking treatment facilities in the United States or U.S. Territories for substance abuse/addiction and/or mental health problems.

<https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

The Dougy Center – The National Center for Grieving Children and Families

The mission of The Dougy Center is to provide support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults and their families grieving a death can share their experiences. The organization’s website has a wealth of information, resources and tip sheets, as well as a podcast on the topic of grieving.

<https://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/tip-sheets/>

<https://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/help-for-kids/>

<https://www.tdcschooltoolkit.org/kids>

<https://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/talking-with-children-about-tragic-events/>

<https://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/how-to-help-a-grieving-teen/>

<https://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/grief-out-loud-podcast/>

The Trauma Stewardship Institute

The Trauma Stewardship Institute focuses on raising awareness of and responding to the cumulative toll on those who are exposed to the suffering, hardship, crisis, or trauma of humans, living beings, or the planet itself. The Institute was founded in 2011 by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, author of *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others*.

<http://traumastewardship.com/>

UMOS in Milwaukee

UMOS Milwaukee provides programs and services that improve the employment, educational, health and housing opportunities of underserved populations.

<https://www.umos.org/programs.html>

(414) 389-6000

UNIDOS in Madison

UNIDOS provides direct services to victims of domestic violence & sexual assault in Dane and surrounding counties. They also provide statewide education and technical assistance to colleagues and professionals who wish to improve their services to the Latinx & immigrant community in Wisconsin.

<https://www.unidoswi.org/en/>

(608) 256-9195

Vicarious Trauma Institute

The Vicarious Trauma Institute seeks to inspire, motivate, and empower others to heal and enrich the human spirit.

<http://www.vicarioustrauma.com/whatis.html>

Victim Connect Resource Center

Information and resources related to homicide and grief available in English and Spanish.

<https://victimconnect.org/learn/types-of-crime/homicide-and-grief/>

Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Covering Domestic Violence – A Guide for Journalists and Other Media Professionals

<https://wscadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Media-Guide-2008.pdf>

WI Department of Health Services

The Department of Health Services is committed to supporting the understanding and application of trauma-informed care in Wisconsin. Their website contains a list of helpful resources for consumers and service providers.

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/tic/resources.htm>

Appendix 2

Sample Internal Homicide Response Plan

The following example reflects a working document used by Domestic Abuse Intervention Services (DAIS) for its staff serving Dane County. Any homicide response plan should consider the unique dynamics, needs, and requirements of the organization, the service population, and its communities.



In the event that there is a homicide related to domestic violence in Dane County, DAIS will take the following steps.

External Communications

- The Executive Director is the sole spokesperson for DAIS to the media, funders, community partners, etc. No member of the following groups: staff, volunteers, Board of Directors, Trustees, should speak on behalf of DAIS without consent and direction from the Executive Director. In the Executive Director's absence, the Director of Development and Communications serves as the organizational spokesperson.
- The Director of Development and Communications or her/his designee in concert with the Executive Director may draft a Press Release about the homicide and any links to issues relating to domestic violence as a broader community and societal issue. The press release will be carefully crafted so as to assure only publicly available information which has been fact checked is used.
- Upon sending out the press release, the Director of Development and Communications will appoint a member of the Development Team or the Receptionist to triage media requests in concert with the communications staff. The Director of Development and Communications and the communications staff will prioritize responses to those requests and will work with the Receptionist to arrange media interviews with the Executive Director. Other staff members may be pulled in as needed to assist with scheduling and room reservations for media interviews.
- The Director of Services or her/his designee will reach out to the Faith Issues Subcommittee of the Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence Task Force to notify them of the homicide, to share the press release, and to collaborate in reaching out to the impacted neighborhood or community to offer support and assistance.

One. And for all.

DAIS

Internal Communications

- The Director of Development and Communications or a designee will draft an email for staff regarding the homicide. This email will be based on the same information that has been included in the press release.
 - Any internal communications will also include information about opportunities for staff and volunteers to debrief about the homicide and to get support so that they can continue their work.
- Talking points will be created by the Crisis Intervention Coordinator for Help Line Advocates and the Receptionist to assist in any calls they may receive from community members seeking support. These talking points will be made available in com logs.

