

## Family Advocacy Program: Safety Planning Podcast

### **Episode transcript:**

#### **Intro voiceover:**

Welcome to the Military OneSource Podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department, with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit [militaryonesource.mil](https://militaryonesource.mil).

#### **Bruce Moody:**

Welcome to the podcast, I'm Bruce Moody. Today we're going to talk about things you can do to keep you and your children safe from domestic violence. It's called a safety plan. And I have two guests with me today to help us through this topic. Adrian and Nikki are both domestic abuse victim advocates. Welcome to both of you.

#### **Adrian:**

Thank you. Welcome.

#### **Nikki:**

Thank you.

#### **Bruce:**

Welcome. It's great to have you with us. Really important topic. Adrian, let's start with you. What is a domestic abuse victim advocate?

#### **Adrian:**

Well, I'm glad you asked, sir. The family advocacy domestic abuse victim advocate, we're also known as DAVAs, and that's our acronym, D-A-V-A, and we provide 24-hour telephonic and face-to-face crisis response and support to adult victims of domestic abuse, and also intimate partner sexual assault. DAVAs maintain effective safety plans. We empower victims of abuse. We provide a 24-hour crisis intervention service, either through in-person or telephonic contact. And also, upon notification of a domestic abuse incident, the DAVA will make the initial contact with the adult victim as soon as possible. It's all about making sure that we are notified and that we provide these immediate services to any survivor of abuse.

#### **Bruce:**

Now you're describing basically your job. You've both been doing this. How long have you worked in this field?

**Adrian:**

I've been in 10 years as a military advocate and five years as a community advocate. I'd say a total of 15 years in this field.

**Bruce:**

And I should note that we generally identify people with their last names, but given the nature of your work, we're protecting your privacy, honestly, during this episode because of your work as domestic abuse victim advocates.

Let's push on and get some definitions before we go any further. What are the different types of domestic abuse?

**Nikki:**

We see physical, emotional, sexual and neglect, and also economic abuse, all realms of abuse. When it comes to anything within a family or a dating relationship, intimate partner relationship, if there's any maltreatment at all, that's what we can help with.

**Bruce:**

You mentioned help. What should somebody expect if they contact an advocate?

**Nikki:**

Safety support resources is what a DAVA can help with. So, what we'll do is we make sure that we go over a safety plan and go into depth about what is happening in their situation. And then we will create a safety plan around their particular situation. We are there for resources, getting them all the resources that they need, whatever they are. Maybe they need to talk to somebody at the legal office and get some legal advice. Maybe they need a protective order. Maybe they want to get a victim's counsel. Whatever it is, we will help them get to that resource and then we're there for support so that the one thing that they don't have to do is go through this alone.

**Adrian:**

I wanted to add that we provide follow-up services to empower victims to advocate for the safety needs of themselves and their children. And I know that the empowering piece is very, very important. Victims need to understand and know how and be able to make their own decisions, and to make decisions on behalf of themselves and their children.

**Bruce:**

What if a person is not sure about their situation? What happens if maybe they're not ready to make a report, can they remain anonymous?

**Adrian:**

Yes. DAVA services, they're voluntary and not mandatory, so no one is mandated to speak to us. Everyone has a right to self-determination. If at any time during the initial contact the victim declines services or is unwilling to divulge identifying information, the victim can be referred and will be referred to a local or national domestic violence resource for confidential and ongoing advocacy services. We make sure that they receive the referrals necessary in their area.

**Bruce:**

What you're getting at is a really important aspect of reporting and that there are options. So, get into the different types of reporting options.

**Nikki:**

We've got restricted reporting and unrestricted reporting. Unrestricted reporting, people with the need to know are notified. They do an intake with the victim, and then they'll also do an intake with the alleged offender. And at that point, there's a process in family advocacy. The big piece of that is people with the need to know are notified, and all of the services that are available through DAVA and for the victims are available.

On a restricted report, that stays right inside a family advocacy, only the victim advocate, the family advocacy officer and the clinical team know about this restricted report. It doesn't leave our building. We're able to work with the victim, empower the victim, and they're able to get counseling, medical services, some legal assistance under a restricted report. We're not able to do some of the options that we could do on an unrestricted report because we can't help with a protective order, we can't help with a relocation when it comes to a restricted report.

Now there are some limitations to the reporting options if there's child abuse or there's imminent risk of harm or death, then we aren't able to offer a restricted report. And the end of the day a family advocacy officer has to approve it to be a restricted report and they don't technically have a restricted report until they come in and complete that appointment with the treatment manager.

**Bruce:**

In the military, sometimes services are only available to those who are in the military or married to someone who is. Are intimate partners eligible to call a victim advocate for help? Are there services offered to them that might be different from the ones offered to spouses?

**Nikki:**

If anyone calls our hotline, we're going to help them and we're going to get them do a risk assessment and safety plan and connect them to all of the resources that are available to them. If there's a military connection, so if the offender's a military member

or if the victim is, even if it's just an intimate partner and there's not a marriage, we will absolutely help them and make sure that they have all the support that is available to them. And we will also connect them to off-base resources if that would be better for them through whatever their process and their situation is. Intimate partners, married, partners, divorced, partners, it doesn't matter, as DAVAs, we're going to help them.

