



Family and Domestic Violence Media and Reporting Guidelines



About these guidelines

These guidelines provide information and tips to support safe and accurate reporting on family and domestic violence. The guidelines were developed by the **Office for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence** at the **Department of Communities** based on a comprehensive guide from Our Watch.

More information, including guidance for interviewing victim-survivors, can be found at media.ourwatch.org.au

What is family and domestic violence?

Family and domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviours intended to coerce, control or create fear within a family or intimate relationship. This includes physical, financial, emotional or psychological abuse, sexual violence or any other behaviour which causes the victim to live in fear.

Family and domestic violence takes many forms and occurs across all cultural groups, ages and sexual diversity groups. Some abusive behaviours can be identified easily, while others are difficult to recognise. Many adult and child victims live with perpetrators who use coercive patterns of control and may not realise that what they are experiencing is family and domestic violence.

The term family and domestic violence refers to violence and abuse against an intimate partner, including same sex relationships and ex-partners, and violence and abuse that occurs between siblings, from adolescents to parents, or from family carers to a relative. It can include the abuse of children and young people, older people, people with a disability, and other family members.



8

tips for reporting on family and domestic violence



1. Safety first

Leave out details that might identify victim-survivors. Including specific details about the victim-survivor, the perpetrator, what occurred and where, could risk the safety of victim-survivor.



2. Name it

Name the violence for what it is: 'violence against women,' 'family and domestic violence,' 'psychological violence,' 'elder abuse,' 'child exploitation material,' 'rape,' 'murder,' 'coercive control' or 'abuse.'



3. Keep the perpetrator in view and accountable

Use active language, for example, 'man assaults wife' instead of 'women assaulted,' or 'woman left relationship where man perpetrated FDV/woman left relationship where she experienced family and domestic violence' instead of 'woman left violent relationship.' Where it is safe and legally possible, name the relationship between the victim-survivor and perpetrator to remind your audience that most violence against women is perpetrated by somebody they know



4. Be respectful

Use respectful language and headlines to articulate the seriousness of the violence. Seek to uphold the dignity and humanity of the victims-survivors and their families. Plan how to maintain respect once the story is live, including by monitoring or closing comments on social media as appropriate.





5. Reflect the evidence

Use statistics to demonstrate the prevalence of family and domestic violence in the community and contextualise the story. While not all violence against women is committed by men, evidence shows that most violence against women and children is committed by men and driven by gender inequality.



6. Use appropriate imagery

Don't perpetuate harmful stereotypes about gender, race, disability, sexuality, or age. Consider the impact of images on the victim-survivor, their family and other survivors of violence. Avoid images that disempower or infantilise victim-survivors, such as clenched fists or cowering women.

Consider the appropriateness of showing photos of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have died. In respect of cultural beliefs, the reproduction of the names and images of deceased people is restricted during a period of mourning. The length of time can vary, meaning cultural liaison with the relevant community is paramount.



7. Quote experts

Develop relationships with experts in family and domestic violence and sexual violence so they can be contacted to help put issues and incidents into context.



8. Include support options

Always include details for family and domestic violence-specific support service and helplines at the end of every story to assist those concerned about violence with seeking help.



Common misconceptions

Misconception

Reality



It has to be physical to be family and domestic violence.

Coercive control is family and domestic violence. Coercive control can involve any behaviour which scares, hurts, isolates, humiliates, harasses, monitors, takes away another person's freedom and autonomy, or controls their day-to-day activities. It can include physical violence and sexual violence, but it doesn't have to.

Family and domestic violence is caused by substance abuse, stress, employment issues, poverty and failed marriage.

Family and domestic violence happens because the perpetrator chooses to use violent and/or abusive behaviours. Many people who experience these issues throughout their lives do not become perpetrators of family and domestic violence. While these issues may exacerbate violence, they do not drive or cause it.

They just snapped or violence is sparked by an argument or an event.

Research indicates that the overwhelming majority of men who murdered their partners had a history of abusing them. The history of abuse may be coercive control or other types of abuse, the history does not always have to include physical violence.





They had a difficult or violent upbringing.

