

The Tragedy of Murder-Suicides – Domestic Violence in Delaware

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As 2018 comes to a close, we are painfully aware of the lives lost this past year to domestic violence. So many families have experienced the horror of murder-suicides. Just this past November a 20-year old woman, Ahyanna Baker-Griffin, was killed by her boyfriend who then committed suicide. Her tragic death is one of many murder-suicides committed in Delaware in 2018. These are heartbreaking crimes, devastating to families, friends and communities.

We often associate domestic violence to married couples, but dating relationships often experience this abuse and violence. Domestic violence is a form of abuse that arises from the need to control, to have power over another. It is not a failure of the relationship or a 'bad dynamic', rather it is abuse that is aimed at controlling the other partner, to make them do what the abuser wants. This abuse may initially look just like jealous behavior, with the abuser wanting to know where the victim is all the time, checking their phone, accusing them of being in other relationships. The violence may start with emotional abuse, such as name calling, putting the other person down so they feel bad about themselves, limiting contact with family and friends. It may become financial abuse such as controlling the access to money. The abuse may build up to physical violence or it may start there.

Experiencing this abuse is devastating and generates so many emotions from confusion to shame to fear. Victims may be afraid to tell others about their situation because of embarrassment or fear of judgment. The victim may be hesitant to tell others because they worry that they will be told to leave the abuser when they feel they have no choice but to stay because they are financially dependent, or there are children, or because of religious beliefs, or they are afraid of more violence. These feelings can be overwhelming. Domestic violence is pervasive in our state and there are so many individuals who are experiencing this abuse.

If we know of someone who is experiencing dating or domestic violence, we should listen, be supportive, never judge, acknowledge their feelings, and encourage them to talk with someone who can help. Importantly, there is help available.

The Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence wants victims of dating and domestic violence to know that they are not alone, that services are available, and that their safety is paramount. We want to connect victims of violence with supportive advocates who can help with safety planning, especially if they are planning or thinking of leaving or have left the abuser. Domestic Violence advocates can provide victims with life-saving information, as they are making the decisions that are best for themselves and their families.

There are 24-hour hotlines, shelters, counseling and legal assistance across the state. Sharing these resources can help a victim know that services are available and that they are not alone.

24-Hour Domestic Violence Hotlines:

- **CHILD Inc.'s Domestic Violence Program** New Castle County **302-762-6110**
- **The SAFE Program at People's Place II** Kent & Sussex Counties **302-422-8058**
- **Abriendo Puertas - Bilingual Hotline** Sussex County **302-745-9874**