

Intimate Partner Homicide Support Toolkit:

***A resource guide for domestic
violence agencies in Minnesota***



VIOLENCE FREE
MINNESOTA





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THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

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***In memory of every Minnesotan
we've lost to relationship abuse***



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About Violence Free Minnesota



Violence Free Minnesota is the statewide coalition to end relationship abuse. Founded in 1978, we've grown to include over 90 dedicated member programs across the state.

Our vision is to end relationship abuse, create safety, and achieve social justice for all.

Our mission is to:

- Represent victims/survivors of relationship abuse and our member programs;
- Challenge systems and institutions;
- Promote social change;
- Support, educate, and connect our member programs.

In everything we do, we are led by our values. Our work:

- Is survivor-informed;
- Amplifies the voices of marginalized communities;
- Advocates for member programs and their interests;
- Institutionalizes equity through policy, and;
- Ensures that each new generation is raised in an environment free from violence.



Toolkit Background and Purpose

This toolkit is intended to serve as a resource for domestic violence advocacy programs impacted by the intimate partner homicide of a community member(s), whether the individual(s) were:

- receiving community-based, non-shelter services from the advocacy program;
- receiving shelter services from the advocacy program; or
- not receiving services from the advocacy program, but lived in the advocacy program's service area.

Violence Free Minnesota's IPV (Intimate Partner Violence) Homicide Committee identified the need for a resource or toolkit for Minnesota advocacy programs in the wake of local IPV homicides. The IPV Homicide Committee is a volunteer workgroup comprised of advocates from Violence Free Minnesota's member programs. The Committee works on homicide tracking, reporting, and memorialization efforts, and addressing related needs in Minnesota.

While some domestic violence advocacy programs have created their own guides to support surviving family members in the wake of an IPV homicide, no comprehensive protocol or guide currently exists in Minnesota for advocacy programs or loved ones who have lost someone to intimate partner homicide.

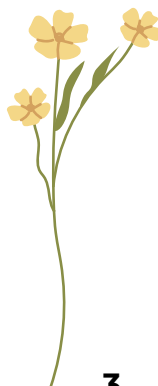
This toolkit is a non-exhaustive compilation of supports and resources that may be needed in the wake of intimate partner homicide.



Acknowledgments

Violence Free Minnesota thanks the following individuals and organizations for their contributions to this toolkit:

- **Our IPV Homicide Committee** for their leadership, insight and expertise, and shaping, writing, and reviewing multiple sections of this toolkit;
- **Our member programs**, who responded to our survey about homicide response policies, protocols, and practices, and what they believe is still needed. Many of their suggestions and examples are included in this toolkit;
- **Dawn Shewmaker**, Crime Victim Ombudsman Investigator for the Office of Justice Programs-Crime Victim Justice Unit, for sharing her expertise in resources for crime victims' loved ones and for crime victim advocates;
- **Lousie Seliski**, former Executive Director of Relationship Safety Alliance in Brainerd, who shared a letter filled with insight from her time as Executive Director, which included learnings from losing clients to domestic violence homicide;
- **Cynthia Callais**, Violence Free Minnesota Public Policy intern, who researched practices around online fundraisers, law enforcement, and social media;
- **End Abuse Wisconsin** and the **Idaho Coalition Against Domestic Violence** whose homicide response plans generated ideas for our own;
- **The National Legal Center on Children and Domestic Violence, BWJP**, which contributed information around custody and kinship care for relatives;
- **Heather**, who shared her blog post about caring for her nieces in the wake of her sister-in-law Melissa Hunt's domestic violence homicide;
- And **Christie Larson**, Executive Director of Southern Valley Alliance, who contributed a community impact statement example.



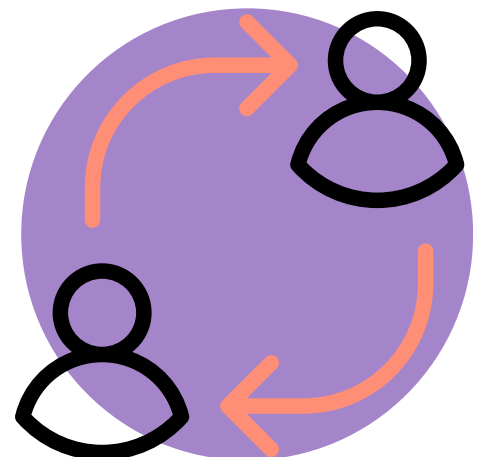
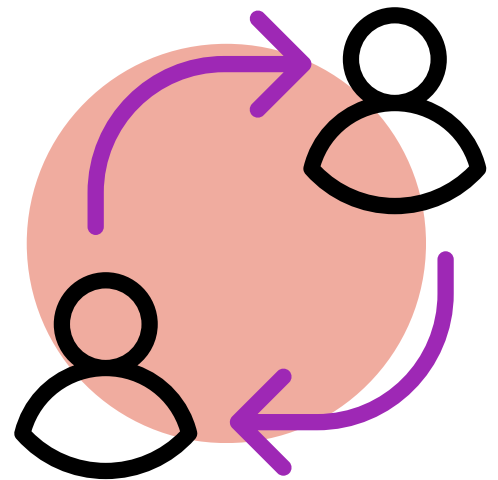
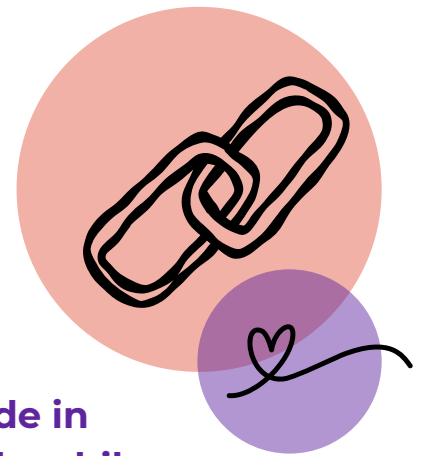
The wisdom and creativity of domestic violence advocates cannot be overstated. When we prioritize the expertise of advocates and advocacy program leadership in domestic violence prevention and response work in Minnesota, we move ever closer to our goal of ending relationship abuse.

For the Agency or Program:

Policies & Protocols

Every program should prepare in advance for a homicide in order to respond as quickly and supportively as possible while still being intentional. Advance preparation can also reduce the likelihood or severity of traumatic stress for leadership and staff.

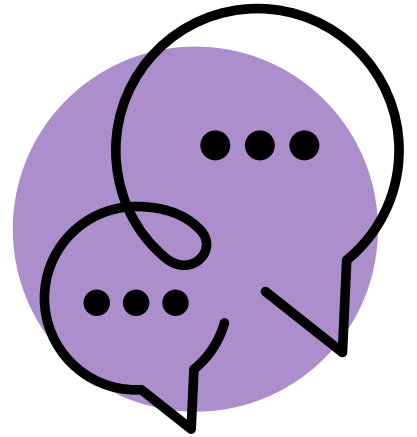
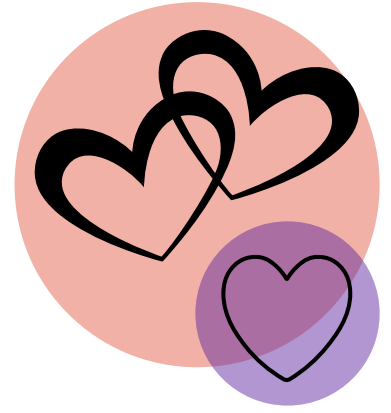
- **Identify clear roles and expectations** for any staff involved in post-homicide response (for example, communication decisions to staff, volunteers, system partners, clients, family, media, and your social media). **Consider timing, consent, compliance with other policies like confidentiality and decision-making practices, setting and messenger for sharing information, and establishing what support can be offered.** Consider how support for staff could mean changes to or flexibility around regular service offerings or coverage needs.
- **Consider establishing advance partnerships** with a local counselor or therapist, or culturally-specific community center. It would be helpful for these professionals to have familiarity and experience with *the combination* of grief, trauma, and domestic violence. **Create relationships with culturally-specific providers in order to meet the needs of culturally-specific care.**



For the Agency or Program:

Policies & Protocols

- **Regularly review your organization's confidentiality policies with staff and offer tools for staff to reflect on their personal responses to trauma and stress.** Shock, trauma, stress, and urgency can trigger or activate staff in ways that are surprising or unexpected, and can interrupt their typical way of thinking and performing their job. **Helping staff reflect in advance and reminding them to ground in established policies** can prepare them for this time.
- **Engage staff, clients, and volunteers in ongoing conversations** about what supports or resources they need post-homicide. Offer ideas in case people don't know what to ask for, and check in regularly to normalize that support needs continue and evolve.
- Provide opportunities for program staff to **learn about and engage in various cultural customs and practices** in response to death and collective grief.
- **Involve staff** to the fullest extent possible in the development of a response plan.



"Not having policies/procedures in place BEFORE a homicide happens [was harmful to our organization]...initially there was nothing to guide our staff and they were left feeling confused while they were grieving."

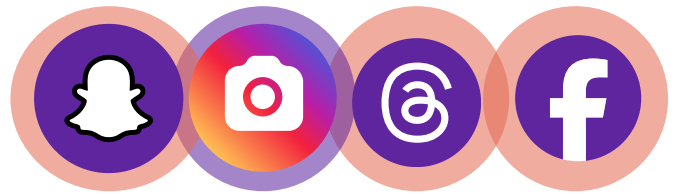
- VFMN member program

Considerations for Agency Response to IPV Homicide — Client or Community



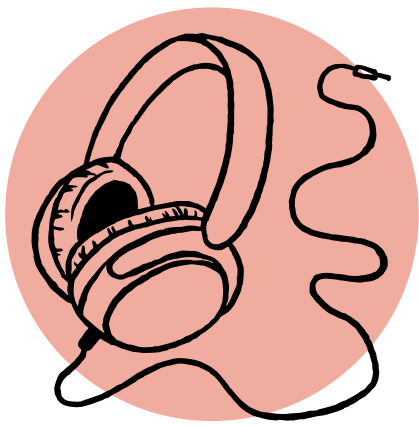
The death of an individual due to intimate partner violence can have a tremendous impact on agency staff and volunteers, whether the person was a client or was a community member living in the program's service area. **Programs often have questions about how to handle internal and external communications** in the wake of a homicide, and may be grappling with how to support the emotional and practical needs of staff, volunteers, and other program clients.

Social Media Feedback/Engagement



Social Media Confidentiality:

- **Confidentiality continues even after the death of a client.** Programs and staff should not post any social media content that would directly indicate the victim was a client of their program or that would violate the individual's confidentiality through the sharing of private details.
- **If leadership allows, program staff can consider sharing any official posts** the program has made about the homicide or can consider sharing Violence Free Minnesota's *We Remember* posts for the victim.
- **Advise staff to use their social media with discretion** regarding the homicide. Have a clear plan in place for what staff should and shouldn't say or do on social media using their personal accounts. For example, are staff allowed to make personal comments on news posts about the homicide? What guidance do you want to offer around this?
- **Programs should consider the implications** of any social media post the agency makes — could a post out of the norm imply that the victim was a client? **Consider creating a clear policy around when posts are shared (for example, "We share all We Remember posts in MN/in our service area/county/city, etc.") to ensure consistency.**



Considerations for Agency Response to IPV Homicide — Client or Community

Social Media Feedback/Engagement

- **Programs should prepare ahead of time for possible comments** on their social media posts from loved ones of the victim(s). Developing an agency protocol for how to handle positive and negative comments can alleviate some of the stress this engagement may bring.
- **If loved ones make comments** on a program's post that express negative feelings about the program, or the program's decision to recognize their loved one as a victim of intimate partner homicide, it may be best to consider privately reaching out to the commenter to address their concerns and share resources.
- **If the commenter does not understand** why their loved one is viewed as a victim of domestic violence homicide, consider sharing any relevant facts, statistics, or examples that may provide a different perspective, while also acknowledging that every situation is nuanced and unique.
- **Prioritize respecting the commenter's feelings and wishes**, especially if they are a loved one of the victim, while also emphasizing the importance of accurately counting and naming domestic violence.
- **Violence Free Minnesota is happy to be contacted by programs** to address specific comments or situations that pertain to our *We Remember*.
- **Sometimes, people who did not know the victim may post comments** with questions about why the person is recognized as a victim of intimate partner homicide. In these cases, it may be beneficial to publicly respond to them on the post, so that other viewers/commenters can see the program's explanation.