Staff and Volunteer Support

- The Director of Services and the Human Resources Manager will coordinate a meeting for staff and volunteers who may wish to come together to debrief the homicide and to share thoughts and feelings. The Director of Services and Human Resources Manager may decide to engage grief counselors for this purpose and will be responsible for coordinating their engagement.
- Supervisors and Managers will reach out to their direct reports to offer support and the opportunity to debrief individually.

Community Support

- DAIS will light the Remembrance Lantern for one week following a domestic violence related homicide. This will automatically occur for any homicides that occur in Dane County. DAIS will depend on communications from End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin about lighting the lantern when there has been a domestic violence related homicide in other parts of the state.
- If the affected neighborhood or community is planning a vigil, DAIS will offer to have advocates available to support community members at that vigil. Those advocates who are assigned to attend the vigil to offer support services will be provided the talking points created by the Crisis Intervention Coordinator. Under no circumstance should any DAIS representative (other than the Executive Director or her/his designee) who is attending a community vigil make a statement to any press who may be at the vigil.

Documentation

- As soon as accurate information is publicly available, the Director of Development and Communications (or her/his designee) will document the details of the homicide in the DAIS homicide list for future reference and to serve as supporting documentation to End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin's annual Homicide Report.

One. And for all.

Appendix 3

Internal Homicide Response Plan Template

1) Convene small internal team to review the facts, think critically about what can/should be shared and with whom, and determine next steps.

- Names and contact information for small internal team:

Name Phone Number

Name Phone Number

Name Phone Number

2) Provide relevant notifications

Important messages to convey to board, staff, and volunteers after a domestic violence homicide:

- Acknowledge the trauma of the situation and convey appreciation for the work that they do within the organization.
- Assure staff, volunteers and board members that any updates related to the incident and/or information regarding a vigil or funeral will be shared as it becomes available.
- Remind them of the agency's confidentiality policy and how it applies to this situation.
- Advise staff, volunteers and board members to not engage with social media regarding the incident.
- Inform them about how media inquiries related to the incident should be handled (i.e., they should refrain from comment and direct all calls to designated agency media point person).

a. Who will notify staff and volunteers and by what means (e-mail, phone, in-person)?

- b. Who will notify the Board of Directors and by what means (e-mail, phone, in-person)?
-

Board President/Chair – Contact Information:

Name	Phone Number	E-mail
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- c. Who will develop a plan for communicating the news to existing clients, and who will be the point person (or people) on staff to address their needs related to the situation?
-

Important messages to convey to clients:

- *Acknowledge the trauma of the situation and assure clients that staff will continue to check in with them regarding how they are handling the news.*
- *If clients request this information, let them know that information regarding a vigil or funeral will be shared as it becomes available.*
- *Remind them of the agency's confidentiality policy and how it applies to this situation.*

- d. When will outreach be conducted to the victim's family/friends/co-workers/other people of importance? Who will do this and by what means?
-

Important messages to convey to those close to the victim:

- *Acknowledge the trauma of the situation and let them know that your agency is available to offer support to them as they process through what happened.*
- *Ask if they are planning a vigil, and if not, if they would like your agency to organize something.*

- e. Who are the other relevant community partners that need to know of the situation? Who on staff will inform them?
-
-

3) Address the impact on program activities

- a. Provide a “script” for advocates and volunteers to refer to if calls from media or other requests for information are received. In addition to your agency’s “Cannot confirm or deny” statement, an example would be:

“All questions and concerns regarding this situation are being handled by our Executive Director. I can take a message and your phone number, and they will get back to you.”
- b. Plan ahead by reaching out to nearby DV programs to ask if they’d be willing to assist at your program in a time of crisis, if needed. If the situation requires asking for assistance from another DV program to provide coverage for shelter or the hotline, who on staff will do this?

Nearby domestic violence programs & contact information:

DV Program & Name of Contact Person	Phone Number
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DV Program & Name of Contact Person	Phone Number
-------------------------------------	--------------

DV Program & Name of Contact Person	Phone Number
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** Ensure any staff/volunteers that are not affiliated with your program sign a confidentiality agreement**

- c. Decide if any of your program activities need to be canceled or re-scheduled. Write this information down for whoever answers the agency’s phones so that they have it to refer to easily.

