

Responsible Reporting Matters

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

It's domestic abuse, call it out

It is domestic abuse, it is not a one-off incident, so avoid terms like "they snapped", "they lost control" or "in a moment of madness". Perpetrators of domestic abuse are always in control of their behaviour. Their behaviour is thoughtful and purposeful, and they are responsible for it.

Don't frame the perpetrator as a "pillar of the community" who has made a bad decision – their decision was to abuse someone and make them feel unsafe.

Likewise, perpetrators are people, so avoid language that makes him seem fantastical or otherworldly like "monster" or "vicious". Abusive people look just like everybody else.

Domestic abuse is a prevalent problem, use this incident to comment on that. Include local domestic abuse statistics, speak to relevant domestic abuse agencies for comments, frame it as part of a wider problem that needs to be tackled.

2

Lead with empathy

If the victim is still alive refer to them as a survivor. They have personhood, they are not defined by the abuse that has been done to them.

Ensure that no confidential information is released about a victim or survivor, particularly when they are part of an ongoing case.

Take time to understand a situation beyond your first judgement. Do not use pejorative language that questions how the victim or survivor's behaviour could have led to this.

Do not use images that are graphic or offensive. Centre the victim or survivor in images. Avoid using family photographs which include the perpetrator, this can be upsetting to survivors or to loved ones of victims. It can also frame the abuser as family orientated and add to the narrative that this was a one-off incident.

Avoid looking for comments from neighbours or colleagues to build a profile of the perpetrator. The likelihood is that they won't be aware of the abusive behaviour, abusers often present as extremely charming. To include these comments detracts from the focus of the article which should centre the victim/survivor.

3

Avoid gender stereotypes

Don't use language that frames female victims or survivors as passive to their own lives, or question why she didn't leave. Women experiencing domestic abuse are the experts of their own situation. They have managed their situation, keeping themselves and their children safe for a long time. Be respectful of this.

If the victim or survivor is male, do not use language that minimises the abuse that he has suffered or calls into question his gender. Men can be victims of domestic abuse too, and very often feel that they cannot come forward. Changing the narrative around male victims can create a culture of support and allow more victims to speak about the abuse they have suffered.

4

Be respectful of intersectionality

Minority groups face even greater barriers to support, be mindful of this when telling their story. Examples of this:

- A man's ethnicity does not indicate that he is more likely to be abusive.
- A bisexual woman's sexual orientation is not a justification for jealousy and abuse.

Do not use a person's status as transgender to explain abuse that they have suffered.

Do not use a person's intersectionality against them in order to create a salacious or dramatic story. If their intersectionality is relevant, then ensure that you include it in a responsible manner that doesn't read as an excuse for abuse. Be sure to use the correct language, for example use the term sex worker, not prostitute.

5

Signpost

Include the information of local domestic abuse services at the end of the article. Contact local

services to ensure the information is up to date and correct.

Many articles which report on domestic abuse, namely after there has been an apparent murder/suicide will only signpost to a suicide intervention helpline. This again reinforces the narrative that the perpetrator snapped and did something out of character, which ignores the experience of the victim/survivor. If you want to include a suicide helpline then make sure you are also signposting to services geared towards survivors.

Look after yourselves in these moments too. These stories can be very triggering, talk about anything that may have upset you, and practice self-care.

6

Be Careful with Case Studies

Before seeking out a case study ensure that it is necessary to the article or could the same outcome be achieved without one. Asking someone to recount their trauma should not be taken lightly.

Link in with local domestic abuse services well in advance of your deadline. Finding someone who is confident enough to share their experience of domestic abuse is a sensitive issue that takes time.

Think about how you can get the information you need while remaining sensitive to the survivor. Ultimately, always ensure the safety of the interviewee, taking care to safeguard any identifying information, making sure that their identity is always protected.