Considerations for Agency Response to IPV Homicide — Client or Community

Timing and Details of Posts

- **If your program learns about a homicide before the details and identity or identities of the victim(s) are made public**, consider waiting to post until this information is released in order to be respectful to loved ones and lessen the chance that a post could imply a victim was a client at your program.
- **When sharing information about a homicide, only share what is publicly available/known** (such as what is detailed in news articles or court records). Do not share information you have seen on social media that is not verified or substantiated. If there is an ongoing investigation, sharing of unverified, private information could potentially compromise the investigation.

Example of member program social media post:

This weekend, a community member's life was taken in [city/town/village] as a result of intimate partner violence. This tragedy has had a devastating impact on the victim's loved ones, their colleagues, and first responders. Five children are now left without a parent. We acknowledge that our community may be grappling with many complicated feelings after this tragedy, and want to emphasize that [program name] is available to support. [Program name] offers [list available services]. [Details of program's crisis line number and hours, and other relevant contact information]



This social media post accomplishes:

- Acknowledging the death(s) AND the community impact
- Reminding the community of the severity of intimate partner violence
- Normalizing complicated feelings and demonstrating the program's capacity to understand and work with complicated feelings
- Reminding the community that this DV advocacy program is available to help and sharing specific program services and hotline information



Media and Communications:

Media Recommendations

After a homicide occurs in your community, be prepared to receive interview requests from the media about the incident. **You can ALWAYS decline to participate.** Victims' loved ones should be made aware that they can also choose to decline requests for interviews.

The following are suggested practices, but may not work for every agency:

- Prior to any homicides, **identify two individuals at your agency** who are comfortable handling interviews with the media and can be available at short notice. **Designate one as the lead contact and the other as a backup** in case the lead is unavailable. Offer these individuals access to media training.
 - **Direct all remaining staff to send any media requests** to those two individuals and to not answer requests on their own.
 - **Ensure that crisis line staff or volunteers have a pre-developed “script” to follow** in case a member of the media contacts them after a homicide. This script should make clear that the crisis line staff or volunteers *cannot* give an interview, quote, or confirm or deny if a victim was a client. This script should guide them to directly refer the media contact to the lead staff member at your agency designated to handle these requests. If the lead is unavailable, direct the media to the backup contact.
- **Proactively develop a brief list of general talking points** prior to any homicide occurring. This can later be tailored to individual circumstances.



Media and Communications:

Media Terminology

All agency staff involved in media interviews should familiarize themselves with the following levels of attribution for media interviews, and should request a specific level of attribution be used if the journalist does not offer one:

- **On the record:** everything you say may be published and quoted directly, and your name and title may be included.
 ■ *“We served 75 clients last year.”* -Anna Smith, Executive Director, The Domestic Violence Alliance
- **On background:** your statements may be quoted directly, but they will not be attributed to you by name. A description of your title, however, may be included.
 ■ *“This year’s funding climate is dire.”* - A domestic violence advocate in George County
- **On deep background:** your statements will be referenced, but they will not be quoted directly and will not be attributed to your name or title.
 ■ *“Sunny Newspaper has learned that domestic violence rates are increasing across the state.”*
- **Off the record:** the information you share is only for the journalist’s knowledge and will not be shared publicly by them in any way, but it could be used to inform their research.

Media and Communications:



Quick Turnaround Media Requests

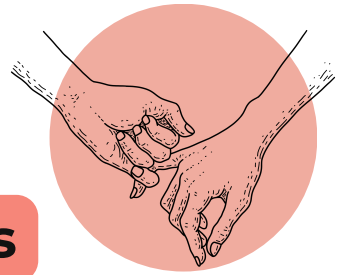
Frequently, media requests come with little time to prepare. Reporters often want interviews same-day, and sometimes even within an hour or two. You may receive more media requests if the incident has sensational elements. Equitable media coverage is also still an issue. Reporters may also want information that you are unable to share. If you are not prepared, cannot share information, do not have anyone available, or if you are still waiting for a situation to unfold before speaking, **it is ok to say no. There are ways to say no and offer alternatives, and there are ways to say no and still keep the door open for media coverage in the future.** Here are some examples of what you could say:

- Thank you for contacting us. We're not able to speak on this specific case, but we can offer general context about domestic violence, warning signs, and available resources. **If that would be useful for your coverage, we're glad to help now or for future stories.**
- Thanks for reaching out. We're not able to participate in an interview about this situation right now. We want to be mindful of safety and avoid speaking to details that are still unfolding. We're happy to provide general information about domestic violence dynamics or share a statement if that's helpful, **and we're open to connecting at a later time.**
- I appreciate you reaching out. We're not able to do an interview at this time. Our focus right now is supporting those directly impacted and ensuring accurate, trauma-informed messaging. **We can share a brief written statement or connect at a later point if that would be helpful.**



Media and Communications:

Establishing Relationships with Reporters



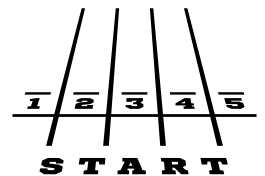
Things to consider:

- **Reporters typically want to get their article out very quickly.** They are likely calling multiple possible sources and will typically go with the source that responds the quickest. If you want to comment on a story, it is beneficial to respond quickly.
- **Building relationships with reporters, especially local reporters, can be mutually beneficial.** These relationships can be helpful if you'd like to pitch a story or want to use media as a tool for public awareness and culture shifting.

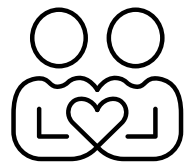
- **Is this reporter local or national?** A local story could bring awareness to your local community about your organization and your work. If the reporter is not local, is there local context you think you should share with them?



- **It can be helpful to internally track reporters** that you have had positive and negative experiences with. You can also share [Violence Free Minnesota's media toolkit](#) with reporters to educate them around best practices when reporting on domestic violence. This tracking can impact how you respond in the future, too.



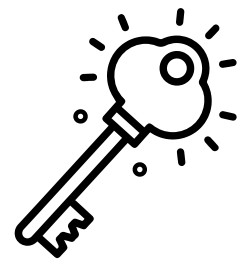
- **Making yourself available for interviews can establish a mutually beneficial relationship with a reporter.** You can ask them if you can reach out to them in the future for any story ideas or needs you have. ("Would it be okay to pitch story ideas to you in the future around IPV?")



- **Consider where to take the interview.** If the reporter would like to meet in person, do you have a designated space to go to? Most shelter spaces are confidential spaces. You may not want to have a reporter in your home. You may want to ask for an interview over the phone or over a platform like Zoom.



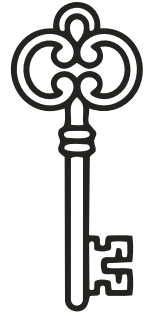
Identifying Key Organizational Messages for Interviews



Reporters often ask DV programs to sum up key messages at the end of an interview to help the public understand what matters most after a domestic violence–related homicide. It’s best to keep the focus here on DV awareness, prevention, survivor safety, and community responsibility and impact, and to avoid assumptions or blame. You can tailor your message in ways that reflect the work you do and the communities you serve. **Here are some examples to consider while coming up with your key messages:**

- To survivors: **You are not alone, we are here for you.**
- DV homicides are often the result of **escalating patterns of abuse.** 
- **Warning signs and risk factors** (such as stalking, threats, increased use of violence, strangulation, substance use, unemployment/job loss, possession of firearms, etc.) **are critical to pay attention to and are sometimes visible to others;** however, they aren’t always visible to outsiders, and we can’t fully predict behaviors. This is why listening to survivors, educating on and paying attention to warning signs and risk factors, creating individualized safety plans informed by risk factors, and keeping support available are so important.
- Domestic violence is complex. These tragedies rarely come “out of nowhere.” They often follow **patterns of coercion, control, and escalating risk. Don’t center the narrative on “mental health struggles” when what we’re seeing is domestic violence.** 
- Leaving or preparing to leave an abusive situation **can increase danger.**
- **Survivors face barriers** to seeking and receiving help. 

Identifying Key Organizational Messages for Interviews



Continued

- **Rural survivors often face added challenges**, including isolation, limited services, and fewer safe options for support, transportation, and housing.
 - **There are additional risks and barriers when the person causing harm is current or former law enforcement** or in a position of power, or is “buddies” with law enforcement or people in positions of power.
 - **People of color, immigrants, people with undocumented status, people who don’t speak or read English, people with disabilities, sex workers, people who use drugs, and 2SLGBTQIA+ survivors face additional barriers**, including systemic inequities, lack of accommodations, lack of representation, discrimination, and reduced access to culturally responsive services.
-
- Community members can help by **staying connected and responsive**.
 - **Accommodations, options, and low-barrier financial support** can help survivors access safety. Survivors may not use resources if they won’t accommodate their children or pets. Access to low-barrier, flexible financial support can help survivors access safety options that work best for them.
 - **Prevention requires community-wide awareness and action, including investing in protective factors, keeping services fully funded, and changing harmful cultural norms and beliefs.**
 - Support and resources are **available and confidential (24/7, if applicable)**.

Talking Point Guidance for Media Interviews

- **Write up a list of any off-limits subjects** beforehand.
- In media interviews, **only share information that is publicly available** in news articles or public court records, and/or is given to you by permission from the victim's loved ones. **Do not share unsubstantiated rumors from social media or other sources.**
- **Emphasize the ripple effect/community impact of the homicide** and highlight that domestic violence is a public health issue and social issue, not a private personal matter.
- **Provide the community with information** about how they can support a loved one in an abusive relationship.
 - Share **how the community can support** local advocacy agencies.



- **Remind the community** that your organization has domestic violence and/or sexual violence services available and let them know how they can connect to your organization.
 - **If you have a crisis line**, share that information.
- If the interviewer asks any questions or shares any information that comes off as victim-blaming or contains abuse myths, **challenge those misconceptions in your response** so readers or listeners don't internalize them.

A black and white line drawing of dandelions. Several dandelion heads are shown at different stages of seed dispersal. Some are fully formed, while others have seeds blowing away, represented by small lines and seed heads. The stems are thin and curved. The overall style is minimalist and artistic.

Post-Interview Guidance

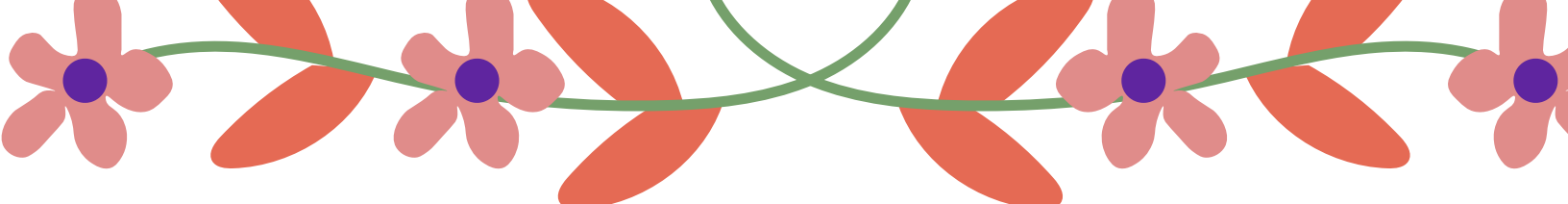
- **Programs can ALWAYS ask journalists to review a copy of written or audio stories before they are published.** This request may not always be granted, but when it is, this can offer programs the opportunity to request any necessary corrections. Be prepared, the full interview content won't make it into the final story.
- **Develop a plan for communicating to the victim's loved ones,** if you have established contact with them, about when the article or media piece will be published so they can be aware.
- **Develop a plan for whether and how to share the media piece** when it is published on your program's social media platforms. You can also use your social media or newsletter to continue the conversation with your community. You can also ask local leaders to share on their platforms as well.



Considerations for Supporting Clients in the Aftermath of an IPV Homicide

Violence Free Minnesota's IPV Homicide Committee offered the following practices and suggestions for supporting program clients post-homicide:

- **Identify whether there are former clients** who may be especially impacted by the homicide, and consider appropriately reaching out to them through previously established communication methods/preferences or trusted service providers.
- **Identify a specific staff member or members** who will be responsible for communicating with clients about the homicide moving forward.
- **If possible, programs may offer individual counseling or debrief sessions** for clients to help them process the aftermath of a homicide.
- **Programs should determine whether clients would like the organization** to schedule a time for clients to come together as a group to process. This should be optional.
- **Program clients who are not necessarily considered “victims” under the law** may need unique resources or general crime victims resources. For example, if a client's partner is killed by the client's former partner, they may not necessarily qualify for all available victim services if they are not legally considered a victim of crime. Information and resources that may be helpful in such situations include:
 - **General crime support**
 - **Crime scene cleanup information**
 - **Information about setting up GoFundMes** or other online fundraisers (see pages 42–43)



Considerations for Supporting Clients in Shelter in the Aftermath of an IPV Homicide of Another Client

The death of a shelter client can have a profound impact on both shelter staff and shelter clients. The previous considerations for supporting clients still apply, but there are some unique considerations to take into account when the person who died was a shelter resident.