Who on staff will determine this? _____

If helpful and needed in the moment, fill in the following information

List what needs to be canceled/re-scheduled:

Confirm when it was canceled/re-scheduled, by what means, and by who:

List re-scheduled date/time here:

Provide staff/volunteers who may answer the phone with the pertinent information needed to convey these updates to callers

- d. Who on staff will take the lead on determining a time and space for clients to come together and process the event, if the situation warrants it?

If helpful and needed in the moment, fill in the following information

List scheduled date/time for this here:

- _____
- e. Who on staff will take the lead on determining a time and space for staff and volunteers to come together and process the event?

If helpful and needed in the moment, fill in the following information

List scheduled date/time for this here:

Appendix 4

Exercise: Developing a Community-Wide DV Homicide Response Plan

Facilitator: Convene relevant community partners to discuss your collective response when a domestic violence homicide occurs. Ask the group to take a few minutes to think about these questions:

- If a tragedy happened to me or my family, how would I want to be treated?
- What would be helpful to me?
- What would I want others to say or do?

Exercise:

1. Break into pairs or small groups of 3 or 4 people. Provide each group with a scenario and sticky flip chart paper. Use a scenario provided on page 33 or any cases from the [Wisconsin Domestic Violence Homicide Reports](#).
2. In each small group identify a recorder to take notes and a reporter to share your plan with the larger group.
3. Read through your scenario individually, and then discuss what you feel are important components of a community response to this situation with other members of your small group.

Considerations:

- What is in place now when a domestic violence homicide occurs?
- Who is notified? (both agencies/organizations, and specific people within those organizations)
- Do we convey a unified and consistent message across the community about the nature of these homicides when approached by media?
- Who takes the lead on communicating with surviving friends/family to coordinate a vigil?
- How do we support ourselves, each other, staff within our organizations and our clients in the aftermath of a domestic violence homicide?
- What are some steps/actions that could be included/would assist/benefit in handling a domestic violence homicide?
- Who else in your organization needs to be involved and/or familiar with this plan when it is developed?

4. In your small group, identify components of the plan that you each feel are important. The recorder writes these on the flipchart paper.

5. Come back together as a large group. Reporters share what each group came up with in their discussion and place the flipchart paper on the wall so that all can see.
6. Ask the group for input on where they see similarities in the ideas presented. The facilitator works to place similar ideas together on a separate flip chart paper in front of the room. It is important to involve the group in any clarifying of the ideas, and to keep the group involved in by asking “Are you seeing associations or similarities amongst these ideas?”
7. Once at least three ideas are grouped as being similar, ask the group for a 1-2 word description of what those ideas are about and label the sheet.
8. The facilitator compiles all of the ideas shared and overarching themes identified in one document and distributes to all for review prior to the next meeting.
9. Members of the group should discuss the ideas presented with key individuals in their organizations/departments in preparation for the group’s next meeting and final development of the plan.
10. At the next meeting, discuss and agree upon the approach for how your community will collectively work together to support all involved after a domestic violence homicide situation. Agree on who is responsible for each individual component of your community’s plan.

Remember:

- There will be many possible approaches identified – keep an open mind.
- Discuss any additional community partners that should be included that aren’t currently.
- It is important to have inclusive, critical thinking discussions with individuals representing a wide variety of perspectives.

11. Meet together with the final document and “walk through” the plan.
12. Ensure there is a group commitment to taking the final plan to their organizations and incorporating it into their own homicide response policies or practices.

Homicide Response Scenarios

Scenario #1

A 27-year-old Hmong woman has been murdered. Her three children, ages nine, six and four, were present at the time of the murder. Her 35-year-old husband has been arrested, and the children are now living with his family. Her husband's family claims that the victim had a boyfriend, and consequently, her own clan is refusing to hold a funeral and burial. In Hmong culture, rituals related to death are very important because without the necessary rituals, the soul of the deceased will roam for eternity.

The victim was a member of a support group at Haven House, the local domestic violence program. Several support group members and a few of the Haven House staff knew her well. In addition to their distress about her death, those who knew her are worried about her children and about the absence of a funeral.

