

# **Domestic Violence Media Guide**

**September, 2006**

DELAWARE COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

# Domestic Violence Media Guide

## Breaking the Cycle of Violence

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Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
100 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 703  
Wilmington, DE 19801  
Phone 302-658-2958 • Fax 302-658-5049  
[www.dcadv.org](http://www.dcadv.org)  
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# **Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence**

## **Mission Statement**

The Delaware Coalition Against Domestic is a statewide, non-profit organization of domestic violence agencies and individuals working to eliminate domestic violence through:

- Acting as an educational and informational resource to our member agencies and the community;
- Advocating for domestic violence concerns in Delaware;
- Providing a strong, unified statewide voice for victims of domestic violence and their children, domestic violence programs, and victim service providers.

## **Philosophy**

We believe in the right of all persons to live without fear, abuse, oppression and violence. We oppose all forms of dominance over others. We believe in the need to change societal attitudes which encourage the abuse of power to control others and we are committed to this struggle.

## **DCADV Organization/Program Members**

- **People's Place II, Inc**
- **Domestic Violence Advocacy Center**
- **Abriendo Puertas**
- **Community Legal Aid Society, Inc**
- **Delaware Center for Justice**
- **YWCA of Delaware**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Section 1: Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Section 2: The Law</b> .....	2
Overview of Delaware’s Domestic Violence Laws .....	2
What Conduct is Prohibited by DE Domestic Violence Law?.....	2
Who Does Delaware’s PFA law Protect?.....	4
Where Do Delaware’s Criminal Laws Fit In?.....	4
When & How Would One Decide to Use the Civil vs Criminal Laws.....	5
What are the PFA Remedies.....	5
What Other Laws Impact Domestic Violence for Delawareans.....	6
Chart of Civil vs Criminal Intimate Partner Domestic Violence Laws.....	8
<b>Section 3: Domestic Violence</b> .....	10
An Overview .....	10
Domestic Violence Facts.....	10
Abusive Partners.....	14
Victims of Domestic Violence.....	15
How Does Domestic Violence Affect the Victim?.....	16
What Happens to Offenders?.....	17
Domestic Violence Myths.....	18
How Can Society Work to Eliminate Domestic Violence.....	19
<b>Section 4: Statistics</b> .....	21
Domestic Violence Prevalence Statistics: .....	21
Delaware Domestic Violence Statistics.....	22
<b>Section 5: Media Study: Key Findings</b> .....	23
Delaware Media Study.....	26
Talking with Survivors .....	30
Highlights of Recommendations from Survivors: .....	31
<b>Section 6: Key Learnings</b> .....	32
Interviews with Journalists and Reporters.....	32
Delaware Best Media Practice: Tips for Journalists.....	34
<b>Section 7: Materials to Publish</b> .....	38
Warning Signs of Domestic Violence .....	38
Safety Planning.....	39
Where to Go for Help.....	41
Appendix.....	45
Excerpts from Interview with RICADV SOAR Members.....	45

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## Introduction

Domestic Violence is a difficult issue to investigate and a complicated one to report. The Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence (DCADV) has designed the Domestic Violence Media Guide as a resource to assist journalists in covering domestic violence homicides and other related stories. The DCADV modeled this handbook after the original and highly regarded version created by the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Information provided in this manual is designed to help reporters view intimate partner crimes with understanding and accuracy through the lens of domestic violence.

Murder is the most extreme and newsworthy example of coercive behaviors and violent acts that batterers may use to exert control and power over their intimate partners. Often a pattern of abusive behavior develops over time in relationships, increasing in both severity and frequency. Still, domestic violence remains a problem that occurs largely “behind closed doors.” Thus, it’s not unusual for these same batterers to show a different personality to the outside world and to be perceived as a “model employee,” or a “sweet guy,” who is active in the community or an avid volunteer at the local school. Talking to domestic violence experts and learning about the dynamics of violent relationships will clarify that, though sometimes shocking, acts of domestic violence are not unusual or uncommon.

The DCADV hopes that by asking the key question, “**What was the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim?**” reporters will view intimate partner crimes, such as a homicide, murder/suicide, assault and terroristic threatening the culmination of a pattern of violence in a relationship. We hope that ultimately, news coverage of these crimes will reflect the reality of lives lived in the context of abuse. Members of the media can then help the larger community understand why domestic violence often remains an unaddressed and unrecognized problem until it escalates to an extreme and tragic level.

\*\* Though both women and men can be victims of domestic violence, research tells us that women are the victims in an estimated 90% of cases. (See Sections 3 and 4 for statistics and research citations.) Thus, for the purposes of this manual, victims will generally be referred to as female and perpetrators or abusers as male.

## The Law

### Overview of Delaware Domestic Violence Laws

Delaware does not have a singular domestic violence law. Instead, various civil and criminal laws regarding and/or impacting domestic violence can be found in several parts of the Delaware Code's major divisions which are called "Titles". This section of the manual provides a brief overview of the most important civil and criminal statutes that provide protection to victims of domestic violence.

Primary among these Delaware statutes is the Protection From Abuse (PFA) law which is found at Title 10, Section 1041 (1) (a) through (h). Enacted in 1994, the PFA is accepted as the essence of Delaware's domestic violence law. A review of the conduct deemed abusive and thus prohibited by 10 Del. C. § 1041 (1) (a) through (h) follows

### What Conduct is prohibited by Delaware's Domestic Violence Law?

- **10 Del. C. § 1041 (1) (a):**
  - Intentionally or recklessly, causing or attempting to cause physical injury to or sexual offense against the victim.
- **10 Del. C. § 1041 (1) (b):**
  - Intentionally or recklessly, engaging in conduct which causes the victim to feel that she had a good reason to fear that she might be physically injured or sexually assaulted by the abuser.
  - Intentionally or recklessly, engaging in conduct which causes the victim to feel that she had a good reason to fear that someone else might be physically injured or sexually assaulted by the abuser.
- **10 Del. C. § 1041 (1) (c):**
  - Intentionally, or recklessly, damaging or destroying or taking the victim's personal property.
- **10 Del. C. § 1041 (1) (d):**
  - Engaging in a course of alarming or distressing conduct in a manner that is likely to cause the victim to be afraid *or* to be emotionally distressed.

- Engaging in a course of alarming or distressing conduct in a manner that is likely to cause the victim to become violent *or* disorderly.
- **10 Del. C. § 1041 (1) (e):**
  - Entering without permission (or staying after being asked to leave) a place that the victim (*or* someone else) lived in *or* owned.
  - Entering without permission (or staying after being asked to leave) land that the victim (*or* someone else) lived on *or* owned.
  - Entering into any place or onto any land that a court (in any order regarding the victim) told the perpetrator not to enter into or onto.
- **10 Del. C. § 1041 (1) (f):**
  - Committing child abuse which is defined at 16 Del. C. § 902 (1) as “any physical injury to a child by those responsible for the care, custody and control of the child, through unjustified force as defined in § 468 of Title 11, emotional abuse, torture, criminally negligent treatment, sexual abuse, exploitation, maltreatment or mistreatment”.
- **10 Del. C. § 1041 (1) (g):**
  - Unlawfully restraining the victim *or* the victim’s children (i.e. ordering the victim or victim’s children to “stay put” or preventing the victim or the victim’s children from leaving or moving about). (See 11 Del. C. §§ 781-783A).
  - Parental taking of a child who is less than 16 years old with the intention of permanently (or for a prolonged period of time) keeping the child away from the victim. (See 11 Del. C. §§ 785).
  - Forcing (see 11 Del. C. § 791) the victim to either do or not do something by causing her to fear that the abuser (*or* another person) will:
    - Cause physical injury to any person
    - Damage any property
    - Commit any crime
    - Accuse anyone of a crime or cause criminal charges to be filed against anyone
    - Expose a secret (or publicize a truth or a lie) with the goal of subjecting the victim to ridicule or hatred or contempt
    - Testify or provide information (or withhold testimony or information) regarding someone’s legal defense or claim
    - Use or abuse his own position as a public servant by doing (or failing to do) some job-related act so as to adversely affect the victim or another person

- Do something which is intended to harm the victim or another person's health, safety, business, calling, career, financial condition, reputation or personal relationships.
- **10 Del. C. § 1041 (1) (h):**
  - Doing anything which a reasonable person under the particular circumstances would find threatening or harmful.

### **Who Does Delaware's PFA Law Protect?**

The persons who are protected by Delaware's PFA law are described at 10 Del. C. §§ 901 (9) and 1041 (2) as:

- Husband and wife
- Former spouses
- A man and woman cohabiting together with or without a child of either or both
- Custodian and child
- Any group of persons related by blood or marriage who are residing in one home under one head
- Any group of persons related to the other by any of the following degrees of relationship: Mother; Father; Mother-in-law; Father-in-law; Brother; Sister; Brother-in-law; Sister-in-law; Son; Daughter; Son-in-law; Daughter-in-law; Grandfather; Grandmother; Grandson; Granddaughter; Stepfather; Stepmother. (The relationships referred to in this definition include blood relationships without regard to legitimacy and relationships by adoption.)

### **Where Do Delaware's Criminal Laws Fit In?**

In addition to the civil, PFA law, the entire system of crimes and criminal punishments which are found in Title 11 of the Delaware Code are also available to address all crime victims (including domestic violence victims/survivors) and to prosecute all persons who commit crimes (including those who commit crimes against their family members or domestic partners). Therefore an assault in a bar by a stranger and an assault in a home by a spouse are both assaults. In one case the victim is a stranger, in the other, the victim is your domestic partner. Both assaults are equally criminal. Other aspects of the differences between criminal and civil DV law in Delaware are noted on the attached Civil vs. Criminal DV Law Chart.

## **When and How Would One Decide to Use the Civil or the Criminal Law?**

The most important thing to know here is that a victim **need not choose one or the other**. A victim can use **both**, or **either**, or **neither**. What the victim decides to use depends on her needs. The goals of criminal law and civil law are different. It is the goal of criminal law to punish (and possibly “fix”) those who commit crimes by imposing fines, loss of liberty and/or other restrictions or penalties.

The defendant relinquishes the fine or his liberty to a governmental entity. It is the goal of civil law to compensate (“make whole”) the person who has been aggrieved by the bad conduct of another. In a criminal DV case therefore, the abuser might be arrested, required to post bail, fined, jailed, placed on probation, and/or required to engage in rehabilitative activities/classes (such as certified Batters’ Intervention Programs) with the goal of making society safer.

In the case of a PFA, our law specifically outlines certain remedies that are aimed at making the victim safe and “whole”. (Those remedies are found at 10 Del. C. § 1045 and are discussed below.) Both criminal and civil DV cases may include “no contact” provisions. In criminal DV cases the “no contact” provisions are part of either bail conditions or criminal sentencing. These criminal “no contact” orders are not automatically issued, last for varying lengths of time, and are not quickly and automatically included in a statewide data bank. In civil DV (PFA) cases, the “no contact” order generally lasts up to one year with the possibility of an additional six month renewal. The PFA “no contact” orders are quickly (within 24 hours) and automatically included in Delaware’s Judicial Information System (DELJIS) and are available to every law enforcement agency in the state.