The suggestion that people who perpetrate violence had traumatic childhoods, or they are repeating violence they witnessed in their own family backgrounds, cannot account for the very large number of men and women who have been exposed to family and domestic violence and are not violent in adulthood. Nor does it explain how the significant number of people who report happy and non-violent childhoods perpetrate violence in an adult relationship.

Family and domestic violence is a private matter.

Violence that occurs in the home is often still considered a private matter and less serious than violence occurring in public. Violence in the home is at least as serious and damaging – if not more so – as all other forms of violence and is often a criminal offence.

If it was that bad, why didn't she leave?

Statements such as these imply the victim is to blame. People choose to use violence and control to dominate other family members. However, they don't typically use the same tactics on friends, colleagues and bosses. Victims are not to blame because they stay. Some victim survivors do not want to leave, they just want the violence to stop. For some victim survivors, the decision not to leave the perpetrator is often a considered and strategic choice for a woman.

Family and domestic violence involves control, and because of that control, Leaving may entail a loss of income or employment, loss of accommodation, loss of friendship and support networks, shame, disruption to child's schooling and increased risk of further assaults, including death. Deciding to leave the perpetrator is a time of high risk for perpetrators to use more severe and lethal violence against women and children.



Family and domestic violence is viewed differently in some cultures.

This belief may reflect the negative stereotypes held by some people about other cultures. While discrimination can mean that women from some cultures and low-socioeconomic groups are disproportionately affected by violence, the assertion that perpetrators from these groups are inherently more violent is both inaccurate and damaging. It is difficult to know the prevalence of family and domestic violence in any community. It is also important to consider that whilst there may be a high percentage of women impacted by FDV in a specific culture, it does not mean that the FDV is being perpetrated by men from that same culture.

It may be more difficult for Aboriginal women or women from CaLD communities to leave violent partners, including a lack of social and economic resources, language barriers, racism and culturally inappropriate service responses in their area. Violence in any form, against anyone, is unacceptable.

He was a nice guy.

When reporting incidents of family and domestic violence, it's not uncommon for journalists to hear that the murderer/perpetrator was a sweet and loving husband/father and model employee. However, abusers can convey a very different picture to the outside world, appearing as 'friendly', 'neighbourly', 'hard-working' and the type of person who 'wouldn't do such a thing'. This doesn't mean that he wasn't violent, abusive and controlling behind closed doors. Perpetrators of family and domestic violence are not confined to any racial, cultural, age or socio-economic group. They are in all pockets of the community and can be found in varying social circles and professions. It is important to remember that many perpetrators purposely conduct themselves appropriately in the community and earn other people's respect to make abuse claims appear false.

Don't focus on 'good' stories and perceived accolades of men who perpetrate violence when discussing the violence they perpetrated. This serves to minimise their behaviour in the public eye and can contribute to dangerous and harmful myths about how and why family and domestic violence happens, and who is to blame for it.



Support services

When reporting on FDV, please provide the following information at the end of the story:

For FDV services or support, please visit [WA.gov.au/familydomesticviolence](https://www.wa.gov.au/familydomesticviolence)



Glossary

Below is a list of terms associated with family and domestic violence and how they are defined.

TERM	DEFINITION
Coercive control	Coercive control is when someone uses a pattern of abusive behaviours to make someone feel afraid and take away their freedom and independence. People who use coercive control use many different abusive behaviours to maintain power and control.
Child abuse	Child abuse includes any action or lack of action that causes harm or could harm a child.
Emotional abuse	Emotional abuse is behaviour that aims to cause emotional or mental harm. This can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ embarrassing the person in public▪ calling them names▪ ignoring them or pretending they aren't there▪ doing and saying things that make them feel confused.▪ always correcting what they say.
Family and domestic violence	Family and domestic violence is a pattern of behaviours intended to coerce, control and create fear within an intimate (current and former partners) or family relationships. FDV refers to a range of violent, abusive and controlling behaviours that include physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse, undermining or disrupting parenting, using or harming children to coerce or control their mother, financial abuse and social isolation.
Family and domestic violence paid leave	All employees are entitled to 10 days of paid family and domestic violence leave each year. This includes full-time, part-time and casual employees.