Scenario #2

A 19-year-old woman has been murdered, apparently by a 26-year-old man who killed himself two days later. There has been a great deal of press coverage of the deaths and the manhunt that occurred in the two days between them. The local newspaper reports that the woman had been arrested previously for prostitution and possession of a controlled substance. Press coverage has not attributed the murder to domestic violence, and the police have stated that they cannot determine a motive for the murder.

A woman who attends support group at Haven House (the local domestic violence program) was friends with the victim. She reports that her friend and the dead man were a couple, and that he was the victim's pimp. The friend is very distressed. She has reached out to the victim's family, but they have not responded.

Appendix 5

Media Talking Points

This resource offers some talking points for local programs that can be used when speaking to reporters in the wake of a domestic violence homicide. They are designed to facilitate a rapid response and to help shape better coverage.

Some goals when using talking points:

- Connect with the audience
- Establish credibility/expertise
- Define domestic violence
- Provide context/scope of problem
- Suggest positive community/individual action

Connect with the Audience

- We are deeply saddened to hear of the homicide of [victim's name]. Any loss of life is tragic, but the loss of life at the hands of someone who claimed to love and care for the victim can seem especially senseless.
- [Name of victim] was much more than a victim of domestic violence. It's important we remember that any media coverage about her/his murder will inevitably fail to depict the complexity and fullness of their life and the impact that the homicide has had on surviving family members, friends, and others close to the victim, as well as those attempting to help during the immediate event or in the time preceding it.
- Our community has suffered a tremendous loss. It's important that we treat each other and ourselves with compassion at this time.
- It's time we ask ourselves how we as a community can better identify and safely intervene in these dangerous situations before they turn deadly. We all have a role to play in keeping our friends and neighbors safe.

General Domestic Violence Information

- Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior in which an abuser does everything they can to maintain power and control over their victim. It can involve verbal abuse, physical and sexual assault, controlling access to financial resources, abuse of pets, and isolation from friends and family.
- Statewide and nationally, domestic violence continues to be an enormous social epidemic. In an average year over 40,000 men, women and children seek services from a local domestic violence program in Wisconsin.

Domestic Violence Homicide

- Domestic violence is not about stress, depression or alcohol causing an abuser to be violent. Nor is it about an abuser "losing control" or "snapping." It is a calculated act by

the abuser to control and intimidate the victim. Homicide is the ultimate form of power and control.

- Domestic violence homicides often occur after or during the time that a victim attempts to leave the relationship. Abusers kill because it's their final act of trying to control their victim. *(See End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin's Homicide Reports for specific figures and analysis.)*
- Domestic violence homicide rarely occurs as an isolated incident of abuse. Often there is a history of abuse in the relationship. We all need to get better at identifying the signs of abuse. However, there are times when we may never see the signs because the abuser deliberately isolates the victim from friends and family.
- Too often with these tragedies the focus is on the abuser. Let's not forget about the life of [name of victim] and his or her family and friends. Think of your own family members or friends. Imagine what it would be like for this to happen to them. It should serve as a wakeup call for each of us to face the problem of domestic violence and how it affects our families and our community.
- An abuser can seem like a "nice, normal person" or even a respected member of the community but be abusive at home. Domestic abuse is often a carefully guarded secret in homes that may otherwise appear normal. It can be very difficult for victims to seek help when their batterers are respected community figures because the victims' claims of abuse are likely to be met with skepticism.
- Anyone can be a batterer, regardless of socio-economic status, age, race, sexual orientation, or other demographic differences. Domestic violence homicides can happen anywhere, to anyone. We may not realize it, but we all know someone who has been affected by domestic violence.
- In the aftermath of a domestic violence homicide, the focus often turns to what the victim did or did not do "to cause" the abuser to do this. This is blaming the victim and suggests we should excuse this tragic killing. The focus should instead be on why the abuser thought he or she had the right to take a person's life. To prevent domestic violence and homicide, we as a community must send a consistent, strong message that all abuse is unacceptable.