## **What are the PFA remedies?**

The civil (i.e.PFA) DV remedies listed at 10 Del. C. § 1045 (1) through (11) include Family Court’s ability to order any or all of the following:

- Order that the perpetrator not commit acts of domestic abuse.
- Order that the perpetrator not contact or attempt to contact the victim.
- Order that the perpetrator move from the residence or household so that the victim (or other resident) can have exclusive possession of the residence/household. (The Court has authority to make this order even if the perpetrator or someone else owns or leases the residence/household.)
- Order that the perpetrator give the victim possession (for the duration of the PFA or for some other specified time) any listed personal property including, but not limited to:

- Motor vehicles
  - Bank accounts (“checkbooks”)
  - Keys
  - And other personal items
- Order that the perpetrator give up temporary custody of the children to the victim (or another family member).
- Order the perpetrator to pay support (including housing costs) for the victim and for the parties’ children.
- Order the perpetrator to pay the victim (or any other family member) for the following expenses which resulted directly from the perpetrator’s acts of domestic violence:
  - Medical
  - Dental
  - Counseling
  - Loss of earnings or other support
  - Cost of repair/replacement of real or personal property which was damaged or taken by perpetrator
  - Moving and other travel expenses
  - Litigation costs
  - Attorneys fees
- Order the perpetrator to relinquish (and refrain from purchasing or receiving) all firearms and ammunition for the duration of the PFA. (Note that firearms may **only** be relinquished to police officers, sheriffs or constables.)
- Order the perpetrator to refrain from transferring, concealing, mortgaging, or otherwise encumbering any property owned or leased by the parties.
- Order treatment or counseling (such as participation in a certified Batters’ Intervention Program).
- Order anything else that the court believes reasonably necessary or appropriate to prevent or reduce the likelihood of future domestic violence.

## **What Other Laws Impact Domestic Violence for Delawareans?**

The above review, by no means, outlines all there is to know about domestic violence law in Delaware. There are, in addition to the PFA and criminal laws mentioned here, further state and federal statutes which impact Delawareans. Included among these are a wide range of Delaware criminal laws which, for example, cover various types of proscribed conduct, prohibit gun and ammunition possession, outline the consequences of violating no contact orders, define when police officers may initiate arrests, and offer special sentencing options.

Among the various Delaware civil statutory provisions is everything from noting that Courts must consider a parent’s abuse of another parent when deciding “best interest of the child”, to granting unemployment benefits to persons who have lost their employment for reasons related to domestic violence, to offering free

telephone call blocking to domestic violence victims. Federal statutes, like their state counterparts, also provide a range of both substantive and procedural benefits, prohibitions and safeguards.

Among these are the right to obtain a protection order without the requirement of paying for court costs, filing fees, advertising, service and related costs. Additionally, many non- DV laws also impact and benefit domestic violence victims and survivors. Examples include our state and federal anti-discrimination laws which, where appropriate, may be utilized by domestic violence victims and survivors.

Finally our system of jurisprudence includes all three branches of government. Therefore, one must also consider case law and court evidentiary/procedural rules which may emanate from the judicial branches of both state and federal government as well as the regulatory/policy provisions which issue from the administrative branches of government. All of these sources contribute to form integral parts of the entire complement of laws which impact domestic violence victims and survivors. For more information about those domestic violence laws which impact Delawareans, please see DCADV's forthcoming *Legal Guide for Delaware's DV Victims and Advocates*

### Chart of Civil vs. Criminal Intimate Partner Domestic Violence Laws

	CIVIL LAW	CRIMINAL LAW
<b>Parties Involved</b>	Petitioner vs. Respondent (limited to 10 <u>Del. C. § 901</u> and § 1041 (2) (a) and (b) definition of family); <sup>1</sup> Victim = “Party” and “witness”; “Parties” = Petitioner and Respondent.	State vs. Defendant (not limited to 10 <u>Del. C. § 901(9)</u> or § 1041 (2) (a) and (b) definitions of “family” <sup>2</sup> ; Victim = “witness” for the State; “Parties” = State and Defendant
<b>Initial Court Involved</b>	Family Court	Family Court, or Justice of the Peace Court, or Court of Common Pleas, or Superior Court
<b>Length of Relief</b>	One year with possible extension of 6 months	Varies (See discussion on Criminal Sentencing)
<b>Relief Available</b>	No contact order; exclusive possession of residence, exclusive possession of car, provisional custody of children, financial support (children’s tuition, car insurance, rent, mortgage, utilities, health ins., etc); order to certified domestic violence program; order immediately goes into *DELJIS; restriction on gun possession. 10 <u>Del.C. §1045 et seq.</u> See also 18 <u>USC §§ 2265</u> regarding full faith and credit.	No contact order, fine, imprisonment, criminal record, order to certified domestic violence intervention program, DV First Offenders Diversion Program (for adult misdemeanor DV defendants who fit the 10 <u>Del. C. §. 901 (9)</u> definition of “family”); restriction on gun possession under Delaware and Federal laws. [11 <u>Del. C. §§ 1448 (a) (1), (a) (6) and (a) (7); 18 USC §§ 922 (g) (8) and (g) (9)</u> ].
<b>Personnel Involved</b>	Family Court Intake Person, Mediator, Commissioner, Judge, Court, Shelter and Community DV advocates	Police, Police-based Victim Advocates, Deputy Attorney General, AG’s Victim/Witness Services, Judge, Probation Officer
<b>Paperwork Involved</b>	PFA Petition, PFA Ex Parte Order, PFA Final Order, Motion to Modify PFA, Certified Copy of Notice of	Police Criminal Incident No., Police Report, Victim Copy of Police Report, Arrest Warrant filed by Police,

<sup>1</sup> For intimate partners protects: Husband/Wife, Cohabiting Man and Woman w/ or w/out child, Divorced couples, Non-cohabiting Man and Woman w/child in common.

<sup>2</sup> For intimate partners protects: Heterosexual dating couples (who neither cohabit nor have children in common); All other intimate partners (including Gay, Lesbians, Bi and Transgender couples).

<b>(continued)</b>	Publication. See 10 <u>Del. C.</u> §§ 1041-1049F. Note that victim pays nothing to file, notice, serve or publish the PFA-- 42 <u>USC</u> §§3796 gg and §§ 3796 hh.	Warrant filed by victim, Bail Conditions, Probation Reports, Sentencing Report, Victim Impact Statement, Sentencing order, VCCB Application
<b>Standard of Proof (level of Proof Needed)</b>	Preponderance of the Evidence (Majority of the Relevant Evidence)	Beyond A Reasonable Doubt
<b>Who Can Appeal</b>	Petitioner and/or Respondent	Defendant and/or the State <sup>3</sup>
<b>What Happens When the perpetrator Fails to Follow the Court's Order</b>	10 <u>Del. C.</u> § 1046 (c): police SHALL ARREST <sup>4</sup> where s/he finds probably cause; PFA in DELGIS + contact w/victim= PROBABLE CAUSE FOR ARREST; violator to be immediately arrested and taken before Family Court (or Justice of the Peace if Family Court is closed); it is a Class A Misdemeanor to knowingly violate a PFA; violators can be held in contempt, prosecuted, imprisoned, and/or fined; Victim may also file for Civil Contempt of PFA in Family Court. See also 10 <u>Del. C.</u> § 1049B.	Violation of Probation (if placed on probation); Violation of Bail Conditions (if conditions were imposed); New Crime Charged and New Sentence 11 <u>Del. C.</u> § 1271 (3)—intentional disobedience of Court “injunction or other mandate” (i.e “order”); 11 <u>Del. C.</u> § 1271A—conditions under which PFA violator receives minimum mandatory 15 day sentence; arrest per 10 <u>Del. C.</u> §§ 1046 (c) and 1049C.

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<sup>3</sup> Under certain circumstances the State may appeal a Family Court criminal or delinquency decision.

<sup>4</sup> In practice, these arrests will be made only regarding the “no contact provisions” of the PFA. Victims/Survivors will need to file Civil Contempt with Family Court for violation of other PFA provisions (i.e. custody/visitation, financial obligations, certified domestic violence intervention requirements).

Paulette Sullivan Moore, Esq., Policy Coordinator, Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
Formatted by Angela Mauz, Office Manager, Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
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# Domestic Violence

## An Overview:

Even in 2006, domestic violence remains an under reported crime with most victims of abuse never telling a friend, much less calling 911 or a shelter hotline. When it does come into the public eye, often in tragic circumstances, domestic violence is a difficult matter for police to investigate and a complex one for the media to cover. The main characters including victims, perpetrators and their children, friends and family are cast onto a public stage shrouded in an atmosphere of intense emotions including anger, recriminations, betrayal, and in some cases, terrible grief over the loss of a loved one.

It can be risky, as a reporter, to be confronted with such a scenario without adequate background knowledge and up-to-date resources regarding this important social problem. In covering domestic violence cases, reporters are challenged to juxtapose their main interest, which is informing and educating the general public, with respecting the privacy and confidence, as well as integrity of those involved in the case. In this section of the manual, we provide general information about domestic violence, together with research citations to help facilitate clear and in depth media coverage of these compelling and difficult cases. Much of the information has been bulleted to make it user-friendly.

## Domestic Violence Facts:

### Adult Victims

- The cost of domestic violence to society is enormous and still rising. It is a criminal offense which tends to repeat itself and has the potential to lead to other crimes. It has more complex causes and solutions than crimes committed by strangers. For those whose lives have never been touched by domestic violence, it can be difficult to understand and empathize.<sup>1</sup>

## Sources:

<sup>1</sup>Cliff Mariani, *Domestic Violence Survival Guide*, Looseleaf Law Publications, New York, 1996.

<sup>2</sup>Eve S. Buzawa and Carl G. Buzawa, *Domestic Violence: The Criminal Justice Response*, 3d ed., Sage Publications, California 2003.

<sup>3-4</sup> DCADV, “Domestic Violence 101 Training”, *Dynamics of Domestic Violence*, DCADV 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?*, Putnam’s Sons, New York, 2002

<sup>6</sup> Eve S. Buzawa and Carl G. Buzawa, *Domestic Violence: The Criminal Justice Response*, 3d ed., Sage Publications, California 2003.

<sup>7-8</sup> K.J Wilson, *When Violence Begins at Home*, Hunter House Inc. Publishers, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Eve S. Buzawa and Carl G. Buzawa, *Domestic Violence: The Criminal Justice Response*, 3d Ed, Sage Publications, California, 2003.

