

MORE THAN JUST A PIECE OF PAPER:

A TOOLKIT FOR ADVOCATES

ON FIREARMS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING COVID-19

January 2021



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National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms

About Us

The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms (NRCDVF), a project of BWJP, aims to prevent domestic violence-related firearm homicides. Expert consultation and resources provide the road map for communities to improve implementation of firearm prohibitions at preventdvgunviolence.org

For more information about NRCDVF or this document, please contact:

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National Domestic Violence Hotline
National Network to End Domestic Violence
National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives
Office of Violence Prevention, City of Minneapolis
Ortner Center on Violence and Abuse, University of Pennsylvania
The Honorable Victor Reyes, (Ret)
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INTRODUCTION

In context

The spike in gun sales during the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly concerned us at the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms (NRCDVF). Social isolation, stress and anxiety has surged during the pandemic. Many families are experiencing underemployment or unemployment, worries about homelessness and other environmental stressors. Add to this the alarming spike in gun sales—including among first-time gun buyers—and the risk of intimate partner homicide increases significantly.

The NRCDVF spent the better part of 2020 conducting interviews, holding focus groups, and working with communications professionals to develop new strategies for engaging people on intimate partner violence and firearms. The results show: 1) there are solutions; and 2) we must believe we can solve this problem.

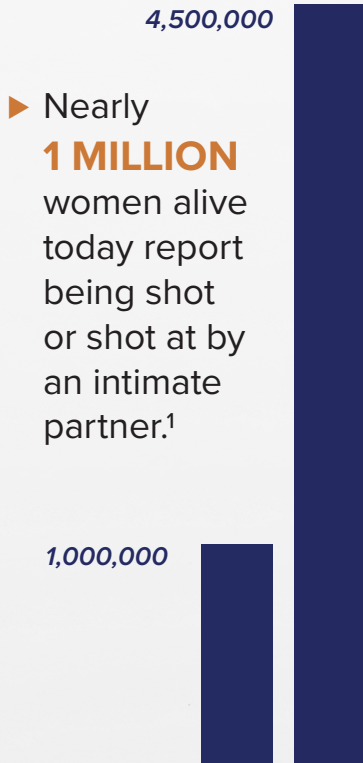
The first step is to challenge the cynicism that the protections that do exist for survivors of intimate partner violence (legal and otherwise) are not real protections. ***A domestic violence protection order is not just a piece of paper.*** It is a legal order which represents a network dedicated to protecting that survivor from further acts of violence. As advocates and practitioners, we must understand how to give life and power to these protections, that protections are easy to implement, and that they actually save lives.

We developed this toolkit for you because advocates have always been a bridge between victims/survivors and the criminal and civil justice systems. Advocates have worked for decades to inform and institute changes in system responses to improve outcomes and foster safety for victims/survivors. There is still much to do. Our hope is that this toolkit gives you the information and resources needed so that the sentence: ***“It is just a piece of paper”*** is never spoken out loud again.

FACTSHEET

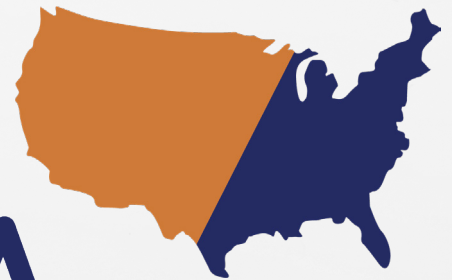
Domestic Violence-related and Firearms Prohibitions

It is against the law for domestic abusers to have firearms if they have a domestic violence protection order against them or have been convicted of domestic violence.



▶ About **4.5 MILLION** women alive today report that an intimate partner threatened them with a gun.²

▶ Firearms are used to commit **MORE THAN HALF** of all intimate partner homicides in the United States.⁴



▶ In the United States, an estimated **1.92 million guns** were purchased in **October 2020** alone.

67% INCREASE IN GUN SALES
COMPARED TO OCTOBER 2019



▶ Every year, more than **600** American women are shot to death by intimate partners—roughly **one every 14 hours**.³

¹Susan B. Sorenson and Rebecca A. Schut, “Nonfatal Gun Use in Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of the Literature,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 19, no. 4 (2018): 431–442.

²Susan B. Sorenson and Rebecca A. Schut, “Nonfatal Gun Use in Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of the Literature,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 19, no. 4 (2018): 431–442.

³Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting Program: Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR), 2014-2018.

⁴James Alan Fox and Emma E. Fridel, “Gender Differences in Patterns and Trends in US Homicide, 1976–2015,” *Violence and Gender* 4, no. 2 (2017): 37–43.