Services Available & A Call to Action

- [Name of agency] serves [use accurate, specific numbers] of victims every year through programs such as [name examples, such as shelter, helpline, etc.]. We have been serving victims here since [founding year].
- Domestic violence continues to be an underreported problem. Most people first talk to those in their lives whom they trust. Because of this, each of us needs to educate ourselves about domestic violence and know about the local services that are available to help [provide details about local helpline, shelter, etc.].
- We must take all forms of domestic abuse seriously to help prevent further abuse or death. Abusers are dangerous, and all of their abusive tactics must be treated seriously.

What may have been yelling, throwing things, or shoving yesterday can turn deadly tomorrow.

- It takes all of us working together to address this problem—health care institutions, schools, media, business leaders, faith communities, legislators, and law enforcement. We need to prioritize the effort to stop domestic violence every day and not wait to talk about it only when a high-profile tragedy like this occurs.

Talking Points for Specific Scenarios

Murder-Suicide

- Murder-suicides commonly occur in domestic violence cases. The perpetrator, statistically usually a man, kills one or more victims, usually a wife or intimate partner, and then commits suicide within minutes or hours. It is important to be aware of the correlation between abusers that are suicidal and the potential for homicide.
- When a murder-suicide occurs, communities are left struggling to find an answer or motive for why the murder occurred without the ability to hold a perpetrator accountable for their actions.
- Children and others can be killed during the course of domestic violence murder-suicide but generally there is one primary intended victim, usually the spouse or partner. When children are killed instead of the intended victim, it may be that the perpetrator is attempting to further hurt the intended victim by taking away what she most values or loves.

Multiple Homicide Victims

- While most abusers do not present a safety threat to anyone other than their intimate partners and in some cases their children, some abusers will take out anyone they perceive to be “in the way,” such as other family or household members, friends, co-workers, or bystanders.
- Batterers seek to control all aspects of their victims’ lives. Some batterers will threaten or harm members of the victim’s extended family, her friends and associates, or those who try to help her. When this happens, these people are also victimized.

LGBTQ Homicide

- The underreporting, mis-gendering and incorrect reporting of LGBTQ intimate partner homicides often mean these relationships are not being acknowledged by our communities. It’s important to accurately speak about the nature of the relationship between the parties when these situations occur. Not doing so perpetuates the isolation that people in same-sex relationships feel, especially in the rural parts of our state.
- We must acknowledge that intimate partner violence in LGBTQ relationships exists and utilize the tools available to us to appropriately identify and respond to these situations before they turn deadly.

Domestic Violence Victim Uses Deadly Force

- We don't condone the taking of any life, but it's important to distinguish between murders committed in self-defense and those whose purpose is revenge or to punish the victim for his/her behavior. It is self-defense when the victim kills out of fear that he or she (or others in her household) will be harmed or killed. This fear is generated by a pattern of coercion, threats and/or assaults from the abuser. The threat of harm is real even if it's not immediate or readily apparent to others.
- Sorting out self-defense is complicated. The legal definition is strict and predicated upon "a man's reasonable use of force against another man." It's important to look closely into how weapons are used and what led to the homicide.
- Deadly force is rarely used in response to a first or one-time abusive event. It's important to talk to family, friends, co-workers and others to try to understand the history between those involved. Some victims of domestic violence suffer years in silence. Prior abuse is often not reported to others out of fear. This fear and isolation can push victims to the edge.

When Children are Killed

- It's critical not to blame the mother for the death of the children when she is a victim herself. Many batterers use children as a tactic of coercion and control against their mother, including threats to abduct or kill the children, particularly when she tries to leave the relationship.
- Batterers often engage in legal fights over custody and physical placement as a way to have ongoing control over their ex-partners. One of the most common reasons given for returning to an abusive relationship is the fear that the abuser will act on the threats of taking the children from the victim. Studies show that batterers have been able to convince authorities that the victim is unfit or undeserving of sole custody in approximately 70% of challenged cases².
- Children are sometimes killed during the course of domestic violence homicide/suicide, but generally there is one primary intended victim, usually the spouse/partner. When children are killed instead of the intended victim, it may be that the perpetrator is attempting to further hurt the intended victim by taking away what they most value or love.