<sup>10</sup>Cliff Mariani, *Domestic Violence Survival Guide*, Looseleaf Law Publications, New

- Domestic violence is difficult to measure since it includes a range of behaviors. Most researchers describe it as behaviors either criminal or manipulative in nature, which result in the coercive control of a partner through the use of physical, sexual psychological, and verbal behaviors.<sup>2</sup>
- Domestic violence is defined as a pattern of abusive and controlling behavior that occurs within an adult intimate relationship<sup>3</sup>
- The most recognizable form of domestic violence is physical; however, batterers employ a series of power and control techniques to coerce their partners. These techniques may include withholding economic resources, coercion and threats, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, blaming the victim and using children as a vehicle of control.<sup>4</sup>
- Physical assault is just one indication of the extent of abuse victims are subjected to. There are many victims who have never been physically assaulted but endure repeated verbal assaults, humiliation, sexual coercion, economic exploitation and other forms of psychological abuse.<sup>5</sup>
- Research has shown that many women find emotional, verbal and psychological abuse more harmful and of greater duration than physical abuse.<sup>6</sup>
- Victims of domestic violence can belong to any socio-economic, ethnic or racial group. They may be young or old, female or male, gay or straight, rich or poor, educated or uneducated. Domestic violence is an equal opportunity problem.<sup>7</sup>
- The majority of cases involving heterosexual, intimate violence that come to the attention of police, courts, shelters and other direct service providers, involve women victims and male perpetrators.<sup>8</sup>
- Women experience much greater fear and injury in domestic violence situations.<sup>9</sup>
- Domestic violence incidents are often under-reported and mislabeled due to the shame of revealing a private intimate matter, the tendency to minimize the incident, a reluctance to report a family member, and the fear of reprisal by abuser and/or friends and family.<sup>10</sup>
- Women are not the only victims of domestic violence. All people- young and old, heterosexual and homosexual, male and female- can be targets of abuse. Teenage, elderly and pregnant women, as well as people with disabilities, are especially at risk of violence.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>13</sup> ABA. "Commission on Domestic Violence" *Statistics*, n.d. <<http://www.abanet.org/domviol/stats.html>> Accessed September 15, 2005.

<sup>14-15</sup> Eve S. Buzawa and Carl G. Buzawa, *Domestic Violence: The Criminal Justice Response*, 3d Ed, Sage Publications, California, 2003

<sup>16-17</sup> Rachel Baum et.al. "National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs 2003 Report" *Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Domestic Violence: 2003 Supplement*, 2004 <[http://www.ncaavp.org/common/document\\_files/Reports/2003NCAVPDVRpt.pdf](http://www.ncaavp.org/common/document_files/Reports/2003NCAVPDVRpt.pdf)> Date Accessed August 21, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> CDC. "Physical Dating Violence Among High School Students- United States, 2003." *MMWR* 55 (2006): 532-5.

<sup>19</sup> Silverman, J.G. et al. "Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality." *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association* 286.5 (2001): 572-579.

<sup>20</sup> Rennison, Callie and Sarah Welchans. "Intimate Partner Violence 1993-2001." U.S. Department of

- Elders may be battered by their adult children or caretakers and may be physically unable to defend themselves or escape from the abuse.<sup>12</sup>
- According to the American Bar Association domestic violence also occurs in same-sex relationships with a statistical frequency similar to that of heterosexual relationships.<sup>13</sup>
- A National Violence Against Women survey in 2000 by Tjaden and Thoennes found that approximately 11% of women in lesbian relationships reported being raped, physically assaulted or stalked by their partner. At the same time, 30% of women living with a man in a heterosexual relationship reported such violence. On the other hand, the rate of violence in male same-sex couples was approximately 15% against a partner while the rate was slightly less than 8% for men in heterosexual relationships with women.<sup>14</sup>
- Research indicates that men perpetrate more violence in both same-sex and heterosexual relationship but the highest rates of male violence are in heterosexual relationship.<sup>15</sup>
- In 2003, twelve National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs member organizations, along with several affiliated programs documented a record 6,523 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) domestic violence incidents reported in 11 distinct cities and regions across the U.S. and Toronto, Ontario. This represents an increase of 13% over the 5,718 cases reported by the same agencies in 2002 and includes six reported domestic violence-related death.<sup>16</sup>
- Same-sex victims may not seek help for fear of being "outed" or that no one will believe that violence occurs in gay and lesbian relationships.<sup>17</sup>

## Teens

- Recent research indicates that teen dating violence occurs in similar manners and frequencies and results in consequences just as serious, if not more so, than violence that occurs in adult intimate relationships.<sup>18</sup>
- National studies of dating violence have shown that teens are at a higher risk than adults for victimization<sup>19</sup> with girls ages sixteen to twenty-four experiencing the highest per capita rates of intimate partner violence victimization, at three times the national average.<sup>20</sup>
- Ten percent of Delaware high school students surveyed by the Delaware Risk Assessment Survey reported having been hit or physically hurt by a partner.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> CDC. "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System." Youth Online: Comprehensive Results. Delaware Unintentional Injuries and Violence. Online. Retrieved June 7, 2006.

<sup>22</sup> K.J Wilson, *When Violence Begins at Home*, Hunter House Inc. Publishers, 1997.

<sup>23</sup> Domestic Violence and Children: Creating a Public Response, Schecter & Edelson, Center on Crime, Communities and Culture, Open Society Institute, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> Eve S. Buzawa and Carl G. Buzawa, *Domestic Violence: The Criminal Justice Response*, 3d Ed, Sage Publications, California, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Jaffe, P. and Sudermann, M., "Child Witness of Women Abuse: Research and Community Responses," in Stith, S. and Straus, M., *Understanding Partner Violence: Prevalence, Causes, Consequences, and Solutions. Families in Focus Services*, Vol. II. Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations, 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (November 2000). *Safe from the start –taking action on children exposed to violence* (Publication # NCJ182789) Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

- Teenagers may not seek help because they distrust adults. Instead they may seek help from their peers. In one study 25% of high school students told no one, only 26% told their parents, and 66% reported the abuse to friends.<sup>22</sup>

### Children

- It is estimated that approximately 3.3 million to 10 million children in the United States witness domestic violence annually.<sup>23</sup>
- A 2000 study by Edelson et al. reported that in a group of 114 battered women, 45% stated their children entered situations in which abuse was occurring at least "occasionally," 18% responded that this occurred "frequently"; only 23% said that this "never" occurred.<sup>24</sup>
- Children who are exposed to domestic violence are more likely to exhibit behavioral and physical health problems including depression, anxiety, and violence towards peers.<sup>25</sup>
- There is an overlap of 30 to 60 percent between violence against children and violence against women in the same families. The home can be a dangerous place.<sup>26</sup>
- Studies have shown that 25 percent of domestic homicides are witnessed by the children of the victim.<sup>27</sup>

## Abusive Partners

- Abusive partners come from all walks of life. They come from all professions, educational and ethnic backgrounds, class backgrounds, as well as religious affiliations.<sup>28</sup>
- Batterers' abusive behaviors are bolstered by familial and societal messages they learn as children, reinforcing the notion that violence against women is acceptable behavior. Batterers rarely accept responsibility for their abuse—often developing a rationale to explain why it occurred.<sup>29</sup>
- This rationale can range from denying or minimizing the effects of the abuse, to blaming the victim or some external force. In general, abusers are jealous of any relationship their partner may have including those with other men, women, children and even pets. Paradoxically, they are often afraid of abandonment by their partner and will do anything to keep her from leaving, including isolating her from support systems, maiming or even killing her.<sup>30</sup>
- The abusive partner's violence serves to intimidate, control and silence the victim in an effort to gain the upper hand in a relationship.<sup>31</sup>
- Most abusive men do not have the “image” of an abuser. Very often they are kind, warm and humorous, especially during courtship. He may have very good relationships with friends, be a success at work and be drug and alcohol free. This makes it difficult for the victim, let alone anyone else, believe that he is an abuser.<sup>32</sup>
- In his book “*Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*” Lundy Bancroft states “Abuse grows from attitudes and values, not feelings. The roots are ownership, the trunk is entitlement, and the branches are control” Feelings, he says, do not bring about controlling or abusive behavior, it is driven by beliefs, values, and habits.<sup>33</sup>
- Peter Jaffe in his book *Child Custody and Domestic Violence*, found that some batterers “deny their violence in an honest and genuine manner, which raises the possibility that the allegation is false, or that the violence was initiated by the partner.”<sup>34</sup>
- A 1989 study by Hotelling and Straus reported that men who assaulted women and children were 5 times more likely than other men to have been generally violent and to have assaulted non-family members.<sup>35</sup>
- A National Family Violence survey that studied a large sample (2,291) cases, indicated that 311(15%) had been violent the preceding year. Out of that number, 208 (67%) had been violent only to their wives, whereas 71(23%)

<sup>28-30</sup> K.J Wilson, *When Violence Begins at Home*, Hunter House Inc. Publishers, 1997.

<sup>31</sup>J.L. Jansinki & Glenda Kaufman “Dynamics and Risk Factors in Partner Violence.” in J.L. Jansinki & L.M. Williams (ed.), *Partner Violence*, Sage Publications, California, 1998

<sup>32-33</sup> Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do that?*, Putnam's Sons, New York, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> P. Jaffe et. al, *Child Custody & Domestic Violence*, Sage Publications, California, 2003

<sup>35-36</sup> Eve S. Buzawa and Carl G. Buzawa, *Domestic Violence: The Criminal Justice Response*, 3d Ed, Sage

were violent against non-family members and 32 (10%) were violent toward their wives and non-family members.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Rennison, C.M. (October, 2001). *Intimate partner violence and age of victim, 1993-1999*. (Publication #NCJ187635). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available from <<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>>

## Victims of Domestic Violence

### Why do they stay? Why don't they leave?

To individuals not “walking in the shoes” of a victim of domestic violence, leaving an abusive relationship seems to be the rational option for victims to take. Victims are therefore judged and often asked “why did you stay?” Instead of questioning why victims stay in abusive relationship, we need to take the burden off the victims and ask “why do people batter and why is it allowed to continue?” Leaving an abusive relationship is a process and requires careful safety planning. Leaving does not guarantee an end to the abuse and often escalates it.

- Data from the redesigned National Crime Victimization Survey indicate that from 1993-1999, women separated from their husbands were victimized by an intimate at rates higher than married, divorced, widowed, or never married women.<sup>37</sup>
- Estimates from the National Crime Victimization Survey indicate that the percentage of female murder victims killed by intimate partners has remained at about 30 percent since 1976.<sup>38</sup>
- Many women stay for the simple reason that they fear they or their children will be killed or seriously injured if they do attempt to leave. Murder is the ultimate expression of the batterer's need to control his partner.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Rennison, C.M. (May, 2000). *Intimate partner violence*. (Publication #NCJ178247). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available from <<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>>

Listed below are other reasons why women stay:<sup>40</sup>

- A sense of investment in partner and family relationship.
- A desire to end the violence but not the relationship.
- Feelings of shame or embarrassment
- Inconsistent responses from the criminal justice system.
- Economic hardships and loss of income
- Concern about losing custody of the children
- Lack of affordable housing
- Society's expectation of women's roles
- Lack of support from family members
- Religious/cultural beliefs that support staying together

<sup>39</sup> Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, “Why do victims stay.” *Domestic Violence: A Handbook for Journalists*, June, 2000, Section 3:5

<sup>40</sup> Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence, “Why She Stays.” *Domestic Violence 101 Training: 2004*, pg. 13

<sup>41</sup> Jann K. Jackson, *Understanding Survival Responses of Battered Women*,” Maryland Medical Journal, October 1994, cited by Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, “Why do victims stay.” *Domestic Violence: A Handbook for Journalists*,” June, 2000, Section 3:5

<sup>42</sup> Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, “Why do victims stay.” *Domestic Violence: A Handbook for Journalists*,” June, 2000, Section 3:5

<sup>43</sup> K.J Wilson, *When Violence Begins at Home*, Hunter House Inc. Publishers, 1997.