- **Can an advocacy program inform other residents** that a client died in a DV homicide? If not, how do you still support the residents?
- **Determine whether programs have enough staffing** to continue on with regularly scheduled activities and services for clients if staff are taking time off after a homicide. If there isn't enough coverage, determine priorities, enact a backup plan, or communicate about temporary adjustments, if needed. Create this backup/coverage plan, with staff input, in advance.
- **Identify a point of contact** who will communicate with clients post-homicide.
- **Determine whether there is a need to call for support** from other member programs. Violence Free Minnesota can help facilitate connections, provide additional support, or possibly offer funding to enact your plan.
- **Ensure any needed confidentiality agreements** are signed.
- **Shelter staff should be aware of the possible emotional impact** of the death of a resident, and how these impacts may affect interactions with other shelter clients.



Resources & Support for Staff

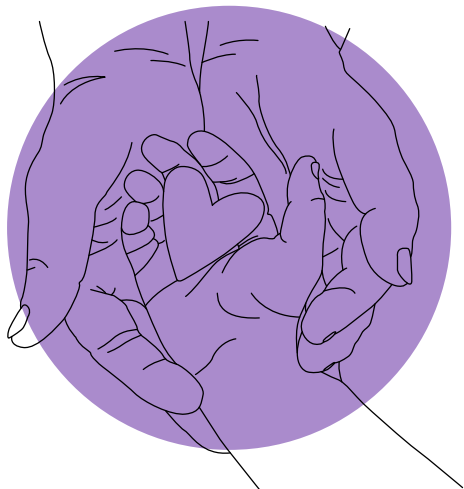
Considerations for Supporting Staff and Volunteers in the Aftermath of an IPV Homicide

Program staff and volunteers may be deeply impacted after a homicide, whether the person killed was a client, a person residing in their service area, or a community member that some staff and volunteers knew personally. Reactions may be complex, ranging from guilt, fear, and anger to despair, shock, and self-doubt. It is important for program leadership to remind staff that a homicide in no way reflects their advocacy abilities and is not their fault.

When asked what they do within their programs to support staff and volunteers after a homicide, Violence Free Minnesota's IPV Homicide Committee offered the following experiences and suggestions:



- **Consider referring staff** to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Remind staff of this resource more than just during “Benefits” renewal time.
- **Personal acknowledgment of an IPV homicide** can be helpful for staff and volunteers, especially if the homicide occurred in the program service area, the victim was a client, and/or the victim was someone that staff knew personally
- **Consider offering staff a half or full day off** without needing to use PTO
- **If a specific staff member knew the victim personally**, connect with that staff member privately first to inform them of the death and have a conversation about what they might need. This should be done before informing the rest of the staff
- **Consider whether to bring in volunteers** to cover for staff who may need time off



Resources & Support for Staff

Considerations for Supporting Staff and Volunteers in the Aftermath of an IPV Homicide

All-staff communication/acknowledgment of the homicide is vital.

- **Building in time during an existing all-staff meeting** to acknowledge the homicide, honor the victim, and share what supports are available is helpful. If a scheduled meeting is too far out, plan on how to create that space sooner. This signals creating space to value life and that leadership expects “business as usual” to look different right now.
- **Program leadership should share any communications** the organization has put out about the homicide, or other relevant communications from the media or VFMN, with staff.
- **Programs might consider bringing in a support person** from an outside agency to host debriefing groups or sessions with staff. These groups and sessions can address staff and volunteers’ immediate feelings, and offer support for continuing the work post-homicide. **As a member of the IPV Homicide Committee noted, it can be “hard to go on” after a person has been killed.**
- **Ask staff if there are specific cultural rituals or customs** they would like to bring in to staff meetings or other organizational gatherings to acknowledge and honor the loss.



Resources & Support for Staff

Preparing for Staff Performance and Attitudes to Be Impacted By a Homicide

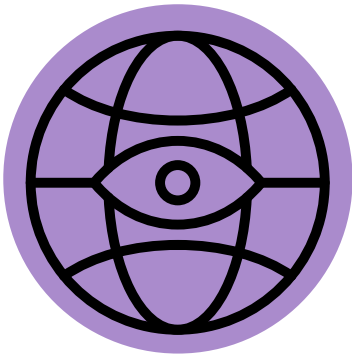
Our field requires us to be trauma-informed, and also, a homicide is an extreme experience. You may see and experience trauma responses that impact staff performance and attitudes.

Consider the following when supporting staff, or reflect on whether they are impacting your own work:

- We are not immune to being impacted by trauma.
- In this field, we may believe that we've built up tolerance for and self-care around hearing about violence.
- These beliefs can cause us to be blindsided by our own unexpected trauma responses. Offer your team training (again) on trauma and vicarious trauma to give them language for their experiences and to revisit coping strategies.

Staff may need different things. Be transparent about how much flexibility can be given. Look into whether you can offer “mental health leave” or other benefits such as short-term disability. What documentation might you need to offer these supports?

- Some staff may need to take time away to grieve and process on their own, or they may have temporarily lost the ability to work regularly due to sleep issues or symptoms of hypovigilance.
- Some may benefit from the structure, normalcy, purpose, and community that work offers and want to keep working. Some may “over-work” as a symptom of hypervigilance, avoidance or numbing. Each staff may need different support, understanding, or flexibility.
- Some staff may have a trauma history or a grief or loss history that is being triggered right now.



Resources & Support for Staff

How Trauma Responses May Impact Staff and Their Work with Clients:

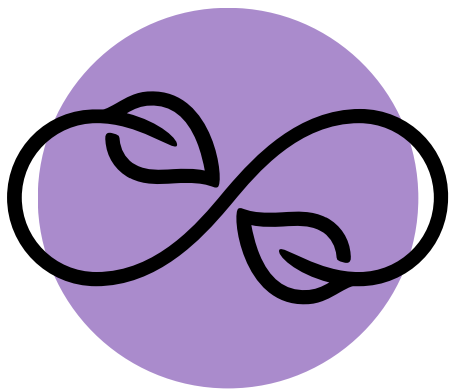
It can be helpful to watch for possible trauma responses and share what you're noticing with staff. Center the conversation around education and wanting to create a support plan. These reactions may be especially relevant for staff who worked closely with the victim, had been safety planning with them, had experienced or heard about systemic failures in relation to them, or were present at the scene of the homicide.

- **Worldview can be impacted.** Some staff may now see the world as more dangerous, see themselves as no longer effective or capable, or may lose trust in systems. They may wonder if they can stay in this field. They may grieve the person they were before they entered this field. Pointing out evidence of safety, support, and competency can be helpful.
- Trauma and stress can make us more rigid, have “all or nothing” thinking, seek to control others, have an exaggerated sense of responsibility, or cling to or demand predictability. These reactions can show up in how you serve and how you safety plan.
- **Check-in questions for yourself or supervision:**
 - Are you still using active listening and individualized support, or are you becoming more controlling with clients, or infantilizing them and taking away agency? Are you offering options and seeking informed consent?
 - Are you still giving grace and flexibility? **22**

- **Are you maintaining and modeling healthy boundaries,** or are you crossing boundaries because you feel like you have to “save” a client? Does it feel like you are the only one who can help? Are you making clients dependent on you?
- **Does everything feel like a threat or dangerous or that everything has to be met with urgency?** How is that showing up in assessing risk with clients? How are you using and modeling discernment?
- Are you finding yourself **feeling hostile** towards system partners or your team and automatically disagreeing or provoking arguments? Are these reactions based on information or a surge of energy in your body?
- Are you **breaking down** in front of clients or seeking support from them? Or avoiding certain clients, cases or topics?

It's important to present these questions as a tool vs making staff feel shamed, attacked, or punished. These questions could give staff awareness around how this tragedy has impacted them and their work, and have leadership understand responses that need support, not punishment.

Check out the Appendix for a worksheet version of these check-in questions, as well as a healthy boundaries worksheet!



Resources & Support for Staff

Sustaining Support, Supporting Leadership, and Recognizing Emotional Labor in Support

It is common for support to be offered early on followed by a “return to normal.” Staff who need support later on may be missed. Awareness of the impacts of tragedy may take time to show up or be recognized. *It is important that staff know they can still seek support at a later time too.*

- **Leadership can offer support by grounding staff in the intentions** behind policies and practices; by reminding staff that the impact of their work is not erased after a tragedy; and that when things feel “out of control,” to focus on what is in their control.
- **Regular check-ins** can be a place to share observations in changed behavior or practices, and to ask staff to self-reflect. Normalize this by noting you’re checking in with all staff after the tragedy. Let staff know that responses and needs could be delayed, and that’s okay too.
- **Leadership can be impacted too!** So often leadership performs their work in isolation and may not have a peer. Can your Board develop a plan for leadership to have support and coverage plans before a tragedy? Would moving to a Co-leadership model be supportive? VFMN can be a resource, and can find director support spaces.
- **What if trauma responses are causing harm to staff or clients?** What tools do you have to ask them to take a break and support them in doing so? What if they don’t want to take a break, or what they need goes beyond what you can offer? How can you prepare options and transparency in advance? Could staff shift to administrative work, help with creative projects, or take a break from direct client work?

Is the emotional labor of women or women of color being overly expected or taken for granted during this time?

- **BE AWARE of an invisible, unspoken societal pressure** placed on women and women of color to provide ALL the emotional labor or provide it for free (outside of work or expecting overtime work).
- Bringing in outside support can help mitigate the harm of these expectations.

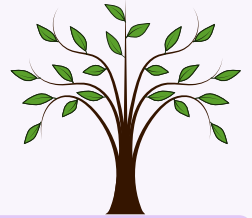
Can you provide emotional labor training for staff to impact the organizational culture now? We have to name it to change it!

Resource for check-ins:
<https://www.managementcenter.org/resources/>



RESOURCES & SUPPORT FOR STAFF

Tragedy can also bring us closer to each other and reignite our commitment to this work.



This is not to minimize the tragedy, but to name that positive impacts can also exist, especially when you invest time in intentional planning, acknowledging the tragedy, honoring the sacredness of life in a communal setting, and investing in supports. We are relational beings by design which means we can be impacted by vicarious trauma AND ALSO vicarious resiliency too.

- Refocus on giving energy to the things you can control.
- Believe in your own and your community's resiliency.
- Increase practice of "both/and" thinking, which is an antidote to "all or nothing" thinking.
- Take needed time to care for yourself when you have been pushing yourself beyond your capacity for quite some time. Maybe now you feel like you have "permission" to care for yourself or be the one grieving. How can you give yourself this permission and practice before such tragedy? What organizational cultural shifts need to be developed for self and communal care to be truly available to staff?
- Perhaps this intentional support can be used for grieving and caring for past grief or loss that you weren't able to take the space to honor.



What else can emerge from such tragedy?



- Introduction to or normalization of collective and communal grief practices.
- Deeper belief in the significance of this work and the desire to commit your time, energy and passions to this work.
- Staff can bond with each other and have stronger bonds and more honest and more vulnerable conversations after supporting each other.

Resources & Support for Staff

“It takes a toll being involved in the aftermath of extreme violence. I believe this can lead to what I call ‘secondary post-traumatic stress.’”

- Quote from Louise Seliski, former Executive Director of Relationship Safety Alliance in Brainerd

Louise spoke to how the homicide of a shelter resident can sometimes lead advocates to unintentionally compare other clients’ situations to the deceased resident’s, which can manifest unintentionally in negative interactions.



Louise also shared:

“Being an effective advocate means taking care of yourself. Be honest about who you are and what you can actually do. Providing support when there is a homicide is not for everyone. If this is something you can’t handle, then find an advocate who can. There is no shame in knowing your limits. Talk about your feelings with someone you can share confidential information with—coworkers, a therapist, etc.
This is a load you can’t carry by yourself.”



SUPPORTING EACH OTHER



How Violence Free Minnesota Can Support with Technical Assistance and Practical Needs

Violence Free Minnesota offers several resources for member programs after an intimate partner homicide. Above all, Violence Free Minnesota hopes to serve as an information and support conduit and is always available to answer advocacy program staff questions, search for relevant resources, and provide technical assistance post-homicide.

What can VFMN offer Minnesota domestic violence advocacy programs?