Teen Dating Violence Homicide

- According to surveys of youth in Wisconsin, 1 in 5 teens have experienced dating violence in a relationship, and 2/3 of them never told anyone about it.
- As a community, we must commit ourselves to preventing this violence before it takes root, and before another young person's life is lost too soon.
- Wisconsin's Dare2Know Campaign seeks to expose the serious impact of teen dating violence in Wisconsin and long-term effects on youth and society. The purpose is to

² American Judges Association (aja.ncsc.dni.us)

inspire youth to rally together in positive ways and promote healthy relationships in their schools and communities. To find out more, visit dare2knowwi.org.

Alcohol & Drugs

- Alcohol and other drug use do not cause domestic violence in relationships that are not otherwise abusive. While many victims report that their partners may be more violent when using alcohol or drugs, but alcohol or drug use only exacerbates an existing pattern of abusive behavior. We must recognize that the root problem is about abusers feeling entitled to control their partner, whether or not alcohol or drugs are involved.
- Many victims of domestic violence commit crimes due to coercion or threats by their abusers. These women choose the risk of breaking the law because it is safer than the risk of refusing the demands of their partner.
- ***In the event of an overdose in shelter:***
 - While every circumstance is different, it is an unfortunate reality that many victims rely on alcohol and drugs to numb themselves to the pain of domestic abuse.
 - Alcohol and drug use are common coping mechanisms for domestic abuse victims and sometimes a tactic abusers use to keep the victim dependent on them.
 - Our entire community is grappling with a drug epidemic. Because our program is a microcosm of the community, unfortunately we are also seeing drug use by some victims in our shelter.

Mental Illness

- Most mental illnesses do not cause abusive behavior, and most batterers are not mentally ill. In some instances, mental illness can exacerbate an existing pattern of abusive behavior or play a role in the escalation of violence. But mental illness remains only a contributing factor.
- The cause of domestic violence is the abuser's value system and their belief that they are entitled to treat their partner as they see fit, even if this involves the use of intimidation, cruelty or violence. Psychological tests do not evaluate a person's values and attitudes and are not reliable predictors of who will engage in domestic violence.

Law Enforcement-Involved

- When the perpetrator of a domestic violence homicide works in law enforcement or some other responsible position, citizens often wonder how such a person could gain employment in this field. Domestic abuse is often an invisible crime. Many batterers are never arrested, and there is often no public record of their violent behavior. Batterers are frequently successful in keeping the abuse a secret, making excuses, or blaming the victim.
- The victim and their friends and family may help hide or minimize domestic violence to protect the reputation of the abuser. For most of our history, public opinion has supported the notion that acts of domestic violence are private matters and don't rise to the level of real crimes.

- When an abuser is a law enforcement enforcer, it severely limits the ability and willingness of the victim to seek help.

Terminology

When a homicide occurs, it is a critical time to help a community understand the nature of domestic violence so that we can all work together to prevent abuse and homicides in the future. The media plays a huge role in influencing how the community makes sense of what happened. Accurate, sensitive media coverage can promote understanding and prevent abuse. Inaccurate, sensationalized coverage can reinforce ignorance by wasting an opportunity for education.

All too often media coverage of domestic homicides uses terminology that is counterproductive and inaccurate. Here are some of the common terms or phrases and why they reinforce misconceptions about the nature of domestic violence:

“Shooting rampage”

“Killing/shooting spree”

“Husband snapped”

These terms suggest that the perpetrator has “gone crazy” or otherwise lost control in some way that is beyond our understanding. In fact, most batterers are aware of their actions and very much in control of their behavior. And domestic violence is not beyond our understanding because it happens all around us every day. These murders may represent situations that did not turn out as the perpetrator planned, but the crime, while hard to comprehend, can be explained by understanding the dynamics of power and control in domestic violence situations. These phrases obscure that fact that these deaths are ultimately a result of domestic violence.

“Lover’s triangle”

“Lover’s quarrel gone bad”

“Domestic dispute” or “domestic disturbance”

“Jealous boyfriend”

“Crime of passion”

“Custody dispute”

These terms downplay the seriousness and calculated nature of domestic abuse. They also demean the lives of victims by sensationalizing the story. For example, homicides do not occur because of “passion,” they occur because an abuser chooses to exert the ultimate form of control over their victim. Such terms can also reinforce the notion that some action on the part of the victim somehow caused the murder. Nothing justifies the taking of a life.