<sup>44</sup> Eve S. Buzawa and Carl G. Buzawa, *Domestic Violence: The Criminal Justice Response*, 3d ed, Sage Publications, California, 2003

<sup>45</sup> Helpguide, “Domestic Violence and Abuse: Types, signs, symptoms, causes” Mental Health Issues, November 2004, < [www.helpguide.org/mental/domestic\\_violence\\_abuse\\_signs.html](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/domestic_violence_abuse_signs.html) > Accessed July 30, 2005

- Domestic Violence experts also point out that leaving may put victims in very challenging circumstances. “It is difficult to escape when there is no safe place to go and there are insufficient financial resources to live independently. Many judges are reluctant to sentence an abuser to jail or deny a father the right to visit his children. Thus, a woman who does escape often finds herself in continuing contact with the abuser during court ordered visitation arrangements or because the abuser has simply tracked her to her new location.”<sup>41</sup>
- No matter whether the woman stays or goes, domestic violence is still a crime. We need to put the blame where it belongs- on the batterer- and replace the questions, “Why didn’t she leave” with “Why does he batter her?”<sup>42</sup>

### **How does domestic violence affect the victim?**

- Abusive partners contribute to the feelings of low self worth sometimes experienced by victims of domestic violence and frequently blame the woman for the abuse. She may eventually accept responsibility for the abuse and try to modify her behavior to change the situation. In reality she has no control over her partner’s behavior, since he *chooses* to hurt her.<sup>43</sup>
- Abuse has the potential to change the economic stability of victims as well as affect the physiological well being of the individual. The results of domestic violence or abuse can be very long-lasting.<sup>44</sup>
- People who are abused by a spouse or intimate partner may experience a variety of health problems such as sleeping difficulties, depression and physical disabilities.<sup>45</sup>
- Domestic violence also impacts victims’ jobs. A recent national benchmark survey done by the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence revealed that 21% of fulltime employed adults revealed themselves as victims of domestic violence. The violence impacted their work in the form of low productivity, lateness, absenteeism, job loss and fear of discovery.<sup>46</sup>
- Battered women are often severely injured. According to a Bureau of Justice Statistics report in 2000, half of female victims of intimate partner violence reported a physical injury. About 4 in 10 of these victims sought professional medical treatment.<sup>47</sup>

- Tragically, in some of these cases the abuse may ultimately result in death, of the victim. A 2004 study by Fox and Zawita, for example, reports that about 11% of homicide victims were killed by an intimate partner from 1976 to 2002.<sup>48</sup> Here in Delaware, 14 people lost their lives to intimate partner violence in 2005, making up 26% of the all the state's homicides.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Kim Wells, "National Benchmark Survey: The Impact of Domestic Violence on the American Workplace," *Domestic Violence Report*, Vol.11 No. 4, April/May 2006, pgs.49-61.

<sup>47</sup> Callie Marie Rennison et. al, "Intimate Partner Violence," Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, May 2000.

<sup>48</sup> Fox JA, Zawitz MW. Homicide trends in the United States. Washington (DC): Department of Justice (US); 2004.

<sup>49</sup> DCADV, "Delaware Domestic Violence Statistics," DCADV, May 17, 2006.

<sup>50</sup> DELJIS, "Domestic Incident Report Statistics," 2005 Reports, culled by DCADV, May, 2006.

<sup>51-53</sup> P. Jaffe et. al,

## What happens to offenders?

First time offenders are usually sentenced to one year of probation and ordered to attend a 12-16 week batterer's intervention program to work on their abusive behavior. In Delaware, only about half of all reported criminal intimate partner incidents lead to an arrest.<sup>50</sup>

Most batterers' intervention programs are based on a specific theory of violence that focuses on altering beliefs and attitudes toward violence by holding batterers accountable for their actions, and teaches non-abusive behavior. These programs also work closely with victims on safety planning during the time the abuser is enrolled.<sup>51</sup> Delaware has five batterer's intervention programs certified to receive court-ordered referrals.

Program effectiveness is an issue that is frequently raised by people regarding batterers intervention programs. Such services are intervention measures, and do not necessarily alter the offender's desire or willingness to violence. Program effectiveness depends on the integrity of the program, the rate of offender completion and whether or not there is a sincere desire by the abuser to change and be held accountable for the violence.<sup>52</sup>

Though recent research has shown some success with batterer intervention programs, the greatest difficulty continues to be attrition. Some batterers fail to follow-up with or complete the court's mandate for treatment. Often abusers will join intervention programs only to keep a partner from leaving or to influence a court's sentencing decision. On a positive note, research has shown that such programs decrease an abuser's potential for violence during treatment.<sup>53</sup>

## **Domestic Violence Myths**

There are commonly accepted beliefs or myths about domestic violence which tend to obscure both the prevalence and seriousness of intimate partner violence. These myths represent the attitudes and norms that support and reinforce how we as a society view the problem of domestic violence. Below are some examples of common myths:<sup>54</sup>

### **Domestic violence is just a brief loss of temper.**

The use of violence is not a temporary or fleeting occurrence. Batterers make a conscious decision to use violence. It is used strategically to enforce power and control. Batterers will often control their anger in the presence of friends and family, unleashing it in their absence.

### **It happens to only low-income families.**

No one is immune. Domestic violence happens throughout all levels of society. It might appear that domestic violence only happens in poor families because they are more likely to access community or social services as opposed to the better off who may have other alternatives for dealing with the abuse.

### **She must ask for it or deserve it.**

There is no excuse for abuse. No one deserves to be abused.

### **If she wanted to leave she could.**

There are many barriers that make it difficult for victims of domestic violence to leave. Concerns regarding a lack of financial means, housing, custody of children, immigration status, fear of retaliation by abuser, among others, will often keep a victim in an abusive relationship.

### **Drug abuse, alcohol, stress and mental illness cause battering.**

Drugs, alcohol, stress and mental illness do not cause battering; they may escalate a violent incident, but do not cause the violence. These factors are often used as an excuse for violence by abusers. For example, it's important to remember that many people who drink do not abuse their partners, and many who do abuse their partners do not drink. Domestic violence is learned behavior.

<sup>54</sup> Oakland County Coordinating Council Against Domestic Violence. "Domestic Violence Handbook," < [www.domesticviolence.org/t\\_or\\_f.html](http://www.domesticviolence.org/t_or_f.html) > accessed August 1, 2006 and Women's Aid, "Myths about Violence Against Women," <http://www.womensaid.ie/pages/domestic/MYTHS.HTM> accessed August, 1 2006. and International Child Abuse Network, "Don't Believe These Domestic Violence Myths," < <http://www.yesican.org/DV/DV04.html> > accessed July, 28 2006

## How can society work to eliminate domestic abuse?

Society contributes to domestic violence by not taking it seriously enough and by treating it as expected, normal, or deserved. Specifically, society could help to reduce the occurrence of domestic abuse in the following ways.<sup>55</sup>

- Law enforcement should strive to treat domestic abuse as a serious crime, rather than as a “domestic dispute”
- Courts should work to impose severe consequences, such as imprisonment or economic sanctions
- Clergy or counselors should rethink the common belief that the relationship just needs to be improved and that the relationship can work, given more time and effort
- Communities should seek meaningful ways to hold domestic abusers accountable
- Individuals should challenge the belief that the abuse is the fault of the victim, or that the abuse is a normal part of marriage or domestic partnerships
- Individuals should challenge gender-role socialization and stereotypes that condone abusive behavior by men.

<sup>55</sup> Helpguide, “Domestic Violence and Abuse: Types, signs, symptoms, causes” Mental Health Issues, November 2004, <[www.helpguide.org/mental/domestic\\_violence\\_abuse\\_signs.html](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/domestic_violence_abuse_signs.html)> Accessed July 30, 2005

<sup>56-58</sup> Adapted from Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, “What Help is there for victims.” *Domestic Violence: A Handbook for Journalists*, June, 2000, Section 3:10

## What Help is Available

Domestic Violence is a “social enemy” that thrives on the silence of the victim, batterer, family members and bystanders. For the victim, reaching for the phone to talk to a domestic violence advocate can be the first step to breaking that silence and a path to ending the abuse.

There are a number of agencies staffed with caring advocates who are working together to, holistically, assist victims/survivors of domestic violence and their families in Delaware. Local domestic violence agencies provide a range of comprehensive, high quality emergency and support services. Services include emergency shelter, 24 hour crisis hotlines, support groups, children’s programs, court advocacy, counseling, legal services and prevention through education and awareness<sup>56</sup>.

On the national level, there is also a strong network of emergency shelters stretching from coast to coast, in every state, in every region of the country. Each state has a coalition that coordinates local efforts and works on both the state and national levels to end this violence. In addition, domestic violence is now

recognized as a crime in all fifty states demonstrating that the criminal justice system has been instrumental in addressing the problem of battering.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, national legislation such as the recently reauthorized Violence Against Women Act of 1994, authored by Delaware's Senator Joseph Biden, has had far-reaching impact on the struggle to end domestic violence. Federal funding of state and local initiatives helps to ensure that victims and their children will be provided the services they need and deserve.<sup>58</sup>

## Statistics

### Domestic Violence Prevalence Statistics\*:

- 4 million American women experience a serious assault by a partner during an average 12-month period.<sup>1</sup>
- On the average, more than three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends every day.<sup>2</sup>
- 92% of women say that reducing domestic violence and sexual assault should be at the top of any formal efforts taken on behalf of women today.<sup>3</sup>
- 1 out of 3 women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during her lifetime.<sup>4</sup>
- 1 in 5 female high school students reports being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner. Abused girls are significantly more likely to get involved in other risky behaviors. They are 4 to 6 times more likely to get pregnant and 8 to 9 times more likely to have tried to commit suicide.<sup>5</sup>
- 1 in 3 teens reports knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, slapped, choked or physically hurt by his/her partner.<sup>6</sup>
- Women of all races are equally vulnerable to violence by an intimate partner.<sup>7</sup>
- 37% of all women who sought care in hospital emergency rooms for violence-related injuries were injured by a current or former spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend.<sup>8</sup>
- Some estimates say almost 1 million incidents of violence occur against a current or former spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend per year.<sup>9</sup>
- For 30% of women who experience abuse, the first incident occurs during pregnancy.<sup>10</sup>

1. Henise, L., Ellsberg, M. and Geottemoeller, M. Ending Violence Against Women, Population Reports, Series L, No.11., December 1999.

2. Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, Intimate Partner Violence, 1993-2001. February 2003.

3. Liz Claiborne Inc., study on Teen dating abuse conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited, February 2005.

4 Jay G. Silverman, PhD; Anita Raj, PhD; Lorelei A. Mucci, MPH; and Jeannie E. Hathaway, MD, MPH, "Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality," Journal of the American Medical Association, Vol. 286, No. 5, 2001.

5. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Violence Against Women: Estimates from the Redesignated Survey, August 1995.

6. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Crime Data Brief, Intimate Partner Violence, 1993-2001, February 2003.

7. US. Department of Justice, Violence? Related Injuries Treated in Hospital Emergency Departments, August 1997.

8. US Department of Justice

<sup>10</sup> Helton et .al, 1987

<sup>11</sup> Gazmararian JA, Petersen R, Spitz AM, Goodwin MM, Saltzman LE, Marks JS. "Violence and reproductive health; current knowledge and future research directions." *Maternal and Child Health Journal* 2000; 4(2):79-84

<sup>12</sup> Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States. 2003. Center for disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Atlanta, GA

<sup>13</sup> Family Violence Prevention Fund. 1998. *The Workplace Guide for Employer, Unions, and Advocates*, San Francisco, CA.