- Opportunities for participation in the Clothesline Project through program creation of a shirt or shirts for victim(s) who died in their community.
- Lending the Clothesline Project for a local event.
- Information about Violence Free Minnesota's annual Intimate Partner Homicide Memorial.
- We Remembers that programs can share on their social medias, if desired.
- Technical assistance around financial resources for families; talking points and guidance for media requests and social media posts, etc.
- Talking through this IPV homicide support toolkit.
- Take the media interview for you.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER



How Violence Free Minnesota Can Support with Program Trauma and Grief Responses

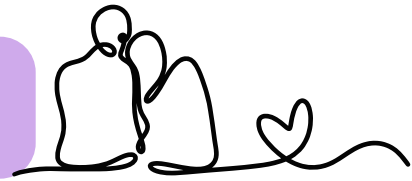
Violence Free Minnesota can also support with coordinating trauma and grief support for program leadership, staff, and/or volunteers who may benefit from therapeutic or debriefing support services post-homicide.

What resources or options can VFMN offer for grief and trauma support?

- A connection to [Safeguard](#), a program offered by the [Minnesota Alliance on Crime \(MAC\)](#). Through this program, two licensed therapists can facilitate an in-person group support session for advocates in the wake of crisis or loss. This support session would involve debriefing as a team, understanding the ongoing impact on staff well-being, identifying support needs, strengthening coping and resilience strategies, and connecting staff with additional resources as needed.
 - Safeguard is free for MAC member programs if accessed through MAC. VFMN may be able to cover costs for programs who are not members of MAC, or who are reaching out through VFMN instead of MAC.
- A possible connection to [The Center for Grief and Loss](#), which provides virtual one-on-one debriefing and support sessions (VFMN would need to check with the Center to see if they have staffing capacity).
 - VFMN may be able to cover all associated costs.
- Peer support from member domestic violence advocacy programs
 - VFMN can reach out to our IPV Homicide Committee to see if any committee members would be willing to provide peer support to staff.



SUPPORTING EACH OTHER



Advocacy Program to Advocacy Program Supports

The 90+ domestic violence agencies across Minnesota have a strong history of networking and collaboration. This collaboration can be invaluable to programs in the wake of an intimate partner homicide of a client or in their community. The VFMN IPV Homicide Committee identified the following suggestions for member programs who have experienced a homicide:

- **Consider asking an advocate from the same jurisdiction or area** to jump in and support with the aftermath and engagement with loved ones, especially if your agency is short-staffed or advocates are taking time off.
- **Programs can use Violence Free Minnesota's members listserv and Executive Directors listserv** for resource sharing post-homicide.
- **Mainstream organizations should loop in culturally specific organizations** for support and guidance post-homicide of a client or community member from a specific cultural community.
- For example, perhaps one program would like to **access a therapist or contractor that another program works with** for debriefing sessions.



SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

Advocacy Program to Advocacy Program Supports

The VFMN IPV Homicide Committee identified the following suggestions for member programs who would like to support another program that has experienced a homicide:

- **Send cards or emails to the program** expressing condolences.
- If you are able to offer assistance to the affected program, **be clear about what you can and can't provide.**
- **Honor the victim(s)** at your all-staff meetings or gatherings.
- If your program is contacted by media about the homicide, **consult with the affected program first for their guidance.**
It is possible that, depending on the content of the interview, an affected program could be negatively impacted by your program's participation in the interview, or any participation at all. **Follow their lead.**





Supporting Victims' Loved Ones and Other Affected Persons or Organizations

Engagement with Loved Ones

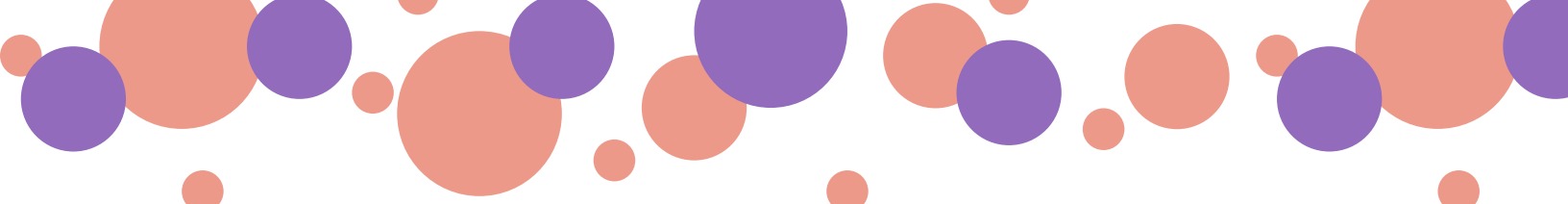
After a homicide, victims' loved ones respond in wide-ranging ways. Some loved ones do not and will not view their loved one's death as a domestic violence homicide, and may refuse engagement with your program or will not reach out. Other loved ones may view the death as a domestic violence homicide and may be willing to engage with your program. As with other advocacy, do not over-promise just to provide temporary comfort.

Programs should establish a policy for engagement with loved ones that pre-determines whether programs proactively reach out to families to offer services after a homicide. If so, who does this outreach at the agency, and how are family members identified and contacted? Some programs may choose to wait until loved ones reach out to them instead.

Family members may want to connect with other homicide victims' families. You might encourage them to find these families in the comments sections of social media or at community events. Families tell us that IPV homicide is a very unique experience and it can be meaningful to connect with others who "get it."

Ways that Minnesota DV programs have supported the loved ones of an IPV homicide victim:

- Hosted or attended a vigil or march/walk
- Attended court hearings
- Connected families with counseling and support groups
- Offered information about their domestic violence advocacy program to law enforcement to pass on to family members
- Provided advocacy to surviving family
- Supported family with media requests



VIGILS AND MEMORIAL SERVICES

Victims' loved ones often hold memorial services after a death, whether private or public. In some cases, programs who have contact with loved ones may be invited to attend these services or share information about them on social media.

- **If permission is given by loved ones**, programs may consider sharing about memorial services by posting on social media.
- **Some programs have spoken at**, hosted, or participated in awareness events in honor of homicide victims, such as walks and fundraisers, after engaging with families.
- **Programs can also inform loved ones** about Violence Free Minnesota's annual Intimate Partner Homicide Memorial and invite them to attend.
- **If any clients will be attending the funeral(s)**, programs should ask if there are ways they can support the clients or help them prepare.

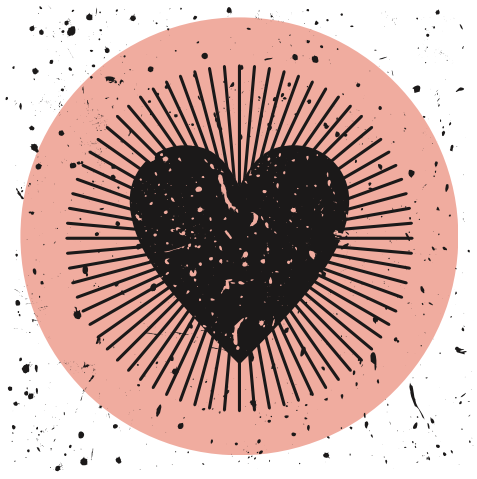
—“

“Because [the mother of two children who were murdered] was in so much pain and experiencing so much anger, she was unable to go to the funeral home to make arrangements [for the children]. Her mother and sister-in-law called me to request that I be there with them while they dealt with funeral details. We spent our time picking out caskets and making funeral arrangements.”

”—

**Quote from Lousie Seliski,
former Executive Director
of Relationship Safety
Alliance in Brainerd,
referencing the homicides
of two children in their
community**





Grief and Healing Resources and Information for Victims' Loved Ones

Engagement with Loved Ones

There is no reaction after a loved one is murdered that is “abnormal.” Some people feel anger and rage. Others may feel profound sadness and depression. Others may feel numb and detached. Often, grieving people cycle through any or all of the above. There is no linear grieving process.

While all of the above feelings are common reactions to any kind of loss of a loved one, there are some reactions that may be more specific to homicide loss. These reactions can include:

- **Struggling to understand** why a loved one was murdered
- **Guilt** in relation to previous knowledge that a loved one was experiencing abuse
- **Expectations regarding the criminal and/or civil legal systems** that may not align realistically with actual processes
- **Thoughts of wanting to retaliate** against a loved one's abusive partner

All of these reactions, again, are normal. Grief experts have found that people who lose a loved one in a sudden and/or violent manner are more likely to experience **complicated grief**, which can involve intense longing and feeling “stuck” and unable to move forward.

Unless a staff member at your program has extensive training in grief and loss, it can be helpful to develop a relationship with a grief counselor or expert who can provide loved ones with specialized support and coping resources. Some grief and loss resources for loved ones can be found in the Appendix.



Interacting with Victims' Loved Ones

Engagement with Loved Ones

The following cards and ritual practices are from **Center for Compassion**, an Arizona organization that uses **Grief Affirming Practice®** to support grievers.

INSTEAD OF DOING THIS

- Giving unsolicited advice.
- Dropping by their house unannounced.
- Avoiding the name of or conversations about the person who died.
- Offering support you can't follow through with.
- Sharing a time when someone's death was difficult for you.
- Asking/sharing circumstances or details around the death without consent.
- Trying to "fix", "solve", or "change" their grief &/or feelings.
- Avoiding words like "death" or "died".

CENTER FOR
COMPASSION
psychiatry & grief counseling
www.thecenterforcompassion.com
1331 Alma School Rd. # 100
Chandler AZ 85224 | 480-530-6441

TRY DOING THIS

- Listen with compassion & without judgement.
- Give a gift card for a food delivery service.
- Say the name of the loved one(s) who died.
- Give specific ways you can help, if any.
- Share a memory of their loved one.
- Periodically let them know you are thinking about them with out expectations of a response.
- Ask and respect their choices on what/how they want information to be shared.
- In your time, tend to your own grief & acknowledge your discomfort.

INSTEAD OF SAYING THIS

- They're in a better place.
- Everything happens for a reason.
- I know exactly how you feel.
- Let me know if you need something.
- At least.... _____
- You should try _____ to feel better.
- Are you feeling better yet?
- You'll move on/feel better with time.
- Heaven gained another angel.
- Be grateful they aren't in pain any more.
- You're so strong.

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Chandler AZ 85224 | 480-530-6441

TRY SAYING THIS

- I am so sorry that this has happened.
- Would you like to share something about _____ with me?
- However you are feeling is okay.
- I am here for you, can I do _____ for you?
- I love/care about you.
- I'll remember them with you.
- There is no right way to grieve.
- Can I sit with you?
- I don't know what to say, but I am here to listen.
- My favorite memory of them is _____.

What do I say to someone who is grieving?

CENTER FOR
COMPASSION
psychiatry & grief counseling
www.thecenterforcompassion.com 1331 Alma School
Rd. #100 | Chandler AZ 85224 | 480-530-6441

- I'm so sorry, there truly are no words.
- I don't know how you feel, but I'm here to listen.
- Do you want to tell me about them?
- Here are ways I am able to support you: (give examples).
- My favorite memory of your beloved is _____.
- _____ will be so missed.
- There is no right way to grieve.
- I love/care about you.
- I'll remember them with you.
- Can I sit with you?
- However you are feeling is okay.



Remembering your beloved(s) with ritual.

Connection

- ☐ Light a candle in their memory.
- ☐ Look at photos or videos of them.
- ☐ Spend time looking at and holding their things.
- ☐ Find nature that reminds you of them (birds, flowers, trees, animals).
- ☐ Look for reminders of them in everyday experiences.
- ☐ Engage with an activity they might have loved.
- ☐ Set up a small space or area in your home that belongs to *them*.
- ☐ Talk to them out loud.
- ☐ Write to them.

Creativity

- ☐ Create a scrapbook in their memory.
- ☐ Create their name in nature with rocks, sticks, flowers, or other items. Take a photo.
- ☐ Write their name or draw a picture they would have loved in chalk in an outdoor area.
- ☐ Make or design and wear a piece of jewelry in their memory.
- ☐ Purchase a garden stepping stone kit and create one in memory of your beloved.
- ☐ If it feels comfortable, use their clothing or belongings to make something new (a quilt, shadowbox, etc).
- ☐ Write about your beloved and who they were.
- ☐ Paint rocks with their name in their memory and leave them for others to find.
- ☐ Create a 'memory' box and add memories of your beloved to the box as they come to you.

