



Tips for Media Professionals Reporting on Intimate Partner Violence

Originally developed by Kristen Barta for use by the Center for Relationship Abuse Awareness

Tip 1. Name it

- Situating an incident in the context of intimate partner violence (IPV) is crucial in illustrating such violence as a social problem and not a private problem.
 - Refer to an IPV-related homicide as an act of IPV
 - Ex. “In an act of domestic violence, John Smith killed his wife”

Tip 2. Include contextual details

- Provide information such as statistics on the incidence of intimate partner violence (on a local, state, or national level) to situate a single incident in a broader social context of violence.
 - Ex. Local: “the incident marks the fifth domestic violence call Palo Alto police have responded to this month.”
 - Ex. State: “In 2008, there were 113 domestic violence homicides in California, according to the California Department of Justice’s Criminal Justice Statistics Center.”
 - Ex. National: “According to the U.S. Department of Justice, one in four women will experience domestic violence or rape perpetrated by an intimate partner.” ([CPEDV](#))

Tip 3. Include [resources](#)

- Promote awareness of the issue as well as options for those needing assistance
- Provide the number of a local hotline or shelter in the article or sidebar for those who need assistance
- Provide the number of a local hotline or shelter in the article or sidebar for those who want to help a friend
- Provide a link to a violence prevention agency in the article or sidebar for those who want to learn more
- Create and maintain a list of resources that can be accessed in the newsroom or on newsroom servers
- Create and maintain a resource list for use by staff members with phone numbers and media contacts at local anti-violence agencies

Tip 4. Avoid [victim blaming](#) statements and frames

- Avoid using passive voice to describe violence
 - Ex. Instead of “the victim was attacked by her husband,” write “the victim’s husband attacked her”
- Exercise discretion in using terms such as “allegedly”
 - Law enforcement and legal representatives rely on “allegedly” as a means of preserving impartiality; however, the term is overused in the media and often unnecessarily obfuscates the reality of an incidence of violence.

- Ex. Instead of “the victim was allegedly attacked by her husband,” write “the victim told police she was attacked by her husband”
- Leave superfluous descriptions of the victim(s) and their behaviors out of the story
 - Descriptions of a victim’s appearance or sexual history are often included in sexual assault stories. Commenting that a victim was “wearing a short skirt” or “seen dancing provocatively with the accused” blames the victim for the perpetrator’s actions and does not advance the story.

Tip 5. Challenge stereotypes

- Abuse is a choice. It is not the result of someone “snapping,” nor is it a “crime of passion.” Avoid language that portrays the perpetrator as a typical, “nice guy” who snapped, or the victim and perpetrator as a “normal couple” as this removes accountability from the perpetrator and removes the incident of IPV from the greater context of abuse as a pattern of behavior.
 - Become familiar with and avoid stereotypes that portray the victim as “asking for it” or deserving of abuse and that portray the perpetrator as a “monster” or mentally ill
- Do not use quotes that perpetuate stereotypes
 - Ex. If quoting a neighbor or friend as saying “he seemed like a normal guy” is unavoidable, balance it with a quote from another source or explanation

Tip 6. Anticipate and respond to questions in coverage – such as “Why didn’t she leave?”

- Recognize and explain that asking, “Why didn’t she leave?” places responsibility on the victim when really the perpetrator should be held accountable for abuse. Explain that it often takes victims multiple attempts to leave an abuser.
- Become familiar with [barriers to leaving abusive relationships](#). These include:
 - Fear of retaliation
 - Lack of housing, child care, employment opportunities, support from friends/family, or legal resources
 - Immigration status
 - Pressure from family or the community
 - Ex. Pressure “to keep the family together”

Tip 7. Ask different questions

- Approach IPV as you would any other crime when consulting law enforcement sources. Consider the following:
 - Did the perpetrator have a history of abusive behavior?
 - What is the cost to the community of abuse? (Analogous to asking about damages)
 - How frequently does abuse occur in the community?

Tip 8. Include a range of sources

- Seek sources beyond law enforcement and neighbors
 - Advocates are legitimate sources that can supplement and balance comments from law enforcement and criminal justice sources

- If a quote or statement is confusing or unclear, ask an expert to clarify

Tip 9. Report consequences of violence

- Follow up on the victim and perpetrator
 - If the perpetrator is arrested, what charges or sentence do they face?
 - If a case does not move to trial, explain why

Tip 10. Do not make assumptions based on class, race, culture, orientation or religion

- Violence can affect anyone regardless of background
 - Do not assume that some cultures or classes are more violent than others
 - Do not assume that there is a “cultural” explanation for violence, such as preventing disgrace by killing an adulterous partner
- However, there may be culture-related barriers to leaving
 - Ex. In a same-sex relationship, the victim may fear being “outed” to his/her family or community
 - Ex. An [immigrant victim](#) may fear “disgracing” the family or be threatened by the perpetrator with deportation

Tip 11. Become educated on the nature and incidence of IPV

- Develop an understanding of:
 - [The spectrum of abusive behavior](#)
 - [Warning signs of abuse](#)
 - [Myths of abuse and stereotypes](#)
 - [Resources for victims](#)
 - [How to help someone who is being abused](#)

Tip 12. Collaborate with other editors/reporters

- Exchange comments on coverage—how could a story be rewritten to exclude a stereotype, for example?
- Create a listserv for crime reporters and share resources, statistics, suggestions, etc.

Sources

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