Appendix 6

SAMPLE INTAKE FORM

This document is intended for use with adults entering a shelter-based Domestic Violence Program. This document, created by the End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin — Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence — Legal Department, does not constitute legal advice. This sample is intended to encourage a conversation with the client at intake about select issues.

Name of Client _____

When staying in shelter or working with advocates at [NAME OF PROGRAM], your location and personal information are, generally speaking, confidential. Because we believe that you are safer and stronger when you are in control of who has access to your personal information, we work hard to protect your privacy and confidentiality. You also have legal rights to have this agency keep your location and personal information confidential in most situations.¹ There may be exceptions when you might want us to communicate information about you to others or we are required to do so. This form discusses these situations and allows you to express your general wishes regarding sharing your information with others.

Emergency Contact

Clients often want us to have emergency contact information for trusted family members or friends they would want us to contact in the event you experience an emergency. If you would like, please list emergency contact information below.

Emergency contact:

Name Relationship

Address Phone number(s)

Secondary emergency contact:

Name Relationship

Address Phone number(s)

Family member:

Name Relationship

¹ For example, this agency may not disclose to any person the location of a service recipient, any minor child of a service recipient, any minor child in the care or custody of a service recipient, or any minor child who accompanies the service recipient when the service recipient receives domestic abuse services, under section 995.67. We may also be subject to other confidentiality requirements under other state and federal laws.

Address

Phone number(s)

Children

If your children or other children are accompanying you, you may want to give us instructions about your wishes in the event we are unable to locate you or you become incapacitated. Depending on the circumstances and due to laws related to child protection, we may not be able to follow these instructions in every situation, but we will try to respect your wishes.

Instructions regarding children:

Personal Property

What would you like us to do with your personal property in the event we are unable to locate you, you leave shelter or you become incapacitated? Some clients say they want us to give the property to an emergency contact. Others designate another person. Some ask that we dispose of the property. Again, we will attempt to follow your wishes, but we may not be able to do so in all circumstances. We cannot keep your property in the event you do not return to shelter.

Instructions regarding property:

Other Limited Circumstances Involving Release of Information

There may be other limited circumstances in which we may need to take action and we wish to be informed of your wishes. We wish to honor those wishes to the extent we can do so.

1. Another set of circumstances that might require the sharing of information involves a situation where you express threats of harm to yourself or to others. We believe in protecting your confidentiality to the greatest extent possible, and we strongly value your right to make decisions about yourself. Therefore, we would like to ask you your wishes in this type of situation. Again, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to follow your wishes in all circumstances.

If you feel comfortable, please tell what you would like us to do if you have a plan to hurt yourself or others.

1. We also want to let you know that in rare cases child abuse and neglect issues might require us to disclose information about you or your children. In certain situations, we may have a legal or ethical obligation to seek help when your children are at risk of being abused or neglected or have been abused or neglected. We will work with you to ensure that you are the person in charge of information whenever possible. For example, if a child abuse report must be made, we will first encourage you to make the report and we will assist you to make the report. We will communicate with you as soon as possible when any situation arises that might require us to take actions regarding child abuse and neglect.

2. We are required to respond in some manner if we receive a subpoena for your files and/or for information about you. Because your privacy is very important to us, it is the policy of this organization to first attempt to discuss with you what your wishes are if we are subject to a subpoena for your records or we are asked to testify. If you tell us you do not wish to release the information or if we cannot reach you to discuss your desires, it is the policy of this agency to attempt to quash any subpoena for your personal information or to request that we testify. We may decide to release the information only if we are not able to successfully quash the subpoena and are subject to a court order to release the information.

3. In other rare circumstances, we might be required to release information because of other court orders, court proceedings, warrants, or an emergency situation which might include a natural disaster.

We have attempted to describe the situations that could possibly involve disclosures of your information. There may be other even more rare situations that we have not predicted or described which may require or necessitate that we release information about you or your records. Again, we strive to keep your privacy and confidential information secure and will continue to do so.