<https://thecenterforcompassion.com/wp-content/uploads/CFC-Ritual-Doc.pdf>

REMEMBERING YOUR BELOVED WITH RITUAL

Community

- ☐ Attend a support group with others who may have similar loss(es).
- ☐ If it feels comfortable and safe, share your story and their story on social media.
- ☐ Participate in online communities where grievors gather to see if you feel welcomed and supported.
- ☐ Read books or memoirs by others who have experienced similar loss(es).
- ☐ Gather a group of those who loved them together to share memories.
- ☐ Invite others to add memories to a 'memory box' full of memories of your beloved.

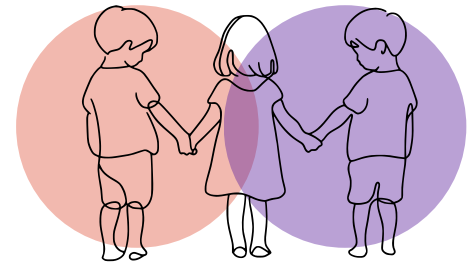
Compassion

- ☐ Do an act of kindness in memory of your beloved.
- ☐ Treat yourself with compassion once a day, even in the smallest of ways (an extra deep breath, ask yourself what you need, drink warm tea, feel the sun on your face).
- ☐ Volunteer your time (1-2 hours/month) with a meaningful organization.
- ☐ Rescue an animal.
- ☐ Extend compassion to a stranger with kind words.
- ☐ Spend 10 minutes in meditation considering the suffering of another and extending compassion.

Contemplation

- ☐ Allow yourself to be deeply present with your feeling states. Turn toward them.
- ☐ Consider what grief might look like and create a clear image of it in your mind.
- ☐ Be in nature and observe the ways that grief is reflected within it.
- ☐ Read poetry that reminds you of your beloved.
- ☐ Sit in meditation or prayer and dedicate this time to your beloved.
- ☐ Write about the profound ways that grief, and your love for your beloved, has changed you.

Custody, Guardianship, and Kinship Care Resources and Information for Grandparents and Other Relatives



Grandparents and other extended family members of a child or children may decide to seek custody or kinship care of the child(ren) after a domestic violence homicide in which their parent was murdered. In murder-suicide cases, children often lose both parents. The process of seeking custody or kinship care (raising a relative or friend's child) often generates many questions for families. The below resources were suggested by the National Legal Center on Children and Domestic Violence, BWJP:

- [**Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota provides Kinship Family Support Services**](#) for individuals and families raising a relative or friend's child(ren). Their Kinship Family Support Services Program offers caregiver resources; support groups; trainings; and a statewide Kinship Warmline that connects kinship caregivers to support and resources Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm.
- [**Generations United**](#), a U.S.-based, membership-based advocacy organization dedicated to supporting the needs of children, youth, and other adults through intergenerational collaboration, has two grandfamilies initiatives. These initiatives are dedicated to supporting families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close friends are raising children whose parents are unable to.
 - [**The National Center on Grandfamilies**](#) engages in federal advocacy and supports kinship/grandfamilies in policy advocacy.
 - [**The Grandfamilies and Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center**](#) provides individual assistance, learning opportunities, and resources to government agencies and nonprofits who serve kinship/grandfamilies.
- [**The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families offers a desk guide**](#) on the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)
 - The purpose of the ICPC is to ensure that children placed across state lines have the same protections and services as children placed in their home state. The ICPC is a contract and uniform law among all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands that protects and enforces the jurisdictional, administrative, and human rights obligations of all the parties involved in a placement.
- Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, Generations United, and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption developed an [**Adoption and Guardianship for Children in Foster Care Comparison Chart for Minnesota**](#). The chart can help kinship foster parents compare adoption and guardianship as two options they can pursue to exit foster care and create permanent families.

In June 2025, [Melissa Hunt, 36](#), was murdered by her partner in Minnesota. Melissa's brother and his wife, Heather, stepped in to care for Melissa's two daughters. Heather wrote a blog post, ["In the Blink of an Eye,"](#) about her family's experiences. Her full post can be found in the Appendix on page 66 or at the link above (included with her permission).



Heather wrote:

"In the span of a week, we went from preparing for a normal summer to rearranging bedrooms, enrolling in therapies, navigating court dates, and trying to hold space for nine grieving children.

There is no training for this. Not for military families, not for therapists, not for mothers. Not for anyone.

I've learned that families don't break only when something big happens — sometimes they break in quiet, ordinary moments...and they heal the same way.

I've learned that grief doesn't move in a straight line. Neither does bonding. Neither does trust.

I've learned that love is not just a feeling — it is a series of exhausting, intentional choices.

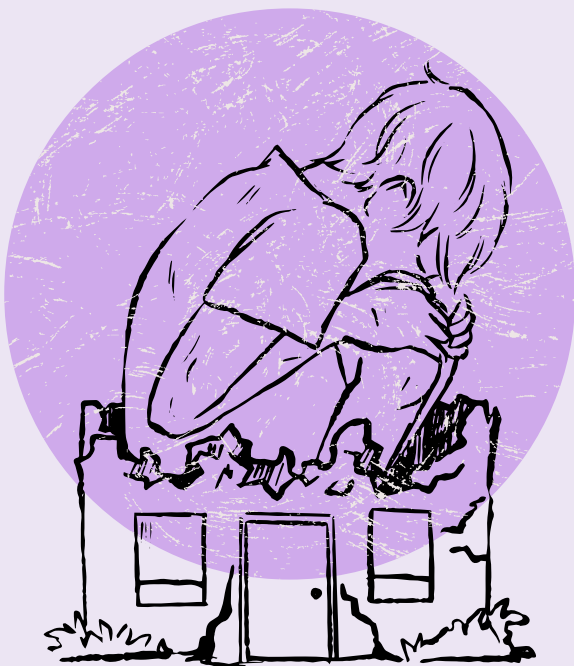
I've learned that children are resilient in ways adults forget how to be.

I've learned that healing is slow and nonlinear, but possible."

Guidance for Loved Ones for Talking to Children About Death

Victims' loved ones are sometimes placed in the unexpected position of caring for children who have lost a parent to domestic violence homicide, or, in the case of murder-suicide, both their parents. Loved ones may struggle with how to talk to children about homicide and grief. The following information was gathered from organizations that specialize in supporting children with complex grief, including [Douguy Center: The National Grief Center for Children & Families](#); [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#); and the [Georgia Commission on Family Violence](#).

- **Start by asking children** what they think happened, and clarify any misconceptions
- **Tell children the truth** about what happened, using age-appropriate language
- **Avoid using euphemisms** such as “[parent’s name] went away” or “is sleeping,” as this can confuse children
- **Be mindful** of how many/what details you share, and when
- **Reassure the child** that what happened was not their fault nor the victim’s fault
- **Do not withhold information** about what happened unless doing so is necessary for an ongoing investigation or is in the child’s best interests
- **Monitor what media the child has access to** — social media, TV, etc. may cover news about the homicide, which may be traumatizing
- **Provide ongoing opportunities** for children to ask questions and discuss their feelings

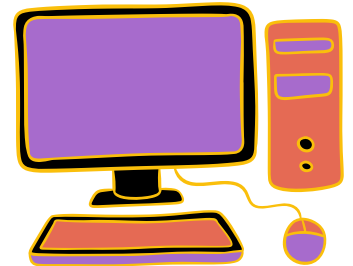


Social Media Guidance for Loved Ones

The following information is provided for general guidance only and does not constitute legal advice. Families should consult law enforcement or a qualified attorney for advice about their specific situations.

Families are usually advised not to post anything that hasn't already been formally released by law enforcement, such as:

- Specific circumstances of the crime
- Details about injuries
- Names or descriptions of potential persons of interest
- Evidence found or rumored evidence
- Information officers have asked them to keep confidential



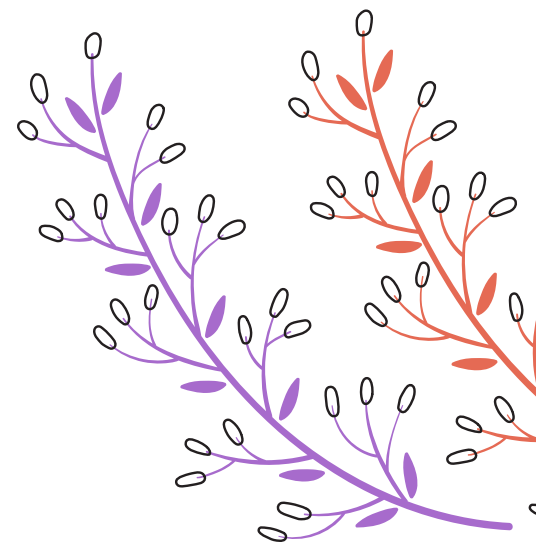
Posting this type of information can unintentionally hinder the investigation, spread misinformation, or expose the family to legal risks. Social media posts can be used in court proceedings and may be reviewed by investigators, attorneys, and judges. Even well-intentioned posts could affect witness testimony, jury selection, or legal arguments.

What is generally safe for families to post?

Families can typically share supportive or personal messages, such as:

- Tributes or memorials
- Approved missing-person posters or official information from law enforcement
- Requests for anyone with information to contact the authorities
- Messages of gratitude to the community
- Links to verified fundraisers

These posts do not interfere with the investigative process and can help foster community support.





Resources & Support

How Community-based Advocacy Can Be Helpful for Families

Families often don't understand how the criminal legal system works, and may have expectations about how the system works that are inaccurate. They may sometimes mis-identify problems that may have contributed to the homicide.

- Case audits: Was there a trend? A missing piece?
- Were police afraid to bring in community-based advocacy because they were afraid of receiving the blame for what went wrong?

"The court system is particularly confusing. It takes a very long time from conviction to sentence and is often hard to understand."

- Quote from Lousie Seliski, former Executive Director of Relationship Safety Alliance in Brainerd



"We were able to collaborate with the attorney's office to have them come in [to a workplace] and visit [with surviving loved ones] about the criminal process and victim impact statements."

"When invited, we provide community impact statements at sentencing hearings."

"We were able to provide emotional support and be present during the court process."

- Quotes from VFMN member programs about their advocacy with surviving family members

Crime Victims Reimbursement Board – Information for Families

The Minnesota Crime Victims Reimbursement Board is a state program within the Minnesota Department of Public Safety that provides financial assistance to victims of violent crime and their families. The program reimburses victims and their families for out-of-pocket losses that were a direct result of a crime.

To be eligible for reimbursement the following requirements must be met:

- Crime occurred in Minnesota
- Application submitted within 3 years of the crime (some exceptions apply)
- Crime reported to police within 30 days (exceptions for sexual assaults/child abuse)
- Victim cooperated fully with police and prosecution
- Victim was not committing a crime at the time of their injury or death
- Collateral sources, such as health and auto insurance and workers compensation, must be used first



There are other factors not listed that may make an application ineligible or result in reduced benefits.

In homicide cases, the victim's family may be reimbursed for:

- Funeral services/burial — \$7,500 cap
- Transportation and lodging to attend funeral — \$1,000 cap (included in the \$7,500 cap)
- Headstone/marker — \$1,000 cap (not included in \$7,500 cap)
- Counseling with licensed provider — \$7,500 cap per person
- Cultural healing services — \$1,500 cap
- Prescriptions/medication management
- Lost wages for spouse/domestic partner and parents — up to one year
- Lost wages for children, siblings and grandparents — up to six weeks
- Loss of support for dependents (spouse/domestic partner and children under 18) — \$400/month per dependent



Complete information about the reimbursement funds and application process can be found at: <https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ojp/for-crime-victims/crime-victim-resources/financial-help/mn-crime-victims-reimbursement-program>

Reimbursement and Online Fundraising Platforms – Information for Families

It is common for victims' loved ones to set up online fundraisers in the wake of a homicide to crowdfund for funeral and memorial services, children's therapy needs, and other resources. Loved ones should be made aware of best practices for online fundraisers.

Could setting up an online fundraiser affect whether loved ones could receive crime victims' reimbursement funds in Minnesota?

- A 2023 court decision (State v. Cotton) reinforces that the **Minnesota Crime Victims Reimbursement Program can recover the full amount** it pays to victims from offenders through restitution, without deductions for private donations or crowdfunding the victim may have received. The Crime Victims Reimbursement Board adopted a policy not to deduct funding amounts based on GoFundMe accounts when the family indicated the funds are going to be used for expenses not covered by the board.
- You can email dps.justiceprograms@state.mn.us or call at 651-201-7300 or 888-622-8799 with specific questions.





What Can GoFundMe Share with Law Enforcement?