**Bruce:**

All right, so let's get into the safety planning. Just what is a safety plan?

**Adrian:**

Well, safety planning is critical. Safety planning for domestic violence is certainly a form of protection, and it should be created specifically for the survivor's immediate safety concerns and future risk of an explosive incident. This may involve how they can escape, where they can go, who's their support system, such as who can they rely on to assist them? And then also additional protections. Safety planning is critical.

**Bruce:**

When does the safety planning process begin?

**Adrian:**

The safety planning process, again, is certainly critical, and as soon as someone discloses concerns regarding unhealthy behaviors in the relationship, DAVAs are right there to create that safety plan for the immediate need and safety concern.

**Bruce:**

What are the steps of creating a safety plan?

**Adrian:**

Well, safety planning varies from person to person. The most important thing, and I think that we need to know this, that DAVA actually have a risk assessment tool and that's up front and that helps us to determine the design of a survivor safety plan. Safety planning does vary from survivor to survivor, it depends on the immediate need, it depends on the severity of the situation. And, of course, the risk assessment will always help us to determine how to design a particular survivor's safety plan.

**Nikki:**

I also want to add to that, that safety planning needs to be not me as an advocate saying, "Hey, here's your safety plan." We need buy-in from the clients that we're working with. Because if we say, "You need to do this, this and this," they probably are not going to do any of those things. We have a conversation, we ask them, we talk to them, we create it with them, not for them.

**Bruce:**

How is safety planning different for a male experiencing abuse?

**Adrian:**

It's really not different. We know that abuse can happen to a woman or a man of any race, ethnicity, age, income, status, religion or sexual orientation. We know this. Oftentimes, men feel that their masculinity will be questioned, that they won't be believed and that their careers will be ruined. And so, of course, these are false narratives. And advocacy is the key to remove these stigmas for men.

**Bruce:**

Do you have to file a report to move forward with a safety plan?

**Nikki:**

No. Everyone has the right to self-determination and they can come and talk to a victim advocate or DAVA and they can talk to us over the phone, they can talk to us in person, and we will just go over what options are available to them and educate them so that they can make an informed decision and decide what's best for them. At a minimum, we're going to do our best to do a risk assessment, a safety plan, and get them to whatever resources that they need right now.

**Bruce:**

You had mentioned this before, but safety planning differs with the circumstances. How does that work? Explain that, please.

**Nikki:**

If somebody were to leave an abusive relationship, well, we are going to come up with a safety plan. I'm going to use he and she for just a minute, but we do know it happens to men and women. So, he leaves an abusive relationship. The safety plan I'm going to create with him is going to be, if she shows up, then this is what you need to do. Now we're going to flip the roles. She has left an abusive relationship and now she's going to go back home. So now that safety plan needs to change again. How do we keep you safe in the home with the person who has abused you in the past? They will modify, they will change. It's not just one and done. It is best if people stay in touch, in contact with their DAVA as their situation changes because we can safety plan around whatever they have going on.

**Bruce:**

And again, I think you've brought this up, but these are really important points to bring up. For example, how much follow-up is there for the victim after the initial contact?

**Nikki:**

Every case is different and some people are seeking just immediate assistance and then we never hear for them for a very long time, and some continue to go on for years and years. It's really unpredictable in every situation is completely different. Adrian?

**Adrian:**

Yes, just like she said, it could take up to a year. Situations involving the court system, I've seen it take up to a year or more, depending on the incident, depending on the court calendars and the domestic violence laws, in that particular state. It varies.

**Bruce:**

I'm just so grateful for the two of you joining us today, and I'd like to give you each, the opportunity to speak to this next question. If there's anything else you'd like to share really with listeners who might be thinking about calling a victim advocate.

**Adrian:**

I wanted to say to any survivors, anyone who is currently experiencing abuse in their relationship, listen, it takes great courage for a person to disclose the details of their abuse. And courage is not the absence of fear, but it's doing it even if you're afraid. Everyone deserves to feel safe in his or her relationship and abuse is never OK.

**Nikki:**

Absolutely. Thanks, Adrian. The one thing that I can promise you is you don't have to go through this alone. There are DAVAs out there that are more than happy to walk through this process with you, to be there by your side and support you through whatever your decision is. Even if you change your mind a whole bunch of times along the way, it's OK. We are here to support you and make sure that you're safe.

**Bruce:**

Wonderful. I'm so grateful to talk to the both of you today. In the program notes for this podcast episode, we have a link to our domestic abuse victim advocate locator. It's exactly what it sounds like. You can use that to find a victim advocate who is local to you. We also have a link to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, along with some of the resources that you can read on this subject. Nikki and Adrian, thank you so much for joining us today.

**Nikki:**

Thank you for inviting us.

**Adrian:**

Thank you for inviting us. This was great.

**Bruce:**

Excellent, excellent. Thank you to the both of you. I want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We'd love to hear from you. We have a link in the program notes, click on it, send us a question, a comment, maybe an idea for a future episode. And be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcast because we cover a wide variety of topics to help military families navigate military life.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you for joining us today. Take care. Bye-bye.