FOUR STEPS TO EFFECTIVE GUN SURRENDER

Domestic violence advocates often play a leadership role in the development of procedures for enforcing domestic violence-related firearm prohibitions in their local communities. In doing so, advocates face all manner of resistance from courts, law enforcement and other legal system practitioners who claim that there are too many hurdles to disarming domestic abusers. For this reason, it is important that advocates be able to clearly communicate the four basic steps involved in removing firearms from abusers. The information below can assist advocates in having these conversations with local decisionmakers and legal system practitioners.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY



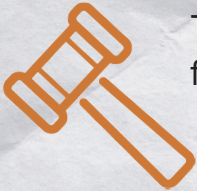
Prior to entering final order or judgment the court should identify if the person is ineligible to possess firearms.

STEP 2: ACCESS



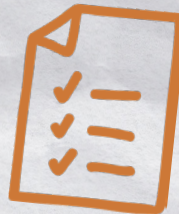
The court then determines whether or not this ineligible person actually had firearms or has access to them.

STEP 3: ORDER SURRENDER



The court orders that the firearms be surrendered.

STEP 4: COMPLIANCE



Compliance through the court is essential. The court can facilitate the entire process by scheduling a compliance hearing requiring the respondent or defendant to appear or otherwise establish that they are in compliance with the court order to surrender firearms.

Each step in the process involves more detail but help is available!

The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms offers expert consultation and resources that provide a road map for communities to improve implementation of firearm prohibitions. Visit us online at preventdvgunviolence.org.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

There are a number of ways to communicate an effective message to the media. In social justice, we often have compelling stories, visuals, commentary, and facts that could resonate with various audiences. There is much to be said about media coverage of gender-based violence, especially at the intersection with gun violence. If a situation results in death, coverage usually begins (and ends with) “murder/ suicide” or “homicide,” without exploring either gender-based violence or gun violence. An opportunity to reframe the coverage and to accurately describe the violence begins with your relationship with the media.

When talking about “media”, we mean many things. Media outlets can be “traditional” such as your local newspaper or radio station. It can also mean online platforms such as blogs and vlogs; and social media: Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, to name a few.

Opportunities for sharing your message with a broad audience exist. Much of your success depends on your ability to accomplish a couple of steps in timely and intentional ways.

- 1. PLAN** What are your key messages? Who should be the spokesperson? What type of media do you want to engage and are you ready to do so?
- 2. DEVELOP** a compelling message and communicate it effectively. Is the message easily understood by constituents outside of your organization or your sphere of influence? One easy way to examine this is to think of people you know who don’t understand your issue. Does your message resonate with them? Simple and concise language is critical to a compelling message and should not include acronyms or professional jargon.
- 3. FOLLOW-UP** and develop an ongoing relationship. Once you make a connection with a reporter, make sure to maintain it. Offer yourself as a resource. Call them back. Be honest—it is OK not to know everything and have all the answers. Make the relationship easy by being professional, accessible, informed and thoughtful.

There are essential tools to receive media attention for your efforts. Some of these tools include:

1. PRESS KIT. This can be very simple or comprehensive depending on your funding and timelessness of the news that you are influencing. You can have a press kit for your organization that is always ready to go when you are called for those timeless, common questions such as, “What causes domestic violence?” You can also have specific kits developed that are written based on your key communication messages (programs, issues, etc.) for the organization. At a minimum, the kit should contain:

- a. An organizational description—who you are, what you do, why it matters
- b. Brochures, fact sheets, Frequently Asked Questions
- c. Varied quotes from organizational leadership, participants, community leaders, and other critical constituency groups.

The kit should be simple, accurate and compelling and, again: avoid jargon and acronyms from your field.

The following pages give examples of a letter to the editor. Remember to follow the format and be concise. With the media, less is better.

Letter to the Editor: Sample Template

Editor Name

Address

Date

Dear Editor:

Paragraph 1: Summarize your issue. If relevant, recall a timely event or issue.

Paragraph 2: Why are you speaking up about this topic? Use data and explain why it is important to the readership/listenership of the media outlet.

Paragraph 3: Simple call to action.