Note that GoFundMe will cooperate with law enforcement and may provide information with a valid legal request. GoFundMe may produce the following information in response to a legally valid request to the extent it has such information available:

- **Name, email address, IP address, and phone number** associated with a person who created a fundraiser;
- **The content of a fundraiser**, including previous versions or edits made to a fundraiser;
- Information regarding the **amount of money** raised by a fundraiser;
- Information regarding the **timing and amount of any funds withdrawn** by a fundraiser organizer or beneficiary;
- **Name, email address, and IP address** for any individuals who donate to a fundraiser, as well as the donation amount and donation date;
- **Information concerning the relevant third-party payment processor** relating to a fundraiser.

Additional notes about GoFundMe's Terms:

- **GoFundMe's terms** prohibit raising money for legal defense in serious violent crimes.
- **Per the service agreement**, a fundraiser may not raise funds for a minor unless (i) you have obtained express permission of the minor's guardian; or (ii) the funds are transferred into a trust, UTMA, or UGMA account for the sole benefit of the minor.





Legal Considerations

Victim Rights: according to MN statute 611A, in a homicide case the term “victim” includes the family members, guardian, conservator, or custodian of a minor, incompetent, incapacitated, or deceased person. This means that all crime victim rights apply to these individuals.

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Justice Programs is the best resource on Minnesota crime victim rights. The Crime Victim Rights page can be found here: <https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ojp/crime-victims/crime-victim-rights>

Confidentiality

- **The death of a client does not end statutorily protected advocate-client confidentiality.** Without a signed release by the client waiving confidentiality in the wake of their death, programs cannot publicly confirm or deny that a victim received services from their organization.
- **All external-facing communication your agency puts out should be the same whether the victim was or was not a client.** To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of victims who were also clients, agencies should develop an internal policy for posting or commenting about IPV homicides. **For example, your agency may decide to share information about every IPV homicide in Minnesota through the We Remembers that VFMN releases. Or, your agency may decide to only share information about IPV homicides that occur in your service area.** Either way, a consistent policy of posting and commenting will help protect your agency from accusations that posting or commenting on an IPV homicide reveals something about your agency’s connection to that victim.
- **NNEDV Resource for ROIs:** <https://www.techsafety.org/releasesfaq#basic-release-template>

What confidentiality laws apply to Minnesota domestic violence advocates?



Federal Confidentiality Laws

Violence Against Women Act (VAWA):

Applies to any program receiving VAWA funds. Prohibits sharing personally identifying information about a survivor without informed, written, time-limited consent, unless:

- A state law requires disclosure, or
- A valid court order compels disclosure.
- Even when disclosure is required, the program must take specific steps (e.g., notify the survivor; limit information released; document the process).

VAWA generally provides the strongest and most protective confidentiality framework for Minnesota advocates.

Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA):

Federal funding stream for many Minnesota DV programs. Confidentiality requirements mirror VAWA, including limits on the release of personally identifying information and requirements for informed, written consent.

Minnesota State Confidentiality Laws

Minn. Stat. 595.02, subd. 1(k):

Creates the domestic abuse advocate–victim privilege:

- Advocates may not testify or disclose information about a survivor without the survivor's consent, unless a court finds, after weighing specific statutory factors, that disclosure is required.
- This privilege applies to communications made in the course of providing services.

Minn. Stat. Chapter 5B — Safe at Home Program (Minnesota's Address Confidentiality Program):

- Allows survivors to use a substitute P.O. Box address for all purposes (housing, school, employment, court processes, etc.).

Advocates working with Safe at Home participants must protect both the survivor's identity and physical location.

What confidentiality laws apply to tribal programs?

- VAWA confidentiality requirements also cover tribal domestic violence programs.
- Many tribal programs also have additional tribal laws or codes protecting survivor information.

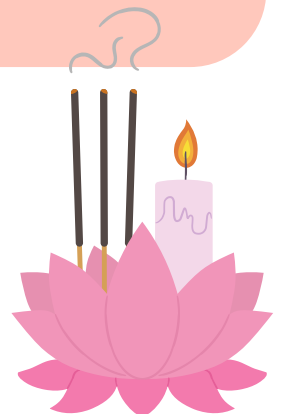
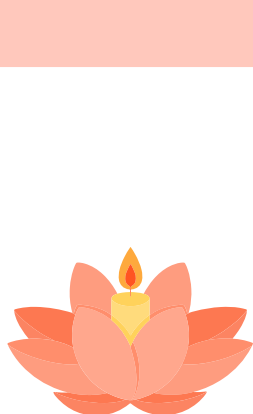


Death of a client while a shelter resident

Lousie Seliski, former Executive Director of Relationship Safety Alliance in Brainerd, offered the following insights about information they wish they'd known prior to homicides of shelter residents:

- Whether a client's partner has access to a firearm and/or a permit to carry
- Whether there are any potentially dangerous probation issues involving the client's partner (for example, if the partner's probation is supposed to be revoked but this has not been done in a timely manner)
- Whether visitation is supervised and if not, how to address this

Louise noted that in some cases, the clients were still program clients but were no longer living in shelter. If the program had had access to the aforementioned information at the time, they may have requested that the clients and their children return to living at the shelter due to their increased risk of homicide.

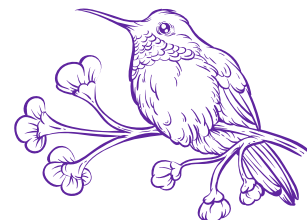


Victims Who Kill Their Abusers

The following are considerations for cases involving a client or a local victim who has killed their abusive partner.

The full document, including advocacy strategies at every stage of the criminal legal and reentry process, can be found in the Survived and Punished Advocacy Strategies toolkit:

- <https://survivedandpunished.org/advocacy-strategies/>



SUPPORTING SURVIVORS AFTER ARREST

Organizational Paradigm:

- **Adopt principle** that survivors already receiving services must continue to be prioritized after arrest and incarceration.
- **Train advocates** on the systemic criminalization of survivors, as well as specific pipelines between surviving domestic violence and becoming targeted for arrest and prosecution.

Individual Advocacy:

- **Develop protocol** for supporting survivors who are already receiving services after they are arrested.
- **Identify a plan** for how advocates can make themselves available to clients after arrest.
- **Research policies** of local jails and other ICE detention locations to learn how people who have been arrested are allowed to reach out for help, and incorporate this info into safety planning.

Outreach:

- **Facilitate support groups** in county jails (women's empowerment groups, etc.) to ensure a presence and support for criminalized survivors. This will help make your services more accessible to current clients who are in custody and survivors who did not connect with your organization before they were arrested.

Organizing:

- **Research local District Attorney's (DA's) record on prosecuting survivors.** Set up meetings to urge the DA to adopt the principle to not criminalize survival. Organize for the removal of DAs who prosecute survivors. See #ByeAnita campaign in Chicago as an example.



Connecting with Criminalized Survivors Who Are Not Already Receiving Services

DV programs may get connected with criminalized survivors through multiple entry points, many of which come through the criminal legal system rather than traditional self-referral. Common pathways include law enforcement referrals, courts, jail/correctional settings, probation/parole systems, or other community-based referrals like shelters, hospitals, or social service agencies.

In these situations, programs often have to balance coordination with system partners while maintaining a survivor-centered, nonjudgmental approach and ensuring confidentiality and voluntary engagement wherever possible.

When connecting with criminalized survivors for the first time, start by focusing on safety, trust, and transparency about confidentiality.

Here are additional tips to consider:

- **Build trust slowly;** use plain language and consistency
- Avoid practices or connections that may feel like **“monitoring”**
- Recognize **impacts** of criminalization (misidentification (being identified as the aggressor), coercion, and distrust)
- **Apply trauma-informed, anti-oppressive** practices
- **Understand how systems respond differently** depending on race, income, identity, and circumstance—not just individual behavior. **Mistrust of systems is rational** for people who have been harmed by systems or are part of communities harmed by systems (this can include carceral, medical, educational, etc. settings)
- **Address immediate needs** (housing, transportation, communication)
- Rethink what “engagement” looks like; **be flexible** with few expectations
- Stay aware of **legal risks and constraints**
- **Center survivor autonomy** and informed choice



Tips for Organizations Commenting on Cases of Victims Killing Their Abusers



A DV program may choose to issue a community statement in these situations, and especially for those that are high-profile, emotionally charged events where the domestic violence context is often misunderstood or misreported. **The goal is usually not to comment on legal responsibility, but to help the public interpret the situation through a DV-informed lens and reduce harm** in how the story is discussed among the community. If your program is unable to comment, consider referring to a resource on criminalized survivors, such as [Survived & Punished](#).

When releasing a statement like this, an organization should coordinate messaging internally before releasing any statement, and should be prepared for follow-up questions and community response. Key points to consider in a statement include:

- **Acknowledge the loss of life** and its impact on the community
- **Recognize domestic violence as a pattern** of coercion and control without speculating on details; acknowledge that safety choices can seem counterintuitive to outsiders.
- **Avoid victim-blaming, perpetrator-blaming, or simplifying complex circumstances.** It's ok to acknowledge the complexity, layers, and nuance that exists in domestic violence situations
- **Do not comment on guilt**, motive, or legal outcomes
- **Clarify the organization's role** as support-focused, not investigative
- **Use calm, neutral, trauma-informed language**
- **Briefly acknowledge broader barriers survivors may face**, including systemic barriers, without offering case-specific critique
- **Include information on available support** and resources for victims/survivors



Sample Organizational Statement on a Criminalized Survivor Homicide Case



“Recently, a community member was convicted of murder and sentenced to prison for the death of their partner. **We acknowledge this devastating loss of life and the profound impact** upon loved ones and our broader community.”

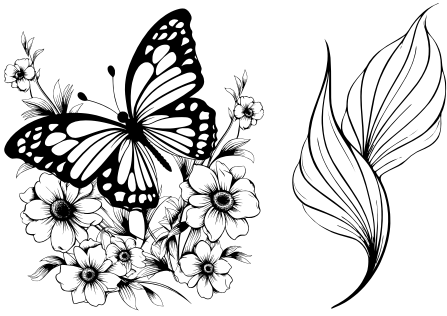
We know that media accounts of domestic violence-related deaths and incidents often do not tell the full story or provide a comprehensive picture of the complexities of the relationship. Domestic violence is a pattern of power and control that frequently involves coercive control. Often, domestic violence involves the perpetuation of narratives that can inaccurately position survivors as predominant aggressors in their relationships.

It is common that actions and behaviors used by individuals in abusive relationships are not publicly contextualized within the known impacts of gender-based violence, including coping strategies. This lack of contextualization often reflects a mischaracterization of survivors’ resistance as abuse. **As a result, survivors may be criminalized for their actions in response to violence** in ways that do not accurately reflect their experiences.

Survivors face many barriers in abusive relationships, including economic instability; threats of harm; lack of community support; stigma and disbelief; and possible harm from legal systems.”

[Organization name] provides [services] in [community area]. Anyone who needs support can [how to contact/contact info]. **We are here for you.**”





Conflicts of Interest

In IPV homicide situations, particularly in cases of murder-suicide, family members of both the victim and the perpetrator may be in need of supportive services and/or advocacy. We encourage agencies to develop a written policy about if, when, and how to work with the family of the perpetrator, considering any conflict of interest policy your agency has and providing clear and consistent guidelines for advocates.

Some things to consider:

- If the family of the perpetrator reaches out to your agency, **ASK what their needs are.** Their needs/asks might be very different than what you are anticipating or assuming.
- **Discuss what kinds of support your agency could offer** (i.e. referrals) and what feels like crossing the line (i.e., advocate showing up in court to support perpetrator's family) if you were to receive a call from a perpetrator's family. **What kinds of questions and concerns do advocates have about the potential impact** — positive and negative — of providing support to the victim's and perpetrator's families? If new policy is developed in this area, make sure advocates understand the what and the why.

Questions to Consider (from End Abuse Wisconsin)

Is there a conflict of interest or not?

How to/can you create openness to this? What might be the impact on the victim's family? How to disclose that you are supporting both families?

Can you connect/refer out to another community-based partner or another office of the same agency?

Working with Law Enforcement

Considerations regarding working with law enforcement

- Due to advocate-client confidentiality, advocacy programs are unable to share information with law enforcement agencies, unless you have signed an ROI waiving confidentiality in the wake of a client's death. If you don't have an established relationship with the impacted family, you could tell the investigator to share your program's information with the family and then they can reach out on their own.

