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MINNESOTA
THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

Domestic Violence Advocates

What is a domestic violence advocate?

Oftentimes, survivors' individual needs and safety concerns are not taken into consideration during the legal process. Advocates are trained professionals who work to support and emphasize the victim/survivor's safety and individuality, serving as a bridge between the victim/survivor and the system. They aim to be a source of empowerment and to make legal options more readily accessible.

There are two widely acknowledged types of advocates associated with domestic and intimate partner violence, system-based and community-based. These advocates are employed in either community-based organizations or criminal justice agencies.

Hospitals and clinics are other institutions where advocates are an available resource, but these advocates might not necessarily fall under the exact definition of the two types identified above.

What role does a domestic violence advocate play in the intervention process for DV/IPV?

Advocates may play a variety of roles throughout an intervention for someone experiencing DV/IPV:

- Representing victim/survivors and acting as their voice when they feel unable to speak out themselves
- Provide safety planning and risk assessment
- Providing support and information for victims/survivors and for healthcare providers or other professionals who work with survivors on the various options and resources that are available
- Serve as a guide through the processes within the legal system
- Assist with specific court hearings and processes
 - May include preparing written communication or submissions, or attending hearings, meetings, or appointments
 - Clarify any pertinent policies and procedures
 - Gather and organize information and documentation
 - Assist with negotiating custody matters
- Identify barriers and problems with the legal system, address the issues with the agencies involved, and work to remove/resolve any roadblocks hindering the victims from obtaining the outcomes they need
- Working to improve the system response to cases of domestic violence



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While the two types of advocates share some of these roles, there are some important differences to be aware of.

System-Based Advocates

- A.k.a. victim witness liaison
- Found in agencies within the criminal justice system (i.e. police departments, prosecutor offices)
- Assist with court-related matters
 - Inform victims of their rights
 - Explain what prosecutors need to proceed with charges against assailant
 - Address safety concerns from the outset of police involvement
- Serve both victim and agency
 - Any information shared by the victim is automatically shared with the agency

Community-Based Advocates

- Can be found in community-based organizations such as shelters or non-residential programs that provide legal advocacy
- Serve only the victim
 - All information shared with advocate by victim is confidential and will not be shared without her permission
 - Address community needs and services including:
 - Housing
 - Health
 - Financial support
 - Children's needs
 - *and more ...*
- Provide self-help and support groups

Advocates and lawyers ARE NOT THE SAME. Advocates cannot practice law or give legal advice.

Why is advocacy important?

Advocates are important because they strive to:

- Protect and promote survivors' rights.
- Acknowledge survivors' views and make certain their wishes are considered regarding any decisions being made regarding their lives.
- Ensure that survivors' voices are heard
- Assist in resolving any issues that may arise.



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Most importantly, advocates are a source of empathetic support and guidance without judgement.