Paragraph 4: Recap critical information

Sincerely,

Your Name, Title

Organization (if applicable)

Email

Cell Phone

Notes: Please see the next page for a sample letter to the editor. The scenario here is that there has been a recent domestic violence homicide in your small town and people want to do something about it. You have the school superintendent on your board of directors, and she wants to write a letter to the editor.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Editor Daryl Jenkins
1234 Willow Drive, Suite 102
Happytown, MD

December 5, 2020

Dear Editor:

This week, I was reminded—yet again—of the devastation domestic violence brings to our families and community. Something has to change! Next Tuesday at 7 pm, our community is going to meet at the park for a march and vigil for the victims of the recent shooting.

As a superintendent, I have seen how gun violence influences our daily operations. We plan and prepare, inform students and their families, and hope that our community is not the next one to face tragedy. Until I joined the board of directors of TurningPoint Shelter however, I had no idea that gun violence is intimately tied to domestic violence. In fact, the presence of a firearm makes a domestic violence situation 5 times more likely to be lethal.¹ There are federal and state laws that take firearms out of the hands of people who are convicted of domestic violence or have a protection order against them. Unfortunately, these laws are often not enforced. Last weekend, our community experienced this with one of our families. Monica, and her daughter Maya and son Daniel were killed as they were fleeing to a hotel after yet another incident of domestic violence in their home. Maya and Daniel were in 6th and 4th grade here and Monica was a teacher in our district. I have asked myself every day since this happened, “Why didn’t you know?” and “Were you just not looking hard enough?” I will never have an answer to these questions, but today, I know something must change.

Please join me and TurningPoint Shelter next Tuesday evening to mourn the deaths in this family and to join together to say NO MORE to domestic violence.

It is unacceptable to have guns in the hands of people who abuse their family. Monica, Maya and Daniel had their lives taken too soon. Let us show up now so there are no more victims of such senseless violence.

Sincerely,

Alesha Williams, Superintendent
Happytown Schools
awilliams@happytown.md.edu
515.555.5555

¹ Campbell, et. al., *Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships*.

Press Release

The format of a press release is tied directly to its publication. In other words, to have the best chance for success of a published release, you must follow the format described in the following paragraphs. Many journalists do not have the time to research and write unique articles each time. Newsworthy, relevant, well-written press releases are often a big help to them, especially at a small-town newspaper.

-Logo -Contact Info -Dateline -Title -Release
-Place -Date -First Paragraph

This information should offer a newsworthy angle that answers the who, what, when, why, and how of the story. It should be scannable in 5-10 seconds so journalists can decide their interest.

-2 to 3 Body Paragraphs -Quotes
-Data -Hyperlinks

This body paragraph should elaborate on your release's newsworthy angle and offer more story depth with data, stories, human perspectives, and resources for journalists to learn more.

-Boilerplates -End Notation (###)
-Call to Action

Add a boilerplate ("About Us" paragraph) for each company mentioned in your release - complete with relevant links like website and social media profile links - followed by a call to action that prompts readers to help you reach business goals.

-Audio Recordings
-Images
-Videos

Attach or embed one to two multimedia elements to help journalists piece together a complete and engaging newsworthy angle for their audience.

*adapted from Fit Small Business

1. Format is important! Releases should be approximately 500 words and fit on to one page. Use Times New Roman or Arial Font. The Headline should be 14 type font, the Subheading 13 type font and italicized, and the body of the release 12 point font. You should have two different dates on the release. The first at the top states when you want the press released published. Most often,

you will say “For Immediate Release”, but not always. If this is the case, add the date that you want it released. The second date begins the press release opening with the date accompanied by the city and the state.

2. If possible, think of the goal(s) that you have for the release before you send it out to the press. Do you want to increase traffic to your website, increase donations, publicize an event? Once you think of your goal(s), figure out a way to measure it. Do you ask attendees at an event how they heard about it? Do you use Google Analytics to track traffic to a campaign landing page? By setting a goal and evaluating it, you will quickly see if the effort was successful and build upon, or learn from, the process.
3. Try to use data, quotes from leaders, no jargon, and make it as “newsworthy” as possible. These will all dramatically improve your chances of getting the release published.

YOUR LOGO HERE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Your Name & Organization

Phone: Contact Phone Number

Email: Contact Email Address

MAIN PRESS RELEASE HEADLINE (ALL CAPS)

Italicized Sub-header

[CITY, STATE, Month Date—] Answer who, what, why, where and how. Lead with the most important information.

Paragraph 2: Background information, Add quote here from a leader, constituent. Add data, stats, etc.

Paragraph 3: Add additional quote if needed. Continue to fill in details, stats, etc as needed.

[Your Organizational Name] is a [Boilerplate description..]

