

Media Guide

For Journalists Reporting on Relationship Violence



Relationship violence can be a difficult issue to investigate and report on. We created this media guide to assist journalists in covering stories involving relationship violence in a more expansive, engaged, and empowering lens. We do this by helping media professionals develop a deeper understanding of relationship violence, connecting journalists to community-based domestic violence advocacy programs that can be used as sources to improve coverage, and discussing ways to best engage people experiencing relationship abuse in telling their stories.

This guide was created by Stand Up Colorado™ and the Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV).



ABOUT STAND UP COLORADO

Stand Up Colorado is a statewide, collaborative, multi-year relationship violence prevention campaign that goes beyond public awareness to alter behavior and effect long-term social change. The Movement will prevent future relationship violence by shaping an informed, zero-tolerance public attitude that inspires individual and community action. Stand Up Colorado is a project of CCADV, in partnership with the Denver City Attorney's Office and the Colorado Attorney General's Office. www.StandUpColorado.org



ABOUT CCADV

CCADV is a nonprofit membership organization that works with a diverse network of domestic violence and other community-based programs across Colorado to help them effectively assist survivors of relationship violence. CCADV improves individual and community health and well-being through statewide visionary advocacy and social change efforts, supporting our members, and informing the public. www.ccadv.org

Media Guide

For Journalists Reporting on Relationship Violence



WHAT IS RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE?

Relationship violence—also known as domestic violence—is a pattern of behaviors used to coerce, intimidate, threaten, manipulate, and/or maintain power and control over a current or former intimate or dating partner. These are behaviors that physically harm, arouse fear, prevent someone from doing what they wish, or force them to behave in ways they do not want. Relationship violence can include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and/or financial abuse. It is pervasive, often life-threatening, and affects thousands of individuals throughout Colorado regardless of race, culture, age, sexual orientation, economic status, religion, education, marital status, or gender.

The criminal definition is narrower; therefore, not all acts of relationship violence are criminal, based on Colorado law. Our current response to relationship violence is primarily one of intervention, with overreliance on the criminal legal system to address violence after it has occurred. However, most relationship violence goes unreported to police, and people experiencing relationship violence instead may choose to disclose to friends, family, doctors, or other community supports, including community-based domestic violence organizations. People experiencing relationship violence are the experts on their situation, and they know when and to whom it is safe to tell.

THE PROBLEM



1 in 7

people in Colorado experience relationship violence.¹

48

people in Colorado died as a result of relationship violence in 2016.²

18,501

cases of physical violence, sexual assault, intimidation, kidnapping, robbery, and/or death by a partner were reported in Colorado in 2016.⁴



only 40%

of relationship violence incidents are reported in Colorado.⁵



Between **20% and 50%** of women experiencing homelessness cite relationship violence (RV) as the primary cause of their homelessness.³



Between **36% and 53%** of people using abusive behaviors concurrently target partners and pets.⁶

CRIMINAL LAWS IN COLORADO

Colorado Revised Statute **§18-6-800.3** defines “domestic violence” as “an act or threatened act of violence upon a person with whom the actor is or has been involved in an intimate relationship. “Domestic violence” also includes any other crime against a person, or against property, including an animal, or any municipal ordinance violation against a person, or against property, including an animal, when used as a method of coercion, control, punishment, intimidation, or revenge directed against a person with whom the actor is or has been involved in an intimate relationship.”

The Statute defines “intimate relationship” as “a relationship between spouses, former spouses, past or present unmarried couples, or persons who are both the parents of the same child regardless of whether the persons have been married or have lived together at any time.”

For a more complete inventory of current Colorado laws on relationship violence, visit: http://womenslaw.org/statutes_root.php?state_code=CO.

TERMINOLOGY

People-first language is empowering. It's best to avoid labels whenever possible, although this does not always fit within the tenets of journalistic writing for brevity due to word count limitations.

- › Rather than “victim” or “survivor,” we prefer “person experiencing relationship violence.”
- › Rather than “perpetrator,” “abuser,” or “offender,” we prefer “person using abusive behaviors.”

Non-gendered language is inclusive.

- › Relationship violence affects people from all sexes, gender identities, and sexual orientations.
 - Try to avoid generalizing people experiencing relationship violence through the use of female pronouns, as this reinforces stereotypes about the issue and who it affects.

HOW TO ENHANCE UNDERSTANDING THROUGH REPORTING

By accurately covering relationship violence, journalists and news outlets have the opportunity to make a significant difference in helping the community understand how relationship violence can go unchecked and unrecognized as a problem until it escalates to an extreme, and often tragic, level.

DOs:

Abuse is a Choice

- › Remember that relationship violence is a choice made by the person who is using abusive behaviors, and not the fault of the person experiencing the abuse. It is not the result of someone “snapping,” nor is it a “crime of passion.”
 - Using these stereotypes removes accountability from the person using abusive behavior and removes the incident of violence from the greater context of a pattern of abuse.

Diversify Sources

- › Seek sources beyond law enforcement and neighbors/friends. Domestic violence advocates are legitimate sources that can supplement comments from other sources who may not understand the issue as well.
 - If you quote a neighbor saying, “He seemed like a normal guy,” balance it with a quote from an advocate: “In reality, many people convicted of domestic violence are well-respected in their communities or at work, but choose to be abusive toward their intimate partners.”

