

# Tips for reporting on domestic, family and sexual violence

Journalists reporting on domestic, family and sexual violence can help raise awareness of the scale and impacts of the issues. Their reporting can also challenge existing attitudes and behaviours that support violence. Below are some tips on how to take a trauma-informed approach to reporting.<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Ensure victim-survivor safety

Leave out specific details that risk identifying victim-survivors. In First Nations or migrant communities, or rural and regional areas, it may be easy to identify a person even when measures are taken to de-identify them.

## 2 Name the violence

Name the violence when legally possible. Terms such as 'violence against women', 'family violence', 'coercive control' or 'sexual assault' help the audience understand that the issue is widespread, not just random or isolated acts. Don't use terms that minimise or trivialise violence.

## 3 Keep the person using violence in view

Use active language to emphasise that someone perpetrated the violence, e.g. man assaults woman, if legally possible. Name the current/previous relationships between the victim-survivor and person using violence. Don't make excuses for the person using violence.

## 4 Use respectful language

Use respectful, appropriate language and headlines. Don't sensationalise or trivialise violence, or use unnecessary/graphic details or inappropriate references/puns. Avoid stereotypes which reinforce myths about causes of violence.

## 5 Use evidence

Women and their children are disproportionately affected by domestic and sexual violence. Where legally possible, include relevant statistics to show the prevalence of the issue and to provide context. Many people do not report to police so recorded data does not reflect the true scale of the issue.

## 6 Talk to experts

Don't focus solely on the voices of police, the legal profession and people who use violence. Ensure sector advocates, academics, people with lived experience and from more diverse communities get a chance to speak.

## 7 Know the legal restrictions

Be aware of laws, court orders or legal rules and processes which might restrict or impact how and what you can report. If you are unsure about any legal aspects of your reporting, seek legal advice as early as possible. Ensure reports on court proceedings are fair and accurate.

## 8 Use appropriate imagery

Avoid images that are graphic, disempower victim-survivors or perpetuate stereotypes about gender, race, disability, sexuality or age. Ensure images don't identify victim-survivors if they don't consent or there are legal proceedings. Don't use inappropriate social media images.

## 9 Include support options

Always provide details about support available for those seeking help, including people who use violence.

## Self-care for media

Journalists reporting on traumatic events should keep their own mental health in mind. Seek support from trusted colleagues, inhouse employee assistance programs, private practitioners or trauma counsellors available through 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732).

## More information

Domestic and family violence media guide  
[www.qld.gov.au/DFVmediaguide](http://www.qld.gov.au/DFVmediaguide)

Sexual violence media guide  
[www.qld.gov.au/SVmediaguide](http://www.qld.gov.au/SVmediaguide)

<sup>1</sup> Our Watch. 2019. *National media reporting guidelines*, Our Watch Limited.