###

Organization logo here

The following is a sample press release based on the same scenario as the Letter to the Editor.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Mary Simms, Executive Director

Phone: 555-123-3456

Email: MSimms@turningpoint.org

JOIN MARCH AND VIGIL TO MOURN A TRAGIC LOSS IN OUR COMMUNITY

HAPPYTOWN, MN, February 9, 2021---TurningPoint Shelter hosted a march and vigil today at Sunnydale Park to mark the tragic loss of Monica, Maya and Daniel at the hands of their father and husband. Our community stood together—with over 2,000 people in attendance to say NO MORE to domestic violence and to demand that people who use violence should not have access to firearms.

“Domestic violence and firearms are intrinsically tied together. In fact, the presence of a firearm makes a domestic violence situation 5 times more lethal”, stated Alesha Williams, Happytown School Superintendent and Board Member of TurningPoint Shelter.

Ms. Williams was a featured speaker at the rally where she shared statistics and information about this terrible tragedy. She finished her speech with the inspiring homage to the victims, “Happytown must take domestic violence seriously. No one deserves to be hurt, hit, or verbally abused. No one, not one person should ever die at the hands of someone who is supposed to care for them. We must do more. We have to commit to following the law and removing guns from domestic abusers.”

TurningPoint Shelter is an advocacy organization and safe place for victims of domestic violence. We believe that everyone deserves a life free from violence. We work with nearly 3,000 survivors each year. Our work is performed at our shelter, in our community education series, and on our 24-hour crisis line.




###

Social Media



Social media is a powerful tool to help you reach new audiences who are empathetic towards victim-survivors of domestic violence. It can help educate friends and family, inform allies, build networks, and empower victim-survivors to seek help they might not have known about. Using social media to help make our communities safer will depend on your specific goals.

Before engaging in a social media campaign, there are a couple of things you can do to make it more effective:

1. **Know where your target community “lives” online.** If you are targeting community leaders over the age of 45 or millennial local politicians, your choice of social media channel is critical to your success.
 - a. Some generalizations for target audiences: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram
 -  **Facebook:** from early thirties to seniors. Life and family and community updates, quizzes, organizational updates/ fundraisers
 -  **Twitter:** from Tweens to working professionals. News, current events, pop culture
 -  **Instagram:** from Tweens to fortysomethings. Pictures, Videos, Live Streaming, Stories
 - b. Make sure to explore your local communities’ online preferences before implementing the generalities above.
2. **Be Ready.** If you decide to engage with an online audience, please make sure that a staff member or trained volunteer is checking the social media channel regularly. When you ask a question in a post, people will answer. You also may get “trolls” who try to derail your message. This job of the staff or trained volunteer is to answer questions with accurate information, share local resources, be ready with a local crisis number, or be prepared to delete a post if it is providing inaccurate or victim-blaming information.
3. **Track your success.** We have included #morethanpaper #saferfamilies #safercommunities in all of the sample posts below. Of course, we would appreciate that you include them in your posts so that BWJP can measure the distribution of the toolkit. Also feel free to add your own # as well. It allows for easier evaluation of the campaign as well as can also build the followers on your social media.

Content Warnings

Explicit descriptions or images of violence can be triggering for people who might have experienced or witnessed violence. Add a content warning to posts that might bring up painful memories and think deeply about what you share, with whom, and why.

Example One:



Content Warning: This article contains information about violence which may be triggering for survivors of abuse.

Example Two:



Content Warning: This article will discuss a specific person’s experience with PTSD as a result of domestic violence. This article may be difficult for readers with similar experiences.

Example Three:



Content Warning: The following video contains material that may be difficult for some viewers.

Considerations for Drafting Posts

Messaging concepts that have been shown to resonate among gun owners, engaged citizens, domestic violence advocates, gun violence advocates, members of the criminal justice system, and survivors include:

- People who commit domestic violence should not own firearms.
- Domestic violence affects everyone in a community, not just those experiencing it.
- Laws that already exist should be enforced to make sure dangerous people don’t have weapons.

Using concepts like this to draft social media posts can help start productive conversations across political boundaries (real or perceived); and framing these conversations in the context of safety and connection can help bring your community together around this issue.

Sample Social Media Posts

Message Concept: Threat to community

- ▶ We all know that keeping guns out of the hands of violent people helps keep us all safe. Domestic abusers with guns pose a threat to their families. #morethanpaper #saferfamilies #safercommunities
- ▶ Domestic violence is tied to the majority of mass shootings. Of the 749 mass shootings over the past six years, 60% were either domestic violence attacks or committed by men with histories of abusing their families. #morethanpaper#saferfamilies #safercommunities
- ▶ Domestic violence is dangerous for first responders: 14% of on duty police deaths between 1996 and 2009 came in response to a domestic violence call—and 97% of those officers were killed by firearms.