Provide Resources

- › Provide local or national resources for viewers/listeners/readers during or at the end of your coverage.
 - Colorado’s statewide Helpline for people using, experiencing, or witnessing relationship violence: 1-855-9StandUp.
 - National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE.
 - Find the crisis line number for your local domestic violence advocacy organization at <http://ccadv.org/find-help/programs-by-county/>.

DON'Ts:

- › Avoid the phrase “domestic dispute.”
 - A dispute or argument implies equal power. Relationship violence is a serious pattern of abuse used to control an individual, and people experiencing violence do not have equal power in their relationships. Using “domestic disputes” undermines the seriousness of the incident, implies equal participation of the parties, and characterizes the incident as isolated rather than a pattern of abuse.
- › Avoid passive voice.
 - Passive voice makes the person using abusive behavior invisible, and fails to make explicit that there was a person responsible for harming the person who experienced the violence.
 - ◆ Instead of “the victim was attacked by her husband,” write, “the survivor’s husband attacked her.”
- › Use discretion with the term “alleged.”
 - The word “alleged” fits within the tenet of ethical and professional journalism, but there is a time and place for its use.
 - ◆ Use “accused” to describe the alleged person using abusive behaviors.
 - Instead of “the victim was allegedly attacked by her husband,” write, “the person experiencing relationship violence told police her husband attacked her.”
- › Avoid unnecessary descriptions regarding behavior exhibited by the person experiencing relationship violence.
 - Discussing why the person experiencing violence stays with or goes back to the person abusing him/her is irrelevant information that distracts from the person using abusive behaviors and implies that the person who is experiencing the violence is somehow complicit in the abuse.



INTERVIEWING PEOPLE EXPERIENCING RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE

Survivors of relationship violence have experienced trauma, often as a part of their daily lives, for sustained periods of time. Reporting on these stories can be difficult, and your questions have the potential to re-traumatize people who have experienced abuse. But, the people experiencing the relationship violence are the experts of their stories, and when possible, it's important to let them tell their side. We've compiled some examples of experiences with survivors who have been interviewed by local media. Here is what they recommend:

Offer the option of not being identified by their full name or image.

- › Some people experiencing relationship violence do not mind identifying themselves, but others still have valid safety concerns. In some cases, they may allow you to focus the camera on their hands, or you may offer to darken their image.

Acknowledge what they have been through.

- › Something as simple as, "I'm so sorry for what you're going through/what happened."

Ask them about other things in their life.

- › They are not defined by what someone else has chosen to do to them. They are more likely to open up and give you a little more information when the entire conversation is not focused on their victimization. It makes them feel human and more whole.

Allow them to bring a support person, and let them know they can take breaks.

- › People experiencing relationship violence have been stripped of control. You can empower them in simple ways; for example, ask them if there is someone they would like to have with them or let them decide where they would like to do the interview.

**ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION FOR REPORTERS: Don't underestimate your own reactions to the details of your interviewee's story.*

- › Take time after the interview to process your reactions. You can reach out to a local domestic violence program to talk with someone about how you are feeling or contact the Stand Up Colorado Helpline at 1-855-9StandUp.

LOCAL PROGRAMS

Community-based domestic violence advocacy programs are an invaluable resource for journalists researching stories and looking for experts to interview during news coverage. They work day-to-day with survivors through their hotlines, offering free and confidential advocacy, safety planning, emergency shelter, housing, legal and medical advocacy, and other support services.

To find the program nearest you, visit CCADV's website and interactive state map: <http://ccadv.org/find-help/programs-by-county/>.

Media Guide

For Journalists Reporting on Relationship Violence



HELPLINE

The Stand Up Colorado Helpline is a statewide resource for people who think they may be using, experiencing, or witnessing relationship violence. The Helpline is staffed Thursday–Monday from 8 am–8 pm MST by qualified professionals who are available to talk with callers about what is happening and refer them to additional resources.

MEDIA CONTACTS

Amy Pohl
CCADV
Communications Director
apohl@ccadv.org
303-962-0936

Ellen Stein Wallace
Campaign Manager
Ellen@StandUpCO.org
303-437-5474

Michael Teague
Communications Coordinator
Michael@StandUpCO.org
303-962-3322

RESOURCES

- Domestic Violence: A Guide for Media Coverage from the Iowa Domestic Abuse Death Review Team.
- Reporting on Rape and Sexual Violence: A Media Toolkit for Local and National Journalists to Better Media Coverage from.
- Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls & Young Women.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (2010).
- Colorado Bureau of Investigation. Colorado Domestic Violence Report (2016). http://crimeinco.cbi.state.co.us/cic2k16/supplemental_reports/domestic.php.

SOURCES

- ¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (2010)*.
- ² Denver Domestic Violence Coordinating Council. (2017). *Denver Metro Domestic Violence Fatality Review (DMDVFR) Year in Review*.
- ³ Wilder Research Center (2004).
- ⁴ Colorado Bureau of Investigation. *Colorado Domestic Violence Report (2016)*. http://crimeinco.cbi.state.co.us/cic2k16/supplemental_reports/domestic.php
- ⁵ Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2012). *Victimizations Not Reported to the Police, 2006–2010*.
- ⁶ Ascione et al. (2007); Faver & Cavoos (2007); Volant et al. (2008).