<sup>14</sup> These Eve S. Buzawa and Carl G. Buzawa, *Domestic Violence: The Criminal Justice Response*, 3d ed, Sage Publications, California, 2003

<sup>15</sup> "Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey," P. Tjaden & N. Thoennes, Office of Justice Programs, 2000

<sup>16</sup> These numbers, compiled by Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence staff, were culled from newspapers reports and as well as data from DELJIS, the Delaware Office of the Budget Statistical Analysis Center's *Crime in Delaware 2002*, Delaware's Family Court, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports.

<sup>17</sup> Numbers for all domestic violence fatalities are gathered from perusing newspaper articles and public agency reports.

- ✚ As many as 324,000 women each year experience intimate partner violence during their pregnancy.<sup>11</sup>
- ✚ Violence against women costs companies \$72.8 million annually due to lost productivity.<sup>12</sup>
- ✚ 74% of employed battered women were harassed by their partner while they were at work.<sup>13</sup>
- ✚ A study by the National Crime Victimization Survey reported in 1998 that of approximately 1 million reported intimate partner victimization cases, 85% involved women victims.<sup>14</sup>
- ✚ According to results from the National Violence Against Women survey, 64% of women who reported being raped, physically assaulted, and/or stalked since age 18 were victimized by a former intimate partner.<sup>15</sup>

## Delaware Domestic Violence Statistics<sup>16</sup>

- ✚ In 2005 there were 27,417 domestic violence related incidents reported by the police.
- ✚ Of these incidents reported, 13,604 – close to half- involved intimate partners.
- ✚ Between 1998 and November of 2005, there were 47 domestic violence fatalities in Delaware.<sup>17</sup>
- ✚ Between 1989 and 2005, 120 individuals were killed by their intimate partners.
- ✚ Of the 14 murders in Delaware during 2004, nine involved firearms, in which seven were handguns.
- ✚ In 2004, 2,800 Protection From Abuse (PFA) orders were issued in the state of Delaware.
- ✚ In 2004, the statewide domestic violence hotline received 3,507 calls, and there were 500 domestic violence shelter stays.

\* This Information was taken from the National Domestic Violence Hotline Website. [www.ndhv.org/educate/abuse\\_in\\_america.html](http://www.ndhv.org/educate/abuse_in_america.html)

## Media Study: Key Findings

The media play a pivotal role in how we as citizens view our surrounding environment. Media have the power to create social change in our society and to expose all of us to new ideas, issues and current events. Because of the tremendous impact that media play in our society, researchers have analyzed newspaper coverage of domestic violence fatalities, resulting in studies done by the Boston College Media Research Action Project in conjunction with the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and the University of Washington School of Communications. Both of these studies investigated how domestic violence homicides were reported in their respective states' newspapers and the ramifications of such reporting. The results of these studies prompted the Delaware Coalition of Domestic Violence to also conduct an informal review of Delaware's newspapers to see how domestic violence homicides are portrayed in Delaware. The conclusions drawn from the Rhode Island/Boston study and the Washington study coincide with many of the conclusions drawn from Delaware's study.

### *Overview of the Rhode Island Study*

The Rhode Island Media Study analyzed print media coverage of 88 articles reporting on 12 domestic violence murders that occurred in Rhode Island between 1996 and 1999. In each of the twelve cases, the perpetrator was male and the victim was female. The study concluded the following:

#### **Coverage tends to focus on perpetrator; victim becomes invisible.**

- A heavy focus on the perpetrator (i.e. his background, socioeconomic class and possible motives such as drugs, alcohol, jealousy, end of the relationship) dominated the coverage.
- If the perpetrator committed suicide in addition to killing his victim, descriptions of the perpetrator were positive. Also, reporters were less likely to label the case as a domestic violence murder and more likely to classify it as a "family tragedy."
- Often little or no information was given about the victim. Photographs accompanying the stories seldom showed the victim's picture. Photographs were most likely of the perpetrators, their cars or the crime scene.

### **Coverage of crime reinforces myths about domestic violence**

- In all the cases, the relationship between the perpetrator and victim was identified. However in the majority of the cases, the terms domestic violence, domestic abuse or domestic violence murder were rarely or never used.
- Domestic violence murders were often treated as senseless and unexpected. The coverage tended to convey a sense of hopelessness and helplessness, indicating that nothing can be done to prevent such acts.
- Domestic violence murders were treated as unpredictable even though the majority of the cases revealed a multitude of warning signs such as: family and friends aware of history of abuse, past restraining orders or PFA's, past domestic violence charges, recent decisions to separate and previous non-domestic violence charges.

### **Sources shape the story: some may obscure or highlight domestic violence**

- Initial reports from the scene of the crime tended to use on-the-scene witnesses- family, friends, neighbors and co-workers- as primary sources. This can be problematic when these sources suggest their own unreliability with statements such as, "They seemed nice but kept to themselves".
- On-the-scene witnesses often testify to the perpetrator's good character.
- Reactions focused on disbelief and denial which reinforces the myth that domestic violence only happens in "bad" areas or in certain communities.
- There was a heavy reliance on police sources who stressed admissible evidence or framed the incident as a "family matter."
- Some reporters broadened their source list to include domestic violence experts. When this occurred, additional information was included such as national and local statistics, warning signs, services and legal remedies.
- Only rarely were domestic violence survivors quoted as sources.

### **Myths of domestic violence commonly found in all reports**

- Common myths were present in all coverage such as: domestic violence doesn't happen "around here," substance abuse caused the perpetrator to murder, it's a family matter and violence is part of tragic love.

The Rhode Island Media Study concluded that coverage of domestic violence murders had improved over the four years covered in the study. Improvements consisted of more regular use of domestic violence experts as sources as well as the linking of murders and placing them in a broader social context. As a result of the study, the authors suggested that reporters ask police directly if the murder would be charged as domestic violence and that reporters should use caution when deciding on which sources to use when covering a story.

## *Overview of the Washington School of Communications Study*

The Washington study included 230 articles reporting on 44 domestic violence fatalities during 1998 in the state of Washington. The study concluded the following:

### **Crime rarely labeled as domestic violence or placed in broader context**

- The majority of articles did not label the incident as domestic violence, mention if there was a prior history of domestic violence or provide evidence of past abuse.
- Articles portrayed murder as a singular incident rather than part of a bigger social problem.

### **Inaccurate information about domestic violence and reinforcement of myths**

- Nearly half of all articles suggested an excuse for the perpetrator's use of violence; a much smaller number included victim blaming.
- Articles tended to focus on the culture or class of the perpetrator.
- There was a general implication that perpetrators of domestic violence are easily recognizable and the articles expressed surprise and shock that such a "nice guy" could commit domestic violence. Research tells us that batterers usually function normally in social/work environments, making them hard to identify.

### **Sources shape stories**

- As in the Rhode Island study, domestic violence experts were not used in a majority of articles and cases.
- This study also found that a heavy reliance on police comments can provide information about the crime scene but may inaccurately frame the incident.

The Washington study concluded that the reports of domestic violence fatalities did not accurately portray these cases due to a failure to:

- identify the act as a domestic violence crime and place the murder in a larger local and national context.
- provide accurate information about the dynamics of domestic violence and use experts as sources for stories.

# Delaware Media Study

## Sources:

C.F. Bullock and J. Cubert, "Coverage of Domestic Violence Fatalities by Newspapers in Washington State," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, May 2002, vol. 17, no. 5, 475-499.

"Media Coverage of Domestic Violence Fatalities" in *Covering Domestic Violence: A Guide for Journalists and Other Media Professionals*, produced by Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2002.

"Rhode Island Media Study: 1996-1999" in *Domestic Violence: A Handbook for Journalists*, produced by the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2000.

The Delaware Media Study reviewed the newspaper coverage of domestic violence homicides that took place in 2005, in the state of Delaware. The News Journal was used as a representative newspaper for Delaware, since it can be accessed throughout the state. Two other newspapers were used to further investigate homicides that took place in southern Delaware. Thirty articles representing the 12 domestic violence homicides were used in the analysis. The average number of articles written per case was 2.5, with the majority of cases featured in 1-3 articles and two of the cases covered in six articles each. The following patterns occurred throughout the articles:

## ***Use of sources can be problematic when covering a domestic violence homicide:***

The majority of the articles (70%) written relied on police as sources to answer questions about the homicide. Many times, it was the spokesperson for the particular police department who spoke on behalf of the Department. As stated in the Rhode Island study, when police are prime sources, the coverage "focuses strictly on the details of the crime." The context in which the crime occurred can therefore become invisible.

Neighbors were the next most likely source to be used, making up 26% of the articles written- representing half of the cases. These sources often remarked that they were unaware of any problems or that they were not familiar or close with the couple. Often times they explained that the couple "mostly kept to themselves." As was noted in the Rhode Island study, even when neighbors suggested their own unreliability, they were still quoted. This is problematic given that just because a neighbor is unaware of a problem, does not mean that one did not exist. Reporters and journalists may miss an opportunity to establish a history of violence or other pertinent information if they limit their sources to those unfamiliar with the couple. For example, one report about a man who killed his wife and mother in law, quoted neighbors as follows (*The News Journal*, 3/20/05):

"he wasn't overly friendly, him or his wife. They kept to themselves"

"she was a nice, long-time resident, and mostly kept to herself"

"many residents said they knew of no problems between Carol & Aris Mouzakitidis though no one seemed to know much about them"

Close friends and family were also used as sources in 23% of the articles representing 1/3 of the cases. This can either be problematic or provide insight to a history of abuse. Close family and friends may have been witnesses to the abuse more so than neighbors or acquaintances. For example in one case the father of the victim was reported as saying that his daughter was 'very scared' of the perpetrator and had previously tried to get him to take anger management classes. In another case, the close friend of the victim was reported as saying (*The News Journal*, 8/9/05):

“he was a very controlling person, and I worried for her safety”  
“she said she wasn’t very happy in the relationship but was in no position to leave him because of his medical condition.”

Furthermore, only 23% of the articles, representing five cases, established whether or not a history of abuse was present. As stated in the Rhode Island study, the behaviors of batterers are often predictable and follow patterns. This information will be apparent to readers, if warning signs, patterns of control, intimidation or past violence can be established. However, just because no past history of abuse can be established, does not mean that there wasn’t one well hidden.

Experts were rarely used when covering domestic violence cases. The instances in which an expert was contacted occurred when a domestic violence agency had initiated the coverage of a particular domestic violence incident. One of the stories that involved the case of a man killing his wife and two sons did not utilize a domestic violence expert, but rather an authority on familicide and family annihilation. When domestic violence experts were consulted, the crime was classified as domestic violence and the incident was put in the broader context of domestic violence as a widespread social problem. For example (*The News Journal*, 8/11/05):

“These are horrible tragedies, but we also need to see them as teaching moments,’ said Carol Post, executive director of the Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence. ‘We have to remain in the public eye talking about these issues to ensure everyone in the community develops a zero tolerance for domestic violence.’”

