



NEW YORK STATE
OFFICE *for the* PREVENTION *of* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Covering Domestic Violence: Tips for the Media

The table below contains information to assist the media in reporting on domestic violence in New York State.

Statistics

Domestic violence statistics are available. There are many sources for NYS-specific, as well as national, data regarding the prevalence of domestic violence, as well as the resource available to combat it. The links below will connect you to up-to-date domestic violence statistics. In addition, many domestic violence programs keep local statistics, so [contact the program](#) in your area to see if they have statistics for your community.

- OPDV statistics page: <http://www.opdv.ny.gov/statistics/index.html>
- NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS):
 - Reports on domestic violence and violence against women:
<http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/pubs.htm>
 - Domestic violence victim data by county:
<http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/domesticviolence/index.htm>
- NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Domestic Violence Prevention Act Annual Report (describes the domestic violence services provided in New York State):
http://www.ocfs.ny.gov/main/reports/2008_domestic_violence_report.pdf
- U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics (national data):
<http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=315>

Language

The language you use is important. Media helps shape public opinion. Your reporting contributes to your readers' understanding of what domestic violence is, who it affects, and how a community responds to the issue. When reporting on domestic violence cases, avoid language that:

- trivializes (*lovers' quarrel, hubby, gal pal*);
- sensationalizes (*jealous rage, love triangle, love gone wrong*);
- implies the violence was mutual if it wasn't (i.e., *domestic dispute turned violent*);
- attributes the violence to some outside circumstance (i.e., *he had been drinking a lot before the attack or he was upset over their recent break-up*) – correlations can be appropriate, but avoid implications of causation;
- blames the victim (i.e., *If she had left, she would still be alive*);
- is not clear regarding the context of the violence. Use the phrase "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence" in your reporting.

If you include quotes in your story (i.e., from family, friends, or neighbors) that contain problematic language, also include quotes from a domestic violence expert to help dispel popular myths and misconceptions about domestic violence.

For more information on the use of language, see (link to the OPDV Media Project page)



NEW YORK STATE OFFICE *for the* PREVENTION *of* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Covering Domestic Violence: Tips for the Media

Sources

Who you use as sources is important. Reporters often use police as primary sources in domestic violence stories. Neighbors, friends, and family members are often used as well. Domestic violence advocates, however, are *not* often used as sources despite the fact that they can offer important insight into domestic violence stories.

- Police as sources:
 - Follow up with them as the case progresses to be sure you are getting up-to-date information.
 - Police are limited in what they can say and usually can only speak about the incident at hand, not any previous abuse.
- Neighbors, friends, and family members as sources:
 - They are often biased due to their relationship with the victim or offender.
 - Despite their biases, their statements about the couple or the relationship between the victim and offender are often presented as fact. While they can provide their opinions regarding history and context, as with any opinions, they should not be presented as fact.
- Domestic violence advocates as sources:
 - Can provide information about services available in your area.
 - Can help explain dynamics that might seem inexplicable to others (i.e., why an abuser is friendly to neighbors but abuses his intimate partner).
 - Can help you put the case you are reporting on into context.
 - To find the domestic violence program(s) in your area, go to the NYS Coalition Against Domestic Violence on-line directory of domestic violence programs by county:
<http://nyscadv.org/directory.htm>.

Context

Putting domestic violence into context is important. A common complaint about domestic violence reporting is that the story focuses only on the incident at hand and does not explain things in the larger framework of domestic violence. Remember, what you are reporting is likely not the first abusive incident in the relationship. Domestic violence is an on-going pattern of behaviors meant to manipulate and control the victim.

A great way to put domestic violence into context is to speak with the experts. Call your [local domestic violence program](#), [OPDV](#), [the NYS Coalition Against Domestic Violence \(NYSCADV\)](#), or another domestic violence organization for help relating your story to the overall issue of domestic violence.

Victims

When you report about domestic violence, your stories are being heard, read, or seen by individuals who are currently living with abuse. Domestic violence victims are part of your audience. Your reporting could have an impact on their decisions. For that reason, be sure to include either the NYS Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline or the [local domestic violence program hotline](#) in your story whenever possible.

Be mindful of how you phrase your questions when speaking with a victim. If you are interviewing a victim or survivor of domestic violence, avoid questions that might imply blame. For example:

- **Ask:** “Why did you find it difficult to escape from the abuse?”
- **Don’t Ask:** “Why didn’t you leave?”

NYS Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline: 1-800-942-6906
Spanish language: 1-800-942-6908
In NYC: 1-800-621-HOPE (4673) or dial 311, TTY: 1-800-604-5350