

Age-Inclusive Advocacy: Expanding Services and Awareness for Older DV Survivors

Domestic violence (DV) advocates and programs can have a profound and positive influence on the lives of older survivors. Advocates can use their specialized skills and training and their confidential relationship with survivors to help them better understand the dynamics of abuse; to be aware of the available options, services, and resources; and to assist them as they navigate through complex intervening systems. Advocates and programs can also help combat ageist social norms by promoting dignity, respect, and accessibility for persons of all ages in their work and service programs.

This Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM), the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) is offering some tips and strategies for addressing DV in later life and raising awareness of DV in this often-overlooked demographic. Below are five considerations for enhancing your services for older survivors; five tips for inclusive outreach to older survivors; and five strategies for including older survivors in your DVAM campaign. We hope these ideas offer ways to concretely and meaningfully engage older survivors in your work.



Five considerations for enhancing your services to meet the needs of older survivors

- 1. Utilize safety planning strategies that are both age appropriate and age-relevant:** When tailoring supportive services to address the unique needs of older survivors from various backgrounds, it is vital to respect their confidentiality, privacy, and autonomy while addressing how implications of mandatory reporting, power of attorney, guardianship, healthcare needs, and financial needs impact service provision.

A victim-centered approach to advocacy can help the survivor feel like they have regained power and control over their own lives. Check out NCALL's [Working with Older Survivors of Abuse: A Framework for Advocates](#) for a deeper exploration of some suggested guidelines and practical strategies.

- 2. Respect history, generational experiences, and values:** Older survivors have decades of life history, which often includes generational trauma and, for some, a lifetime of marginalization, discrimination, and systemic oppression. Older adults may have experienced stigma or disbelief when seeking help in the past. Approach them with sensitivity and respect, acknowledging their experiences and validating their concerns. It is important to understand that these experiences may impact help-seeking behaviors, interpersonal dynamics, and communication styles.
- 3. Recognize that older adults are not a monolith:** Reject a one-size-fits all approach. Older adults come from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, which influence their traditions, values, and experiences. This diversity impacts older survivors' preferences, attitudes, and practices as well as how they perceive abuse and healing.
- 4. Provide equitable services that are welcoming and accessible to survivors of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds:** Ensure that cultural, communication, physical, and other barriers which limit access for older individuals are addressed. Consider developing a [Language Access Plan](#) and engaging in a [self-assessment](#) to measure your organization's capacity to serve Deaf or disabled survivors.
- 5. Expand your partners to agencies that work with older adults:** Commit to learning more about your community's resources and options for older survivors, including, but not limited to adult protective services (APS), aging services, civil justice systems, civil law, criminal justice systems, culturally-specific services, disability rights organizations, faith communities, health care, long-term care, mental health, sexual assault, and social services. Invest time to create authentic relationships with these other professionals to improve the responses of various systems, and to facilitate the referral process between your agency and other community partners.



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Five tips for inclusive outreach to older survivors of domestic violence

- 1. Tailor messaging for relevance to older adults:** Develop outreach materials that address the specific issues faced by older survivors who may be abused by intimate partners, family members, caregivers, or other trusted individuals. This begins with acknowledging that domestic violence does occur later in life and drawing out the unique dynamics that set domestic violence in later life apart from domestic violence experienced by younger survivors. This also means addressing issues such as financial insecurity, caregiver abuse, and isolation.
- 2. Respect older adults' cultural, racial, and LGBTQ+ identities:** Age is just one dimension of an older adult's identity. Ensure that the language and examples you use are relevant to older survivors' overlapping identities and experiences, as well as their risk and protective factors. Outreach materials must be accessible to all individuals regardless of ability, including older adults with visual impairments or limited digital literacy. Use larger print, [plain language](#), [high contrast colors](#), and photos or graphics with [alt-text](#) that illustrate concepts. Employ various formats (e.g., digital media, printed brochures, audio recordings) to reach a wider audience.
- 3. Include age-positive and inclusive images:** When describing services and supports for survivors, include images of older adults and ensure that the images respect their diversity, resilience, and life experience. Incorporating positive and inclusive images humanizes the issue of domestic violence, stops the erasure of older survivors, and pushes back on ageist assumptions about older adults. Find inspiration in these age-positive collections from [AARP x Getty Images](#) and the [Centre for Ageing Better](#).
- 4. Offer age-appropriate support and resources:** Provide clear information about where older adults can seek help if they are experiencing domestic violence. This includes contact information for local services, hotlines, and legal assistance. Ensure that resources are both available and accessible.
- 5. Go to where older adults are:** Distribute outreach materials to locations commonly frequented by older adults in your community such as senior centers, libraries, meal sites, health centers, aging and disability resource centers, etc. Talk with your community partners that focus on services to older adults about your services and what is available to older victims.



Five strategies for including older survivors in your DVAM campaign

- 1. Use age-inclusive language:** Ensure that the language used in your DVAM campaign is inclusive of survivors of all ages. You can avoid implying that domestic violence only affects younger people by using phrases like “domestic violence in later life” or “domestic violence across the lifespan.” Avoid terms like “elderly” which imply frailty or dependency and reinforce ageist stereotypes. Terms like “older adults,” “seniors,” or “older survivors” should be used respectfully.
- 2. Use diverse, age-positive images:** Select images and visuals that reflect older adults authentically and respectfully. Avoid using outdated or clichéd imagery and focus on genuine, relatable representations of older adults across a variety of ages, cultures, ethnicities, racial backgrounds, abilities, and gender identities.
- 3. Address common barriers faced by older adults:** Acknowledge and address common barriers older victims face, such as ageism, ableism, cultural bias, and lack of age-relevant resources. You might consider uplifting [Ageism Awareness Day](#), which is observed in October, to confront ageism and draw awareness to how ageism and other forms of discrimination dehumanize older adults and increase their vulnerability for abuse. Tailor campaign messages to address specific challenges faced by older survivors and provide practical solutions and contact information for specialized services and support.
- 4. Promote confidentiality and safety:** Ensure that your DVAM campaign communicates the importance of confidentiality and safety for older survivors. Send a reassuring message that seeking help is safe and that there are confidential resources available.
- 5. Focus on older adults’ autonomy and resilience:** Emphasize messages of empowerment and strength. Highlight stories of resilience and recovery rather than just victimization to inspire hope and action.



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