In 52% of the articles written, representing half of the cases, the homicides were described by sources as being a complete shock, unexpected or unbelievable, perpetuating the myth that they only occur in poor or metropolitan areas and not in upscale, wealthy neighborhoods; that they are unpreventable and unpredictable occurrences; and that there is no effective means of addressing the abuse. In actuality, domestic violence happens in all communities and among all social classes. As suggested in the Rhode Island study, further investigation of the homicides that were initially thought of as unpredictable and senseless, revealed that there were, in fact, multiple warning signs. Additionally, many communities have an array of resources that can be utilized to prevent and end domestic violence.

### **Portrayal of perpetrator may perpetuate myths about domestic violence:**

Interviewing close friends and family members can sometimes provide a more accurate view of the relationship between the perpetrator and victim. However, discretion must be used when selecting these sources particularly when the abusive partner dies as part of a homicide/suicide.

In 6 of the 30 articles in the Delaware review the perpetrator was portrayed as being a normal and nice person, and this was most often the case when the perpetrator committed suicide. As suggested by the Rhode Island study, the taboo of speaking ill of the dead may make sources uncomfortable about disclosing a past history of abuse or providing negative information about how the perpetrator acted. Instead, sources will often testify to the good nature of the perpetrator.

For example, sources described the perpetrator in the following way, (*The News Journal* 5/10/05):

“In my assessment, this was totally out of character for him... There was nothing that led me to believe there was any problem at all in his life, he was upbeat.”

“was hard-working, industrious, and well-liked by his peers and the community.”

These quotes imply that it was newsworthy and surprising that the perpetrator was normal and fully-functional. However, extensive literature on intimate partner violence clearly indicates that the majority of batterers function normally in social and work settings. Quotes that imply the perpetrator was surprisingly normal, well-liked or hard-working help to perpetuate the myth that abusive partners are usually anti-social, mean and angry and therefore, easily identifiable. More often, batterers display a charming, charismatic personality in public, yet are obsessive and controlling in their intimate relationships.

Although in only one article was the ethnicity of the perpetrator made apparent, it is still important to look at the implications of doing so. The article stated that (*The News Journal* 8/9/05):

“Saturday night, the Jamaican immigrant strangled his 34 year-old wife to death, police said.”

This type of coverage can help perpetuate the myth that intimate partner homicides only happen in certain groups of a population, when in fact it can happen in any cultural, ethnic or racial group.

Other articles also cite whether the perpetrator had a mental illness or was under the influence of drugs at the time of the incident. Again, these types of information

should be used with care so as not to detract from the holding the perpetrator accountable for the abuse and thus, providing an excuse for domestic violence.

***Crimes rarely identified as domestic violence, limited use of domestic violence language:***

As found in both the Rhode Island and Washington State studies, only 10% of the Delaware articles identified the homicide specifically as a domestic violence homicide. Perhaps not coincidentally, these were also the cases in which a domestic violence expert was consulted. In an additional 23% of the articles, language was used that related to domestic violence. For example, phrases such as “domestic disturbance,” “domestic dispute,” and “domestic violence incident,” were used. This type of referencing tends to diminish the severity of the crime.

The majority of the articles did not identify the homicide as related to domestic violence. By not including any reference at all, the context in which the crime occurs is not fully explained, making it nearly impossible to link domestic violence to the broader social, cultural or legal implications. This approach further limits any sense of community responsibility in terms of preventing the violence as well as community support for people experiencing it.

# Talking with Survivors

*Excerpts of the conversation with SOAR may be found in the Appendix*

Survivors of domestic violence play a major role in providing a firsthand account of their experiences to the public forum. Survivor stories paint a realistic picture of how domestic violence impacts women, their families and the society at large. The passion, energy, and commitment survivors possess, to achieve systemic change, is a powerful force which has been instrumental in bringing about crucial legislative changes beneficial to families experiencing domestic violence nationwide.

However, in resolving to make their voices count in decision making, survivors of domestic violence are sometime thrown into the public eye, potentially compromising their safety, well being and sometimes their very freedom. For these reasons, the importance of exercising caution and confidentiality when survivors are exposed to the public to do media interviews cannot be over emphasized.

Here in Delaware, efforts to organize survivors to play a key role in influencing public policy are at its infancy. There is great enthusiasm, however, for the voices of survivors in Delaware to be organized and energized for social change. In Rhode Island, however, Sisters Overcoming Abusive Relationships (SOAR) has been foremost in voicing their opinion about issues affecting those experiencing domestic violence and influencing legislation.

SOAR was started in 1989 by survivors, with a mission to advocate and work for the elimination of domestic violence and to give the voices of abused women visibility. SOAR takes on a variety of issues that affect abused women, like ensuring that Rhode Island's custody and visitation system is working to protect survivors and their families.

In June of 1999, the RI Coalition conducted interviews with members of SOAR to learn from them how they feel when the Coalition asks them to speak with the media, whether it is important to interview survivors, what privacy precautions reporters should take when interviewing survivors, what questions survivors find offensive, and what information the media should get out to the public about domestic violence.

What follows is a summary of recommendations that evolved out of the interviews with SOAR. Excerpts of the interviews explaining the reasons for these recommendations may be found in the appendix.

## Highlights of Recommendations from Survivors:

### Do's

- Ask questions which help the readers understand domestic violence.
- Educate people about what they can do to stop domestic violence.
- Explain why batterers batter.
- Explain dangers in leaving and why people stay.
- Interview survivors and describe the process of becoming a survivor.
- Pay attention to language; word questions so they are not judgmental.
- Consider the safety of the person being interviewed.
- Be careful to not reveal locations and personal details.
- Protect children's privacy.
- Know the difference between news business and triggering trauma.
- Screen sources because of the taboo of speaking ill of the dead.
- Correct errors.
- Respect the victim's family.

### Don'ts

- Don't focus on the gore.
- Don't push for more revelation than survivors want to give.
- Don't assume certain cultures or classes are violent.
- Don't treat survivors like victims.

### Questions to Ask When Interviewing Survivors

What made it hard for you to leave? (rather than why did you stay?)

What advice would you give someone in a situation similar to the one you were in?

If a woman is not ready to leave, what should she do to get ready?

Whom did you call for help, where did you find help, or did anyone try to help you?  
(rather than why didn't you call for help?)

Were the police involved in your case; and if not, could the police have helped you?  
(rather than why didn't you call the police?)

## **Key Learnings**

### **Interviews with Journalists and Reporters**

In March and April of 2006, the DCADV interviewed Delaware journalists to understand their thoughts about domestic violence, and how they report domestic violence incidents. Seven reporters from both print media and broadcast media participated in this study, providing the coalition with valuable information and insight on how domestic violence gets reported. Here we provide some key findings from these interviews.

#### **Training on Domestic Violence**

Interviewees unanimously reported that they are not offered any formal training on how to report domestic violence incidents. However, some reporters said that they had participated in domestic violence-related conferences and seminars provided by domestic violence advocacy organizations. Some also attributed their knowledge on covering domestic violence to their extensive histories in the field of journalism.

#### **Knowledge about the Causes of Domestic Violence**

Reporters' responses to the causes of domestic violence varied. Some of the more common causes reported were issues of control, power, jealousy, and problems with mental health. Other responses given by reporters included: the culture of patriarchy, lack of respect on the part of the perpetrator, and perpetrator's inability to reason.

#### **Themes Reporters See When Covering Domestic Violence**

Alcohol abuse, history of violence, and incidences where women remain with their abusers are the most common themes that reporters see when covering domestic violence. Some reporters made comments on themes of misreporting domestic violence incidents, such as making incidents appear random and reporting incidents as if they were a "one time thing," as opposed to ongoing abuse.

#### **When Reporters Deem an Incident Domestic Violence**

Reporters most often define violent incidents as "domestic violence" based on the information given by the police department. However, some reporters discussed several problems with using police information. For example, one reporter talked about an incident where a man murdered his girlfriend 6 months after she moved

out of their shared residence. The police did not label this incident a domestic violence homicide, because at the time the perpetrator and victim were living apart. The reporter did not believe that the incident should have been labeled a non-domestic homicide, and thought that reporting it in that manner gave the public the impression that this was a random incident. For this reason, some reporters prefer to use their own discretion in labeling an incident domestic violence based on the details of the crime.

### **Fears about Covering Domestic Violence**

Reporters who have concerns about covering domestic violence most often worry about getting the story correct. Other concerns that reporters gave included: reporting incidents when children are involved, doing more to educate the public, and protecting the victim.

### **Reporters' Views on Domestic Violence Victims and the Measures They Take in Interviewing Them**

Reporters expressed various thoughts on victims of domestic violence, such as their helplessness and the complexity of their situation, and the poor choices they may make in their relationships. Most reporters stated that their stories would benefit from interviews with victims/survivors, because they can provide the personal story about domestic violence and give a more accurate account of their experiences. However, reporters also state that finding victims/survivors who are willing to talk about their experiences is rare. When reporting on domestic violence incidents, reporters state that they use discretion in using privacy precautions, such as withholding or changing identifying material that may place the victim at risk.

### **How the Domestic Violence Community Can Assist Reporters in Covering Domestic Violence**

The most commonly cited sources that reporters utilize for information on domestic violence are the police, the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (DVCC), the DCADV, and the internet. However, many reporters expressed frustration on finding information for their stories. Currently, reporters do not have individuals at their headquarters to research domestic violence, and many times local, reliable, up-to-date information can be difficult to find or too time consuming for a reporter who must produce a story quickly. Here are a few ways reporters say that the domestic violence community can help:

**Statistics:** Recent, relevant statistics are the most requested resource that reporters want from the domestic violence community.

**Sources:** Aside from statistics, reporters find other sources helpful, such as training, conferences, contact persons, and legislative updates.

**Sharing information:** All of the reporters we spoke with were interested in having the DCADV share information with them in the future. However, reporters have mixed ideas of the best way for us to share information. Some reporters believed that one-on-one contact via email, phone and (less frequently) in person would be good methods of future trainings/meetings. Most reporters liked the idea of the DCADV

providing training to reporters, but were unsure how well trainings would be received, or the best places and times to hold them.

The coalition thanks all of the reporters who participated in this project. The coalition commends your willingness to learn and share ideas about domestic violence and how it is reported to the community. Your part in educating the community on domestic violence is instrumental, because your stories shape how people think about domestic violence.

## **Delaware Best Media Practice: Tips for Journalists**

### ***Place the crime within the context of domestic violence.***

- Domestic violence homicides contain elements much different than other types of homicides and it is important to explain that. Interview domestic violence experts who can explain how homicide is an extreme measure for the abuser to exert power and control over their partner.

#### **Media Practice**

“The fact that L. C. strangled his wife and later killed himself is the ultimate use of power and control over her life, if he cannot have her, no one else will.” (*The News Journal*, 8/11/05)

- Ask police if homicide will be considered domestic violence. If it is not, explain why.

#### **Media Practice**

“Mr. Wynn and Ms. Suthard ‘just broke up a couple of months ago,’ Cpl. Oldham said... ‘It was a domestic-violence incident...’” (*Delaware State News*, 5/8/05) *Robert Wynn killed his ex-fiancé, Lisa Suthard and her boyfriend Frank Cannatelli.*

- Use statistics available from domestic violence experts or advocates in order to place the homicide in the broader context of the crime.

#### **Media Practice**

“While police said many of this year’s killings have been random or linked to the drug trade, at least eight have been related to domestic violence, a figure that alarms advocates... Ron Keen, executive director of the state Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, said Delaware averaged 12 such deaths annually from 2002 to 2004, but his figures also include some suicides stemming from domestic altercations.” (*The News Journal*, 7/7/05)

- Use the term “domestic violence” in describing these homicides.