Glossary (continued)

TERM	DEFINITION
Family Violence Restraining Order (FVRO)	A Family Violence Restraining Order (FVRO) is a court order to help keep a person and their family safe in a domestic violence situation.
Financial abuse	Financial abuse is behaviour that impacts another persons' financial independence. It may be limiting someone's access to money and/or making them account for their spending. It might be someone using a person's money in ways they are not comfortable with, or haven't consented to. Financial abuse can also be pressuring someone to sell their own assets (such as their car, or their property), as a way to take away their independence. Financial abuse can also include stopping someone from getting a job or forcing them to get loans they don't want.
Gaslighting	<p>Gaslighting happens over time and can look different each time it happens. Gaslighting causes the victim to question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality, or memories. This can lead to confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem, and uncertainty of one's mental stability. A common result of gaslighting is a dependency on the perpetrator.</p> <p>Gaslighting is a strategy that is intended to break down the trust someone has in their memory, instincts and self-esteem.</p> <p>It is where the abuser makes the victim doubt their own truth, experience and sanity, by insisting that they are always right, and instils their narrative of a situation, even if the evidence points against this. Gaslighting in essence, is based on lies and manipulation of the truth.</p>
Gender inequality	Gender inequality is when one gender or sex is consistently favoured or given priority over another. They may receive more opportunities, or have more control, power and rights.

Glossary (continued)

TERM	DEFINITION
Honour-based violence	<p>Honour-based violence involves a pre-meditated act designed to restore a societal construction of honour due to norm or tradition. It's formed and bound within the collective framework of a family structure; and involves men's putative right to control women's sexual and social choices.</p> <p>Honour-based abuse can take many forms, including child marriage, virginity testing, enforced abortion, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, as well as physical, sexual and economic abuse and coercive control.</p> <p>Honour-based abuse is a crime or incident committed to protect or defend the 'honour' of a family or community.</p> <p>If a person's family or community think they've shamed or embarrassed them by behaving in a certain way, they may punish them for breaking their 'honour' code.</p>
Intimidation	Using words, actions or threats to make someone afraid.
Lived experience	<p>This describes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ people who have experienced family and domestic violence▪ people with an experience of using the family and domestic violence system▪ the families, carers and other people impacted by family and domestic violence.
Love bombing	Beginning the relationship by flattering, showing lots of attention, making big promises or telling the victim they love them very early.
Monitoring	When someone monitors a person's behaviour, where they are, who they are interacting with and talking to.

Glossary (continued)

TERM	DEFINITION
Perpetrator	Refers to a person who commits an illegal, criminal or harmful act, including domestic, family or sexual violence.
Physical violence	Physical violence is any violent behaviour or threats of violence. It can be directed at a person, their children, other family, friends, pets, or property.
Respectful relationships	A respectful relationship is built on trusting one another, feeling safe, and being equal partners.
Sexual violence	<p>Sexual violence is about power and control, and it can happen to anybody. It involves any type of sexual contact, activity, act, or behaviour that is committed against a persons' will, and without consent.</p> <p>If a person has been coerced, forced or pressured to participate, this is not consent.</p>
Social isolation (or social violence)	Social isolation or social violence is keeping someone away from friends, family, work and/or other social opportunities.
Spiritual abuse	Spiritual abuse is impacting someone's choice, about their own spiritual connections and practices. It might be keeping someone away from places of worship or forcing them to participate in spiritual or religious practice that they do not want to be involved with.
Technology-facilitated abuse	Technology facilitated abuse includes using text, email or phone to abuse, monitor, humiliate or punish. It also occurs when an abuser uses technology to track or monitor someone's movements and messages or emails. Abusers may also threaten or distribute private or sexual photos or videos.
Tracking	When someone tracks another person's movements without their knowledge or consent.

Glossary (continued)

TERM	DEFINITION
Victim-survivor	People who have experienced family, domestic and sexual violence. This term is understood to acknowledge the strength and resilience shown by people who have experienced or are currently living with violence. People who have experienced violence have different preferences about how they would like to be identified and may choose to use victim or survivor separately, or another term altogether. Some people prefer to use 'people who experience, or are at risk of experiencing, violence.'
Visa abuse	Using a person's visa status to control them and threatening them with deportation.

[WA.gov.au/familydomesticviolence](https://www.wa.gov.au/familydomesticviolence)