Updated Intake Form; Release of Information and Waiver of Nondisclosure

Because your wishes may change, whenever possible, we will attempt to speak with you again prior to releasing any information according to the instructions you have made in this document. We may ask you to sign a separate and/or updated intake form and/or release form to ensure we have understood and recorded your wishes.

In addition, anytime we release information about you, we will ask you to sign a Release of Information and Waiver of Nondisclosure to assure that you are in charge of what information is released. We will request this Release of Information and Waiver of Nondisclosure even in situations where you have given permission to another person/agency to receive information from us about you from your files.

Accommodations

Do you or your child(ren) require a special accommodation? If so, please indicate how we might assist you with a special accommodation.

Signature and Date

I have read and I understand the contents of this form.

Client's signature

Client's Name

Date Intake Form is Signed

Updated or Modified Intake Form and Signature and Date

I wish to make the following changes to this Intake Form as signed on the date above. These changes include:

Acknowledgements and Appreciations

The ***Domestic Violence Homicide Response Plan: A Toolkit for Domestic Violence Programs*** was developed by a workgroup comprised of domestic violence and dual (domestic violence and sexual assault) program representatives from around Wisconsin who came together as a result of experiencing and responding to domestic violence homicides in their own communities. As we worked through the tragedy of a homicide, complicated layers of practical concerns as well as emotions needed to be shared. At times it seemed endless. When we discussed one concern another would emerge, which we felt was reflective of the experience in programs during this time of crisis.

Our conversations were complicated, painful, and comforting all at the same time. We spoke of the trauma felt by so many in so many different ways. We re-affirmed our recognition of and respect for the myriad of feelings experienced by those whom the death has forever impacted, both in the immediate time after the homicide and for months and years to follow. We recognize that this document reflects ongoing work in our programs and our communities to build a solid foundation for response and we look forward to deepening our understanding of how to best support those impacted by these tragedies.

Thank you to all the workgroup participants who shared your experiences. We acknowledge each of you for your contributions and thank you for your dedication to this work.

The first edition of the ***Domestic Violence Homicide Response Plan: A Toolkit for Domestic Violence Programs*** was released in 2012 and developed by workgroup that consisted of:

- Staff and Board from American Indians Against Abuse
- Kelly Burger – Center Against Sexual and Domestic Abuse, Superior
- May Tong Chang – Hmong American Women’s Association, Milwaukee
- Cherie Griffin – Women’s Resource Center, Racine
- Shellie Holmes – Tri County Council on Domestic and Sexual Abuse, Rhinelander
- Jane Graham Jennings – The Women’s Community, Wausau
- Beth Schnorr – Harbor House, Appleton

Former and current staff of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (now End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin) and the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault also assisted with development of the 2012 edition: Rose Barber, Ann Brickson, Colleen Cox, C.J. Doxtater, Graciela Laguna, Pennie Meyers, Kelly Moe Litke, Beth Plautz, and Patti Seger.

A second edition of the ***Domestic Violence Homicide Response Plan: A Toolkit for Domestic Violence Programs*** was created in 2019. Another workgroup came together to offer edits and suggested additions by taking a critical look at the 2012 plan. The 2019 workgroup consisted of:

- Michelle Coppens – Sojourner Family Peace Center, Milwaukee
- Christa Grande – New Day Advocacy Center, Ashland

- Lorena Guimaraens – UNIDOS, Madison
- Shellie Holmes – Tri County Council on Domestic and Sexual Abuse, Rhinelander
- Jessica Honish – Rainbow House Domestic Abuse Services, Marinette
- Tracy Plamann – Harbor House, Appleton
- Justine Rufus – Red Cliff Family Violence Program, Bayfield
- Sue Sippel – The Family Center, Wisconsin Rapids
- Antonia Vann – The Asha Project, Milwaukee

Additional contributors included:

- Shannon Barry – Domestic Abuse Intervention Services, Madison
- Kathryn Chapman – End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin
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- Sara Krall – Homicide Prevention Program Director
- Olivia Osborne – Homicide Prevention Program Coordinator

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“It is a profoundly moving experience to sit with staff members as they express their feelings after the loss of a victim of domestic violence.” – Diane Wolff