Message Concept: Guns are for protection

- ▶ Guns are for protecting families, not threatening them. People with convictions for perpetrating violence against their families should not have guns. #morethanpaper #saferfamilies #safercommunities

Message Concept: Comparison to other issue

- ▶ If you drive drunk, you lose your license. If you threaten your family with violence, you should lose your gun. It's common sense. #morethanpaper #saferfamilies #safercommunities

Message Concept: Americans are united

- ▶ Americans may not agree on everything, but we ARE united in the belief that domestic abusers should not have guns. #morethanpaper #saferfamilies #safercommunities

Message Concept: Laws not enforced

- ▶ Did you know that many states have laws that prohibit people with convictions of domestic violence from owning guns? But sometimes they fall through the cracks because the laws are not enforced. [Share content specific to your community and/or make your call to action]. #morethanpaper #saferfamilies #safercommunities

Message Concept: Communities are taking action

- ▶ Did you know that the vast majority of gun owners support enforcement of laws to keep domestic abusers from having guns? What do you think? #morethanpaper #saferfamilies #safercommunities
- ▶ Better practices to enforce laws help to keep domestic abusers from owning guns. [Share content about your community and feature other communities who are working on enforcement]. #morethanpaper #saferfamilies #safercommunities
- ▶ Responsible gun owners speak out about the enforcement of gun laws. If you're a gun owner, you have a powerful voice. What do you want to say? #morethanpaper #saferfamilies #safercommunities
- ▶ Use your voice to influence policymakers to do the right thing. #morethanpaper #saferfamilies #safercommunities
- ▶ What can you do to keep our community safe? Support gun removal laws for convicted abusers. #morethanpaper #saferfamilies #safercommunities

Other actionable ideas for your social media posts:

- Encourage your audience to call their local or state representatives to tell them they care about keeping guns out of the hands of people convicted of domestic abuse.
- Share information about firearm surrender laws with friends, family, and community so they can help too.
- Sign a petition to show support for better enforcement and policies in their community.
- Make a contribution to [insert org name], who are working to keep guns out of the hands of violent abusers.

Images and Graphics

Download all images from PreventDVGunViolence.org, in the “*More Than Paper*” section linked at the top right of each page.

RESOURCES

Training, Technical Assistance, and Promising Practices

The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms ([NRCDVF](#)) supports comprehensive implementation of domestic violence firearm prohibitions at all levels of government, as well as community-based interventions, to prevent domestic violence-related homicide in our families and communities. Launched in 2016, the [Safer Families, Safer Communities website](#) is the first wholly dedicated to addressing the intersection of domestic violence and firearms. To learn more about the intersection of domestic violence and firearms, please [browse our resources](#).

For information on legal system strategies in implementing and enforcing domestic violence firearm prohibitions, [visit us here](#).

Legal Resources for Advocates and Survivors

[WomensLaw.org](#)

[National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)

Protection Orders

[National Center on Protection Orders and Full Faith and Credit \(NCPOFFC\)](#)

NCPOFFC, a program of BWJP, provides technical assistance and training on protection orders, the Full Faith and Credit provision of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and inter-jurisdictional enforcement of protection orders. Phone: 1-800-903-0111, prompt 2;

Email: ncffc@bwjp.org

NCPOFFC's [Firearm Checklist for Advocates](#). This checklist provides information for advocates facilitating discussions with survivors about firearms.

NCPOFFC's S.A.F.E. Tool. The S.A.F.E. Tool is an inventory of questions designed to facilitate a discussion with a survivor on safety strategies around firearms. For the S.A.F.E. Tool, call NCPOFFC at (800) 903-0111, prompt 2.

Safety Planning

The National Domestic Violence Hotline: [Safety Planning Tipsheet](#) or Call (800) 799-SAFE

Model Communities

Across the country communities are effectively disarming domestic violence offenders by implementing firearm prohibitions in domestic violence cases. Leaders and innovators in these communities have developed pragmatic and responsible policies, protocols and practices directed at all aspects of firearm surrender and seizure.

To learn more about these communities, please visit the [Safer Families, Safer Communities website](#).

Research

- ▶ Multiple Victim Homicides, Mass Murders, and Homicide-Suicides and Domestic Violence Events, <https://www.preventdvgunviolence.org/multiple-killings-zeoli-updated-112918.pdf>
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