**Media Practice**

“Already this year, the number of domestic violence killings is more than double last year’s total. The most recent was the death of Malinda Carter, 33 year-old Pike Creek woman strangled by her husband Saturday.” (*The News Journal*, 8/11/05)

**Recognize that domestic violence is not a private matter.**

- Domestic violence does not just affect the couple involved. It affects safety in the workplace and neighborhood, impacts our children and literally costs our society millions in medical costs and lowered economic productivity. It’s important to acknowledge that it *is* a public issue.

**Media Practice**

“‘The little girl is the one that loses,’ he said. ‘She doesn’t have a mother or a father now.’” (West case, *The News Journal*, 10/16/05).

- Include resources that are available for victims, such as hotline numbers and support groups and batterers as well, such as where to find a batterers intervention group.

**Media Practice**

“See a list of phone numbers for counseling and assistance at [www.delawareonline.com](http://www.delawareonline.com). For information on obtaining Protection From Abuse orders, log onto [www.delaware.gov](http://www.delaware.gov). Click on More State Agencies, Courts and then Family Court.” (*The News Journal*, 8/11/05)

- Often, the homicide is portrayed as unpreventable. This is not true. Include ways in which community members can help (i.e. advocacy and training events, seminars).

**Media Practice**

“These are horrible tragedies, but we also need to see them as teaching moments’, said Carol Post, executive director of the Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence. ‘We have to remain in the public eye talking about these issues to ensure everyone in the community develops a zero tolerance for domestic violence.’” (*The News Journal*, 8/11/05)

“‘If someone is being abused, if you are aware that it’s happening to your loved or neighbor, don’t ignore it,’ Post said. ‘Call police. Try and get some help.’” (*The News Journal*, 8/11/05)

### **Let the story evolve.**

- Domestic violence homicides aren't just private tragedies nor are they unpredictable. Many times there was a history of abuse and violence.

#### **Media Practice**

“But beneath her bubbly exterior, many knew that Ms. Suthard suffered much pain and turmoil as the result of ex-fiancé Robert L. Wynn’s violent temper. Mr. Suthard said his daughter was ‘very scared’ of Mr. Wynn, and had previously tried to get him to take anger management classes.”

*(Delaware State News, 5/10/05)*

- Hearing that a fellow neighbor, co-worker or family member has been killed, or is accused of killing another, can be devastating. Many people are indeed shocked to learn this news, even if they were aware of abuse or warning signs of abuse. Thus, allow time for the shock to subside to ask sources if there was a history of abuse.
- Look for patterns of controlling behavior or a history of violence by searching for court documents such as protection, no contact, or anti-harassment orders or other criminal offenses. Talking to police can also help in this search.

#### **Media Practice**

“No protection from abuse orders were taken out in Family Court, either by Suthard or Wynn, court officials said. But there had been signs of a possible problem, including a December police report Suthard filed after a domestic dispute with Wynn.” *(The News Journal, 5/10/05)*

“In the past 15 years, Cole has faced a string of criminal charges in Delaware Superior Court, Court of Common Pleas, and Family Court.” *(The News Journal, 3/9/05)*

### **Illustrate the warning signs of domestic violence.**

- Sources may be unaware of warning signs so it is important to ask specific questions such as: Was the perpetrator a jealous person? Did they become involved very quickly? Did the victim ever explain away injuries such as bruises, other marks, black eyes, broken bones etc, that didn't quite match with her story? Did the victim seem withdrawn, depressed, or even paranoid and jumpy? If the victim ended the relationship, how did the perpetrator react to this news?

#### **Media Practice**

“I've known her since I was young,” said Page Melson, who lives two doors from Suthard’s home. “I talked to her a couple of times, but she rarely came over. They said she had a jealous boyfriend.” *(The News Journal, 5/8/05)*

- One way of exerting power and control over a partner is by isolating them from the outside world. Ask questions such as: Was the perpetrator a controlling person? How did the perpetrator feel about his partner working? Was the victim allowed to see family and friends? How did the perpetrator act around family and friends? Did the perpetrator drop by the victim's workplace frequently? Was the victim able to see friends, family or co-workers without the perpetrator?

**Media Practice:**

“In the weeks leading up to her death, Malinda Carter talked about leaving her ailing husband, a friend said. ‘I told her months and months ago to leave him,’ said Michelle Swift, of Pike Creek. ‘He was a very controlling person, and I worried for her safety.’” (*The News Journal*, 8/9/05).

**Identify other common questions and misconceptions about the dynamics of domestic violence.**

- Many people wonder, “Why doesn’t she just leave?” By asking this question, it places blame on the victim, who has not broken the law by being in an abusive relationship. A better way to explain this is by explaining the many obstacles to leaving an abusive relationship.

**Media Practice**

“Swift said she last spoke with Malinda Carter on Thursday. ‘She said she wasn’t happy in the relationship but was in no position to leave him because of his medical condition.’” (*The News Journal*, 8/9/05).

- Convey that domestic violence is a pattern of behavior that often escalates when a victim is trying to leave, or has, the relationship.

**Media Practice**

“From reports, Malinda Carter had recently informed her husband of her intentions to leave him...” (*The News Journal*, 8/11/05) *Her husband killed her, and then took his own life.*

- Always consider confidentiality issues when interviewing survivors of domestic violence. Ask if using a different name or omitting a last name would ensure their safety.

**Use sources judiciously and with caution.**

Family and friends of the perpetrator, especially if he has committed suicide, will often try to explain the perpetrator’s behavior, hide and deny abuse occurred in the past, and describe him as being incapable of doing such a thing.

Police will provide facts about the homicide itself, but may omit contextual information.

Some neighbors, co-workers and acquaintances may have not known the couple well enough to accurately establish whether or not there was a history of abuse. Just because they were unaware, does not mean that one did not exist. Batterers become adept at isolating their partners and only using abuse in private, which may explain why many sources claim that the couple kept to themselves.

## Materials to Publish

*Below is information that your news organization can use to publish or broadcast, possibly as sidebars or supplementary material when covering a domestic violence case. The purpose is to educate the general public and provide victims facing abuse with practical information about domestic violence and where to go for help. If you use this material, please credit the sources listed.*

### Warning Signs of Domestic Violence

Adapted from  
When Violence  
Begins at Home: A  
Comprehensive  
Guide to  
Understanding and  
Ending Domestic  
Abuse, by K.J.  
Wilson, Alameda,  
CA: Hunter House  
Publishers, 1997.

Domestic violence is difficult to determine. Most often victims of domestic violence will keep the abuse secret from friends and family out of shame or the fear of not being believed. Consequently, loved ones are often the last to know of its existence. For some it comes too late. Education and awareness of the signs of abuse is very important. Below are warning signs that may indicate the existence of abuse. Answering yes to one or more of these questions could be an indication that the person is in an abusive relationship..

- **Jealousy**
- **Controlling Behavior**
- **Quick Involvement**
- **Unrealistic Expectations**
- **Isolation**
- **Blames Others For Problems**
- **Blames Others for His/Her Feelings**
- **Hypersensitivity**
- **Cruelty to Animals or Children**
- **“Playful” Use of Force During Sex**

- **Verbal Abuse**
- **Rigid Sex Roles**
- **Jekyll-and-Hyde Personality**
- **Past Battering**
- **Threats of Violence**
- **Breaking or Striking Objects**
- **Any Force During an Argument**

## **Safety planning**

Just as it is recommended for every home to have an emergency plan in case of fire or other disaster, it is equally important for those experiencing domestic violence to spend time creating a safety plan which would enable them and their children to leave without being in danger. The following are some suggestions.

- Have important phone numbers readily available for yourself and your children including: police, hotline, friends, shelter.
- Have important items and documents ready in the event you need to leave quickly. See checklist below.
- Teach your children how to call the police in an emergency.
- Tell one or two neighbors you can trust about the violence and ask them to call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from your home.
- If you leave your home, have four different places you can immediately go.
- Leave extra money, car keys, clothes, and copies of documents with a trusted friend.
- To ensure safety and independence, keep change for phone calls with you at all times; open your own savings account; have and rehearse an escape route with a support person; and review your safety plan regularly.

Suggestions for increasing safety when the relationship is over:

- Change the locks; install steel/metal doors, a security system, smoke detectors and an outside lighting system.
- Inform two neighbors you can trust that your partner no longer lives with you and ask them to call the police if s/he is observed near your home or your children.
- Tell people who take care of your children the names of those who have permission to pick them up.
- Ask people at work to screen your calls.
- Avoid banks and stores that you used when living with your battering partner.

- Obtain a protective order from a judge and keep it on or near you at all times. You can also leave a copy with a supportive friend or family member.
- If you feel down and ready to return to a potentially abusive situation, know who you can call for support or attend workshops and support groups to gain support and strengthen your relationships with other people.

**Checklist: Items to Take** *(essential items in bold)*

- Identification**
- Birth certificates** for you and your children
- Social Security cards**
- School and medical records**
- Money, bankbooks, credit cards, food stamps**
- Keys** for house/car/office
- Driver's license and registration**
- Passport(s), Green Card(s), work permit**
- Children's favorite toys and/or blankets/
- Address book**
- Children's diapers/formula
- Welfare Identification
- Change of clothes for you and your children
- Divorce papers
- Mortgage payment book, current unpaid bills
- Insurance papers
- Lease/rental agreement, house deed
- Medications
- Pictures, jewelry, items of sentimental value

Excerpted from  
**Domestic Violence:  
 The Facts** created by  
 Peace At Home, Inc.  
 and "Domestic  
 Violence:  
 Understanding the  
 problem is the first  
 step towards solving  
 it"- created by  
 DCADV

# Where to Go For Help

## Domestic Violence Resource List for Delaware

### 24 Hour Domestic Violence Hotlines

- Child Inc.'s Domestic Violence Program  
New Castle County 302-762-6110
- Families In Transition at People's Place II  
Kent & Sussex Counties 302-422-8058
- Abriendo Puertas Bilingual Hotline  
Sussex County 302-745-9874

### Information/Referrals

- Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
New Castle County 302-658-2958  
Kent & Sussex Counties 1-800-701-0456
- Domestic Violence Coordinating Council  
New Castle County 302-255-0405  
Kent & Sussex Counties 302-424-7238

### Shelter, Counseling, Support & Advocacy Services

#### New Castle County

- Child, Inc. 302-762-6110  
Emergency shelter & transitional services, housing assistance, educational services, bi-lingual services, court advocacy
- Domestic Violence Treatment Program 302-762-8989  
Victim counseling, victim support groups, treatment services for chemically dependent women, Helping Children Heal Program (individual, group & family counseling for children who have witnessed domestic violence), Project P.R.I.D.E. dating violence program.
- Helping Hearts Program,  
YWCA of New Castle County 302-655-0039  
Case management, counseling, referrals (ext. 233 & 234)
- Latin American Community Center 302-655-7338  
Victim support groups, bi-lingual services, support services

- Project Target, Delaware Center for Justice 302-658-7174  
Support services for victims over 50 ext. 12

**Kent/Sussex Counties**

- Families In Transition at People's Place II, Inc. 302-422-8058  
Emergency shelter & transitional services, housing assistance, employment, transportation, educational services
- Turning Point at People's Place II, Inc. 302-424-2420  
Victim counseling, support groups, children's counseling program
- Abriendo Puertas 302-855-9515  
Emergency shelter & transitional services, court advocacy, transportation, translation/bilingual, general case management

**Court Advocacy Programs (located in Family Court)**

- Child, Inc. Victim Advocacy Program 302-255-0420  
New Castle County
- Domestic Violence Advocacy Center  
Kent County 302-672-1075  
Sussex County 302-856-5843

**Certified Offender Intervention Programs:**

**New Castle County**

- Child, Inc. 302-762-8989
- Catholic Charities 302-655-9624

**Kent/Sussex Counties**

- Turning Point at People's Place II, Inc. 302-424-2420  
(Bi-lingual English/Spanish)
- Dover Air Force Base, Family Advocacy Program 302-677-2711

**Legal Assistance:**

- Legal Help Link/Lawyer Referral Service  
New Castle County 302-478-8850  
Kent & Sussex Counties 1-800-773-0606
- Community Legal Aid Society, Inc.  
Free legal assistance to financially eligible. Assistance with Protection From Abuse Orders, child support & custody, visitation & divorce, housing, public benefits & bankruptcy, landlord/tenant problems, and immigration.