Considerations for law enforcement

- Law Enforcement should be aware that **local advocacy agencies can provide support and resources to surviving family members and loved ones** following an IPV homicide. Advocacy programs do not only serve primary victims; they can also support secondary victims, including children, family members, and close friends.
- **Surviving family members may face safety concerns**, including harassment or threats from individuals connected to the alleged perpetrator.
- **Community-based advocates can assist surviving family members** with safety planning, protection order information, resources, and emotional support in the aftermath of a homicide.
- **Law enforcement should consider notifying domestic violence agencies when an IPV homicide occurs**, when appropriate, so that advocates can be prepared to offer support to family members, clients, and community.



Addressing IPV Homicides in and with Community:

Outreach to Other Affected Persons or Organizations

Many people and organizations are affected by domestic violence homicide. In addition to loved ones, victims' coworkers and members of their hobby groups may be impacted. In some cases, victims have been murdered within their **workplaces or in public spaces such as parks, stores, and places of worship.** Often, witnesses who had no prior personal connection to the victim are left traumatized.

Advocacy programs may receive requests for support or resources from these people and organizations, and may consider doing proactive outreach as well. **For example, a VFMN member program was contacted by a local cleaning business** after one of the clients served by the business was murdered. Although the homicide occurred somewhere other than the business, staff were left reeling due to their connection with the victim. **In this case, the advocacy program provided an educational presentation** about IPV to the business **and also hosted a debriefing session** to help staff process their feelings.

Community-based advocacy efforts with organizations and workplaces can be helpful, even if these places have not yet been affected by a homicide. Having proactive conversations about what to do if a homicide happens in their area can help these places prepare and better understand how to support survivors.



"We offered to go do a listening session with the small business it happened at."

-Quote from a VFMN member program about how they supported an affected organization



In 2016, Barb Larson was murdered by her husband at the Faribault Chamber of Commerce, where she worked. In 2019, the Faribault Police Department partnered with the Chamber to sell purple patches in honor of Barb at both the Chamber office and the police station, with 100% of proceeds donated to HOPE Center.

Victim and Community Impact Statements

Victim and community impact statements describe the physical, emotional, and/or financial impacts suffered by the victim(s) of a crime, and may include information that was not in official reports. **These statements are submitted to the court and can be delivered in written format or read aloud in court, or both.** Victims or other parties who choose to have their statement read aloud can read it themselves, or have a victim advocate or prosecutor read it for them.

Impact statements may be written from a range of perspectives and formats. Sometimes they address a defendant directly, and at other times they may address the judge. **Under Minnesota law, anyone who has been affected by a crime, whether as a direct victim or as a community member, has a right to provide information and input to the court.**

Impact statements are taken into account by the judge and may affect bail, conditions for release, probation, or sentencing.

People who live and work in areas where crimes have occurred, such as advocates from domestic violence programs, may submit community impact statements. These statements place a crime in context and describe how it has affected the community. If your program is interested in submitting a community impact statement, **contact your local police department to learn how.**



Community Impact Statement Example

In 2019 in Shakopee, America Mafalda Thayer was publicly murdered by her ex-boyfriend. There were several witnesses to the crime. **Southern Valley Alliance (SVA)**, a VFMM member program providing domestic violence services throughout Carver and Scott Counties (where Shakopee is located), submitted a community impact statement about America's murder to the court. SVA's Executive Director Christie Larson read the statement aloud during the second part of the trial. **Shared with permission of SVA, you can read the full community impact statement on the next two pages.**

We Remember



America Mafalda Thayer

Overview of the statement:

- **Acknowledgment of the trauma** experienced by witnesses to America's murder
- **Forms of intimate partner violence** and barriers to leaving
- **Impacts** of intimate partner violence on victims
- **Statistics about the prevalence** of IPV homicide in Minnesota
- **Brief overview of SVA**

**Graphic credit to SVA*

Community Impact Statement on the Murder of America Mafalda Thayer



Community Impact Statement

July 18, 2023

Your honor, my name is Christie Larson and I am the Executive Director at Southern Valley Alliance, a nonprofit organization providing advocacy and support for victims of domestic abuse in Scott and Carver counties. **I'm speaking today to convey the impact on our community as a result of the murder of America Mafalda Thayer.**

America Mafalda Thayer broke up with her boyfriend moments before he stabbed and decapitated her in the middle of the day in a residential neighborhood in Shakopee, Minnesota. **Our local community is shocked, outraged, and distraught by this horrific act and the impact has been widespread.**

Victims of domestic abuse are already afraid of leaving abusive relationships for many reasons; the fear of not being believed, the difficulties of navigating the court system, the lack of affordable and safe housing, the difficulties of enforcing Orders for Protection, the fear for the safety of their children and the fear that they themselves will be killed. **This fear came true for America.**

This terrifying act of violence has an impact on our community that will be felt for years to come. The feeling of security in one's home has been diminished, as well as the feeling of safety in your own neighborhood. Secondary victims include witnesses who were on the scene right after the murder, including a child. There was distress for all of the first responders on the scene, who had to ignore their shock and continue to do their jobs. **Vicarious trauma was experienced by children, family members, friends, neighborhoods, and workplaces.**

In the United States, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men will experience domestic violence in their lifetime. **Last year, Southern Valley Alliance assisted 945 individuals who accessed direct services.** Over the past two years, the need and demand for SVA direct services has skyrocketed.

Domestic violence can affect anyone, no matter their age, economic status, gender or sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, cultural or religious identity. **A current or former intimate partner may perpetrate multiple types of violence,** including physical or sexual assault, stalking, emotional abuse, and psychological aggression. Such behaviors are part of a systematic pattern of dominance and control.

The individual and societal costs of domestic violence are heartbreaking and monumental. Victim-survivors experience physical injury, psychological trauma, and other negative health effects. They have higher risks for unhealthy behaviors, such as smoking, binge drinking, and actions that lead to HIV.

Domestic violence takes an enormous economic toll as well. Perpetrators withhold or sabotage financial resources, preventing the victim from escaping or keeping them financially unstable if they do leave. When a partner is systematically controlling, intimidating, coercive and threatening, the victim can feel powerless to act and seeking help can multiply the risk of danger to themselves or their children.

Some domestic violence victims and their families pay the ultimate price — death. The CDC reports that over half of female homicide victims in the U.S. are killed by a current or former male intimate partner. **According to Violence Free Minnesota, at least 26 people in the state lost their lives to intimate partner homicides in 2021. Unfortunately, America Mafalda Thayer was one of those victims.**

No one can undo the horrors of the past. But SVA and its partners believe that we can change the future for victims, their families, and our communities. **Everyone has the right to live a life free of violence and it is all of our responsibilities to work together to make sure that right is realized for everyone in our community.** We ask that the legal system and the Courts continue to do their part to help solve this damaging societal issue.

Thank you for giving Southern Valley Alliance the opportunity to speak today.

Appendix: Resources for Loved Ones

Grief Support and Coping

- **Survivor Resources:** <https://survivorresources.org/>
- **Survivors of Homicide:** <https://www.survivorsofhomicide.com/about-us/>
- **Parents of Murdered Children:** <https://www.pomc.org/>
- **FamilyMeans Center for Grief & Loss:** <https://www.griefloss.org/>
- **The GEN Grief Toolkit:** https://global-diversity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The-Grief-Toolkit_CBarton_GEN.pdf



Media/Communications Assistance

- **Survivors Say:** <https://www.survivorssay.org/>
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline Storytellers Collective:** <https://www.thehotline.org/get-involved/storytellers-collective/>



Legal Support and Information

- **Standpoint:** <https://www.standpointmn.org/>
- **Post-conviction advocacy:** <https://www.mnallianceoncrime.org/resources/post-conviction-advocacy/>
- **DOC apology letter bank:** <https://mn.gov/doc/victims/restorative-justice/victim-initiated-restorative-practices/apology-letters/>
- **Justice North:** <https://www.justicenorth.org/>
- **LawHelpMN:** <https://www.lawhelpmn.org/>



Financial Assistance

- **MN Crime Victims Reimbursement Program:** <https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ojp/for-crime-victims/crime-victim-resources/financial-help/mn-crime-victims-reimbursement-program>
- **MN crime victims restitution:** <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/611a.04>



Appendix: Resources for Loved Ones

Supporting Children



- **National Child Traumatic Stress Network:** <https://www.nctsn.org/>
- **How to talk to a child after/about a death:**
<https://mhanational.org/resources/mental-health-resources-for-parents/>
- **Talking to children about murder-suicide:**
<https://gcfv.georgia.gov/document/publication/talking-children-about-murder-suicide-factsheetpdf/download>
- **Supporting children and teens after a murder or violent death:**
<https://www.dougy.org/assets/uploads/Supporting-Children-and-Teens-After-a-Murder-of-Violent-Death.pdf>
- **Compassionate Friends:** <https://www.compassionatefriends.org/>

Custody and Kinship Information for Grandparents and Extended Family

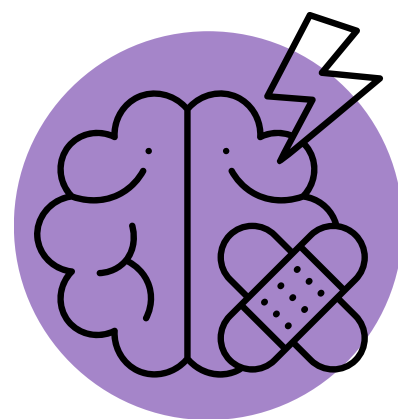
- **Lutheran Social Service Kinship Family Support:**
<https://www.lssmn.org/services/families/kinship>
- **Generations United, The National Center on Grandfamilies:**
<https://www.gu.org/explore-our-topics/grandfamilies/>
- **Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children:**
<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5617.pdf>
- **Adoption and Guardianship Comparison Chart:**
<https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2025/01/25-Grandfamilies-FactSheet-AdoptionGuardianship-MinnesotaChart.pdf>



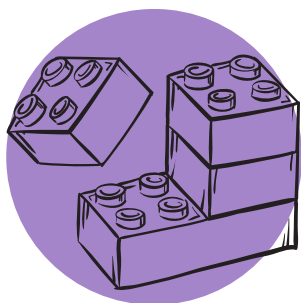
Appendix: Resources for Advocates

Vicarious Trauma Support

- **MN Alliance on Crime (MAC) Safeguard Program:**
Contact MAC or VFMN to get connected
- **Psychological First Aid and Skills for Psychological Recovery:** <https://learn.nctsn.org/course/index.php?categoryid=11>
- **OVC Vicarious Trauma Toolkit:**
<https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/vtt/tools-for-victim-services>
- **NuVantage Employee Assistance Program:**
<https://nuvantage.lssmn.org/>
- **ODVN Resilience for Supervisors Manual:**
<https://www.odvn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Resilience-for-Supervisors-Emerging-Practices-in-Addressing-Vicarious-Trauma.pdf>



Capacity Building



- **NCVC Center for Victim Service Professionals:**
<https://victimsofcrime.org/center-for-victim-service-professionals/>
- **OVC Training and Technical Assistance:**
<https://www.ovcttac.gov/views/HowWeCanHelp/dspTrainingTechnicalAssistance.cfm?nm=tta>
- **Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence, A National Resource Center:** <https://workplacesrespond.org/>
- **Mass Casualty Resources:**
<https://www.mnallianceoncrime.org/mass-casualty-resources-2/>

Appendix: Resources for Advocates

Trauma Responses Showing Up in Your Advocacy? Check-In Worksheet

Reflection questions to use after a tragedy or at various points to check in on how the trauma of this work (or particular tragedy) may be impacting how you do your work and your advocacy.

This document is *not* an exhaustive description of how trauma may show up for you or impact your advocacy but is meant to be a tool, a starting place, and to normalize that trauma can impact you and your work. This check-in worksheet is meant to be a tool for self reflection or to be used during a regular check-in with your manager, supervisor, or team as a support tool.

Trauma can make us more rigid, have “all or nothing” thinking, seek to control others, have an exaggerated sense of responsibility, or cling to or demand predictability. These reactions can show up in how you serve and how you safety plan. **Ask yourself these questions to check in:**

1. Are you still using active listening and individualized support, or are you becoming more controlling with clients? Are you offering options and seeking informed consent or infantilizing clients and taking away their agency?
2. Are you still giving grace and flexibility (to clients, yourself, and your team)? When was the last time someone didn't do something exactly how you would've done it, and how did you respond? Were you curious or did you want to punish?
3. Are you maintaining and modeling healthy boundaries, or are you crossing boundaries because you feel like you have to “save” a client? Does it feel like you are the only one who can help? Are you making clients dependent on you? Or are you pointing out to clients the skills and knowledge they possess and connecting them with networks of care?