New Castle County

(Assistance limited to housing, public benefits & bankruptcy,  
landlord/tenant problems, immigration)

302-575-0660

Kent County 302-674-8500

Sussex County 302-856-0038

- Domestic Violence Legal Services, Inc.-  
Free legal assistance to financially eligible. Assistance limited to Protection  
from Abuse Orders, child support & custody, and visitation & divorce.  
New Castle County 302-478-8680

**Police Based Victim Assistance Programs:**

- Delaware State Police Victims' Center 1-800-842-8461
- New Castle County Police Victim Assistance Program 302-395-8139  
302-395-8135
- Wilmington Department of Police Victim Assistance Program  
302-576-3622  
302-576-3648
- Dover Police Department Victim Assistance Program 302-736-7134
- Georgetown Police Department Victim Assistance Program  
302-856-6613

**Government Agencies**

- Attorney General's Office  
New Castle County 302-577-8500  
Kent County 302-739-4211  
Sussex County 302-856-5353
- Family Court  
New Castle County 302-255-0300  
Kent County 302-672-1000  
Sussex County 302-855-7468
- Violent Crimes Compensation Board (Statewide) 302-995-8383  
Provides compensation to victims of crime who sustain physical and/or  
emotional injury
- Department of Justice, Victim/Witness Assistance Domestic Violence Unit  
New Castle County 302-577-8500  
Kent & Sussex Counties 1-800-870-1790
- Department of Corrections, Probation and Parole, Office of Victim Services

New Castle County 302-323-6050 ext. 220  
Kent County 302-739-5387 ext. 279

**Other Resources:**

- CONTACT Rape Crisis Hotline  
New Castle County 302-761-9100  
Kent & Sussex Counties 1-800-262-9800
- Division of Family Services, Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-292-9582
- Children's Advocacy Center of Delaware, Inc.  
New Castle County 302-651-4566  
Kent County 302-741-2123  
Sussex County 302-854-0323
- Adult Protective Services 1-800-223-9074
- National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE

Compiled by the Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence- March, 2006.  
Updated July, 2006

# Appendix

Below is information gathered from Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence's Survivors' group- Sisters Overcoming Abusive Relationships. (SOAR). The information was taken from RICADV's Domestic Violence Handbook for Journalists.

## Excerpts from interviews with SOAR members

- **Educate yourself about how to ask the right questions.**

“It’s important that before any reporter covers a story as special as domestic violence to get trained on the subject. Part of that training should include listening to stories from the survivors. Have a clear understanding of what domestic violence is all about and what surviving means. You need to really understand the whys the women stay in the situation.”

*Recounting another survivor’s experience with a reporter:* “the [reporter] who was interviewing her had no clue, no background on any domestic violence. So if they had no clue, how could they even ask the right questions?”

- **Interview survivors and describe the process of moving from victim to survivor.**

“When it comes to dealing with domestic violence issues, I think it’s important to interview survivors. We have lived through it. We know how it feels to be a victim. We’re talking from our own experiences. It’s not something that was told to us. We’ve been there. It’s important to give the opportunity to people who have already been there and are strong enough or healed enough to help others to get out of it.”

“Reporters should speak to survivors who are ready to talk, instead of people who aren’t ready. Survivors are not victims. They are over it. They have moved on. Reporters should look at how we did this, how we survived, and research what is going on that is positive, instead of emphasizing the negative.”

- **Don’t treat survivors like victims.**

“One of the things that I find the hardest to overcome in working with a reporter is getting them to understand the psychology of a woman who was a victim of domestic violence, who wants to be treated as a survivor, and constantly reminding them throughout the interview that I am not a victim. I am a survivor and focus on my strengths. And if they could get that, it would be a much more successful interview. We’re [SOAR] doing this not for some personal satisfaction or glory, but we’re doing this to help women who aren’t at a place where we are, to say things that they don’t feel the strength to say right now and they don’t have the freedom to do.”

“My son is not ready to share his part of the story. He said, ‘Ma, I still want to have my dignity.’ I think he was afraid that when other people found out, it was something that he was going to have to be ashamed of. I can look past that. Being a victim, it takes time to heal and then once you’ve healed, that’s when you cross over into being a survivor and you start doing positive things.”

- **Ask questions which will help the readers understand domestic violence.** “When something happens, a murder happens, reporters need to focus on domestic violence.”

“Reporters have an obligation to bring knowledge, information, and education to the community and [the media] must be used as a tool to bring light to the issue of domestic violence, not only to advertise when somebody dies at the hand of domestic violence, but also to bring awareness to society. So that people know what domestic violence is all about, and that it’s not a private matter, but something that could be ‘exterminated’ if we all help.”

“Help people, families and couples, recognize an abusive relationship. Help them confront the batterer with his choice of violent behavior so that he stops because he only uses it as a tool because it works and if it’s silent in the family then it’s a fuel that’s being fed all the time. She is nothing to control. Until those things are recognized and condemned by society, it is going to keep happening.”

“More people pick up newspapers than pick up a pamphlet on domestic violence. Reporters are educating the public. As long as reporters use the tool they possess to help and not hurt people.”

- **Explain why batterers batter.** “Domestic violence is not a private matter. There are ways to deal with it. There are signals, alert signs that we have to be careful and look for. How do batterers react to conflict? Do they allow you to be part of decisions?”

“They [batterers] are not going to show you that side when you’re dating them. They are going to gradually bring you into a situation where you can’t get out. Why don’t you stay at home and take care of the kids? Put your feet up and relax. Then, the next thing to go is your friends. From there it starts to build up. It’s not like you date him two months and all of a sudden they backhand you.”

- **Don’t ask survivors “why did you stay?”** “It’s re-victimizing if a reporter asks why did you stay? It’s putting the blame on her that she had some control over the violence in her life. And that’s not true. It’s not that she stays in the relationship because she likes to get beat. It’s not like she likes to see a black eye or a broken jaw or bruises on her. It’s not like she wants to cry in the other room. She’s got to be strong for her children.”

“How could you stay with this guy? Or when you met him, didn’t you know? Part of the makeup of somebody who is that controlling, is that they could be very charming. They could be persuasive. They show you their best side. They are not going to come out when you are dating them and bat you in the face.”

“I am an immigrant. The other question that I have heard many times is, why didn’t you go back to your country. That was not a solution. If I went back to my country, he would follow me there and do the same thing or worse. Because in my country, the law on domestic violence just works one way, the man’s way. Whatever they say or do is right. We have no voice there. Also, [reporters] ask why didn’t you go to the shelter? I am Hispanic. When we have family problems, we go to neighbors and family. We don’t know about shelters.”

- **Explain dangers in leaving and why people stay.**

“It’s more dangerous to leave than it is to stay. That is when you run the greatest risk of some really serious damage and I don’t think a lot of people understand that. If you get caught going out that door, the beating you’re going to get for leaving is going to be worse than anything else that you’ve gotten before. I had to make sure that I got out that door when I finally got out. I don’t think reporters have a real understanding of how dangerous it is to get away from a control freak. You are taking his control away and if you think he’s going to give you a bunch of flowers for doing that think again. It’s going to be black eyes and broken bones.”

- **Consider the safety of the person being interviewed.**
- **Protect children’s privacy.**

“Reporters bear a responsibility to make sure that the person that they are interviewing is going to be safe with the interview, with the information they disclosed. I know of one case where a reporter had interviewed someone who had left her abuser for many years. Both her and her son had moved to another location and her abuser did not know where she was. They were both professional people. The reporter called up her abuser who was many states away, and was asking questions until it stirred things up and then the abuser started stalking her again. She had to leave her job and move again. Reporters need to think about what they are dealing with, not just getting a story, but that these are people’s lives.”

“One of the first questions reporters should ask is, should we use your real name or should we use a fictitious name? This is not only for the survivor’s protection and dignity, but for other people that they live with, their family.”

“It would have been a lot easier to use an alias.”

“I didn’t want people to be able to read it and identify me or my son. How was he going to feel when it’s time to go to school? Kids can tear them apart for stupid little things.”

- **Understand the difference between the news business and triggering trauma.**
- **Don't focus on the gore.**

"I feel glad for the opportunity to talk about domestic violence or my response to what is going on with a particular incident, but I don't appreciate that reporters are always looking for the bloody gory details that are very triggering to incidents that you've gone through and very hard emotionally, psychologically, physically draining for you to discuss. Even when you talk with them beforehand and say there are certain things that you are not free to talk about, they still try to catch you off guard and ask you those questions."

"[The interview] was making me relive what I had gone through and making it hard to stay focused on what the interview was about. Addressing specific acts of violence triggers the abuse that you have gone through."

- **Don't ask, "why didn't you call the police?"**

"When I was a kid, my mother was physically abused by my father. When police arrived at my house, they said they couldn't interfere with domestic affairs and left my father dragging my mother across the kitchen floor by her legs on her back. I know that today it's a lot different, but if I was being beaten, I would feel very insecure about the police coming, because I know as a child that they did not protect me then, so in my mind I feel why would they protect me now?"

- **Don't assume certain cultures or classes are violent.**

"Sometimes [reporters] focus a lot on status, whether he is black or Hispanic. Because it becomes okay because he is Spanish and grew up poor. If they're white and live in this great big house it was because the stock market went down or he was having problems with his boss. It's not that he is a batterer. Stop focusing so much on the black and white thing."

"Domestic violence doesn't just affect certain people. It affects everybody, every class, every race, and any social status."

- **Screen certain sources because of the cultural taboo of speaking ill of the dead.**

"Once someone's dead, everyone says, 'Oh, they were so nice.' They can't ever talk bad about a dead person. But that nice guy had his daughter pleading for her life. Reporters need to screen who they are going to interview."

"The family knows...my ex-husband, his family knew for a long time. They never fessed up to it. They never told anybody, but they knew exactly what was happening."

- **Correct errors.**

"When my story was in the paper, they had a lot of misinformation in the article, and I actually called the reporter who had done the article, and I spoke to him

directly about the things that were wrong. When everything came to a head and [the batterer] was finally sentenced, the same reporter wrote the article- still with the misinformation in it.”