Appendix: Resources for Advocates

Trauma Responses Showing Up in Your Advocacy? Check-In Worksheet

4. Does everything feel like a threat or dangerous? How is that showing up in assessing risk with clients? Are you finding yourself wanting to meet every moment and task with urgency? Are you demanding that urgency of others? Are you using and modeling discernment?
5. Are you finding yourself feeling hostile towards system partners, your team, or leadership? When did this start? Is it based on information or a surge of energy in your body?
6. Are you breaking down in front of clients or seeking support from them? Or avoiding certain clients, cases or topics? Are there spaces in your life where you can be the person being cared for?
7. Do you find yourself feeling hopeless about your ability to offer support or ability to stay in this job? When did that start changing? What parts of the job feel like “too much”? What is evidence of your effectiveness or abilities from the past? Or can you ask someone to help you remind you of those?
8. Are there any patterns or insights that you’re noticing after thinking about these questions and reflecting on your recent work, performance, and attitudes about your work? Pay attention to any sudden, exaggerated changes in beliefs or habits.

These questions are also meant to help you practice observing, noticing, and being curious about how you’re showing up in your work. Observing, noticing and being curious are tools to help us gather information and respond more intentionally. Shame and fear of punishment can shut down self-reflection.

Please use this as a tool to help foster awareness around trauma responses and how trauma responses can unintentionally be showing up in your performance, attitude, and advocacy. If your advocacy seems to be more rigid, controlling, or you’re finding yourself feeling hopeless, it may indicate you need more tools, support, or training to support you and your advocacy work.

Appendix: Resources for Advocates

Advocate Checklist For Healthy Boundaries

-  Am I staying within my professional responsibilities and not taking on tasks outside my scope (e.g., therapist, savior, or attorney)?
-  Am I setting clear work hours, response times, and breaks to prevent burnout? Am I respecting others' time away from work and response times?
-  Am I noticing my own feelings and avoiding over-identification with the survivor's trauma? Do I have people outside of work for support as needed?
-  Am I practicing self care that works for me? Do I engage in self-reflection to better understand my emotional activators and personal biases?
-  Am I using safe, appropriate methods for contact and clearly communicating expectations for calls, texts, or emails?
-  Am I protecting survivor information and only sharing it when necessary and ethical? Do I know what the limits are with information sharing?
-  Am I practicing community care with my team - maintaining professional relationships with co-workers, sharing responsibilities, and seeking support without over-relying on them for emotional support and/or processing?

Opportunities for Self-Reflection

Identity & Role:

- Where does my advocate role end and my personal identity begin?

Power & Responsibility:

- Am I holding responsibility that actually belongs to the survivor?

Emotional Boundaries:

- What emotions do I have the hardest time "leaving at work?" Why those?

Boundary Slippage:

- What are my earliest signs that my boundaries are eroding?

Communication:

- What makes it hard for me to communicate a boundary clearly?

Values & Alignment:

- When I cross my own boundaries, which value(s) am I compromising?

Vicarious Impact:

- How is this work shaping my worldview about people, relationships, safety, or trust?

Structural Boundaries:

- Where am I making exceptions or compensating for systemic gaps?

Growth & Repair:

- When I cross a boundary, how do I repair with myself and the survivor?

This material has been adapted from a variety of sources and is designed for use by DV/SV Advocates.

Appendix: Resources for Advocates

Books and Podcasts

- ***Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others* by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky with Connie Burk:**
<https://traumastewardship.com/trauma-stewardship-book/>
- ***My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies* by Resmaa Menakem:** <https://resmaa.com/merch/>
- ***Tending Grief: Embodied Rituals for Holding Our Sorrow and Growing Cultures of Care in Community* by Camille Sapara Barton**
<https://camillesaparabarton.com/tending-grief-book/>
- ***Decolonizing Trauma Work* by Renee Linklater**
Buy from local Indigenous book store: <https://birchbarkbooks.com/>
- **Finding Our Way podcast hosted by Prentis Hemphill**
<https://www.findingourwaypodcast.com/>
- **Becoming the People podcast hosted by Prentis Hemphill**
<https://prentishemphill.com/>
- **Share the Load Podcast from Consent Wizardry (Mia Scfhachter)**
<https://consentwizardry.com/share-the-load-podcast>
- **Resilience and Resistance podcast with Marisol Solarte-Erlacher**
<https://www.marisolerlacher.com/podcast>
- **She is Your Neighbor (Produced by Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region)**
<https://www.sheisyourneighbour.com/>



Appendix: Resources for Advocates

Working with Criminalized Victims



- **Considerations When Safety Planning with Criminalized Survivors:**
<https://lms.thelearningcommunitytoendviolence.org/resources/considerations-when-safety-planning-criminalized-survivors>
- **Debunking Misconceptions About Working with Criminalized Survivors:**
<https://lms.thelearningcommunitytoendviolence.org/resources/debunking-misconceptions-about-working-criminalized-survivors>
- **Working With Survivors in Jail: A Manual for Community-Based Advocates:** https://bwjp.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Working_With_Survivors_in_Jail_-_Condensed_Version-1.pdf
- **Tipsheet: Working with Survivors on Probation and Parole:**
https://bwjp.org/site-resources/tipsheet-working-with-survivors-on-probation-and-parole/?section_slug=criminalized-survivors
- **A Criminalized Survivor's First Court Date:** https://bwjp.org/site-resources/a-criminalized-survivors-first-court-date/?section_slug=criminalized-survivors
- **Understanding the Needs of Criminalized Survivors:**
https://www.innovatingjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Monograph_Overview_11192020.pdf

Wife, Mother, Warrior
Military Wife Blog

Appendix: "In the Blink of an Eye" Blog Post by Heather

In the Blink of an Eye

December 10, 2025

Context for this blog post can be found on page 37.



In memory of Melissa Hunt



In the Blink of an Eye

Trigger Warning: This post contains content related to domestic violence, grief, and trauma. Reader discretion is advised.

There are moments that split life into before and after. For us, that moment came in June. One phone call. One act of violence. And in the blink of an eye, our family grew by two, grief hit hard, and our world was forever changed.

The Moment Everything Changed

My husband's sister was murdered — a sentence that still feels foreign in my mouth, as if saying it out loud might make it more real. And with that loss came two terrified girls who needed safety, stability, and someone to step in. In the span of a week, we went from preparing for a normal summer to rearranging bedrooms, enrolling in therapies, navigating court dates, and trying to hold space for nine grieving children.

There is no training for this. Not for military families, not for therapists, not for mothers. Not for anyone.

The Collision: Therapist and Human

I sit with clients in their trauma every day. I know the language, the grounding tools, the clinical explanations of why the body does what it does. But it's different when you're no longer the helper on the outside — when the trauma is inside your own home, reshaping every room, every routine, every conversation.

I would log into telehealth sessions, nodding gently at someone else's pain, while feeling my own pulse hammering in my throat. Holding space for others

while barely holding myself together.

There is no textbook for navigating your grief while shepherding nine children through theirs. No seminar on blending families forged by tragedy. No manual for guiding a child with autism through a new home, new rules, new expectations, and the loss of the only world they knew.

Yet somehow, I kept showing up — for my clients, for my kids, for the two girls who were suddenly ours.

The Girls: A Soft Landing After a Hard Life

Our oldest niece, Ryleigh, had been parenting her little sister for years — stepping into roles no teenager should ever have to shoulder while her mother was building a life for them. Their home life was tense, crowded, and full of conflict, not because there wasn't love from their mother, but because there wasn't enough support for their little family of 3 in day-to-day life. Missy loved her girls — Ry still talks about her with a tenderness that stops me in my tracks — but love doesn't erase other people's chaos, or exhaustion, or the weight of doing so much with too little help.

Huxlynn, her 5-year-old sister, autistic and navigating a lot of change, had learned to cope the ways that worked for her at home. Screens offered calm. Calm offered safety. Safety helped her feel a bit more in control in a household that was often unpredictable.

When they came to us, we weren't trying to erase or undo their life — we were trying to offer something tangible and emotionally safe during one of the hardest life events they may ever experience: co-regulation, consistency, connection. Moving from a world where quiet and screens were a tool to manage stress into a family built on interaction and engagement was overwhelming at times. Different, not wrong. And challenging for all of us.

Huxlynn didn't hold back her feelings. She screamed, she cried, she flailed, she tested the boundaries of her new world. And slowly, gently, we began building a bridge to her — one breath, one routine, one moment of connection at a time.

Continued on next page



Our Kids: The Hidden Army

People keep telling me how “amazing” we are for taking the girls in. But truthfully? My kids are the real backbone of this story.

My 18-year-old, preparing to leave for his first year of college, opened up his room so his younger brother would have a place to land. He became our in-house Uber driver, the runner for last-minute errands, the steady presence who

quietly filled gaps without being asked. Between packing for school and managing his own emotions, he still made space for his cousins in ways that spoke louder than any words.

My 17-year-old absorbed the rest — stepping into leadership roles the moment our family changed and then again when her brother left. She became the organizer, the helper, the person I leaned on when everything felt too heavy. She has amazing intuition and just ‘knew’ what was needed and when. She picked up responsibilities no teenager asks for but handled them with a maturity beyond her years.

And because life works like dominoes, my 15-year-old stepped into the “backup babysitter” position — helping with our littles and her two new cousins anytime schedules collided. She balanced school, her ADHD brain, and shifting routines while still trying to be a normal teenager.

My 14-year-old lost his personal space overnight, moving from having his own room to sharing with his 18-year-old brother. No resentment. No pushback. Just a quiet acceptance that sometimes family means shifting, even when it’s uncomfortable.

My 10-year-old, stuck between little kid and big kid, had to figure out where she belonged in a family that suddenly doubled in complexity. She found herself trying to be helpful, to be seen, to stay grounded in a home buzzing with grief and transition.

Our 5- and 3-year-old boys had to learn to share their room, their toys, and their routines with another young child who was dysregulated, grieving, and overwhelmed. They had to soften, stretch, and adjust in ways even they couldn’t fully understand.

Every one of them had to grow in ways they never prepared for. Every one of them rose to the challenge.

Marriage in the Aftermath

Continued on next page



And somewhere inside all this, there was “us.” Two adults trying to hold a collapsing world together.

Grief does strange things to people. Trauma stretches marriages thin. Old wounds resurface. New cracks form. And while we navigated court hearings, therapy intakes, bedtime routines, and trauma responses... we were also trying to navigate each other.

There’s no gentle way to say: the emotional distance created during long military orders a few years ago, didn’t magically disappear when everything fell apart. We were already carrying unresolved hurt — the kind that builds

quietly over time. The kind that comes from living parallel lives, both married and lonely. And now we were supposed to heal individually, heal together, and heal a house full of wounded children... all at once.

It has been humbling. Messy. Hard. But we are trying. Every day, we choose to try.

What I've Learned

I've learned that families don't break only when something big happens — sometimes they break in quiet, ordinary moments... and they heal the same way.

I've learned that grief doesn't move in a straight line. Neither does bonding. Neither does trust.

I've learned that love is not just a feeling — it is a series of exhausting, intentional choices.

I've learned that children are resilient in ways adults forget how to be.

I've learned that healing is slow and nonlinear, but possible.

I've learned that “strength” sometimes looks like shutting yourself in the bathroom to cry for five minutes before making dinner.

And I've learned that even when life changes in the most violent, unexpected ways... we can grow something good from the rubble.

We didn't choose the circumstances that brought the girls to us, and they certainly didn't choose them either. But we did choose this: to show up, to open our door, and to build something out of the pieces left behind.

We're still learning, still stumbling, still figuring out who we are as a family of eleven. But every time I hear all nine kids laughing in the kitchen, or see Ry relax her shoulders like she finally feels safe, or watch our littles learn how to make space for someone new — I'm reminded that growth doesn't begin in comfort. It begins in the upheaval.

In the chaos, in the grief, in the adjustments — we are becoming something steady, something strong... maybe even something beautiful.

Until next time....

~Heather~



Thank You!

Our team at Violence Free Minnesota is profoundly grateful for the work you do every day. In times of uncertainty, fear, and chaos, and through the ongoing grief and heaviness of working against systems of oppression, you show up, day after day after day, to strive towards ending relationship abuse in Minnesota.

You work tirelessly to ensure that survivors are seen and believed. You make sure survivors know that they matter. You make sure their stories and voices are heard. You are creative, compassionate, and deeply valued.

We appreciate you so much. Every day you build a better world. **We see you, and we see your impact.**

Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts.

Blank Space:

**Feel free to add notes or your own programs'
policies, protocols, and resources here!**

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THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

If you are experiencing abuse, contact
Day One at 1.866.223.1111 (phone call) or
612.399.9995 (text) to connect with services.

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