

The Domestic Violence Crime Scene: The Silent Witness Screaming to be Heard

PRESENTED BY



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OBJECTIVES



THE COMMON WAYS CRIMES SCENES ARE OVERLOOKED

Overlooked

THE IMPACT OF

Corroboration

TOOLS & STRATEGIES TO IDENTIFY AND DOCUMENT

Evidence

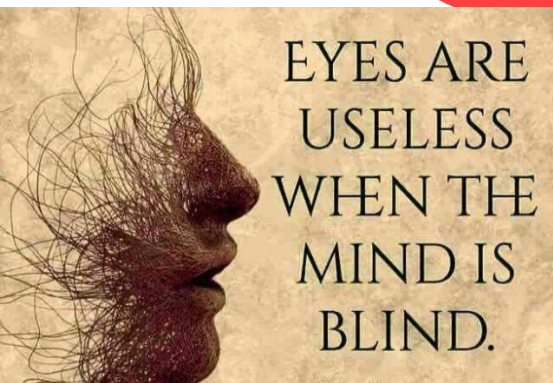
A photograph of a living room with various signs of destruction. A woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey t-shirt and black leggings, lies face down on the wooden floor. A wooden armchair is broken and tipped over. A potted plant has been knocked over, with soil and leaves scattered on the floor. A white curtain is pulled back, revealing a hole in the wall. A large flat-screen TV lies broken on the floor. A wooden coffee table holds a remote and a small object. A wooden console table holds a small white camera. A floor lamp stands in the background. A white door is on the left, and a dark door with a digital lock is on the right.

We investigate these without a participating victim.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey t-shirt and black leggings, sits on the floor of a living room, looking distressed with her hand to her forehead. The room shows signs of a break-in: a large hole in the wall near a white door, a potted plant tipped over with soil spilled, a wooden armchair tipped on its side, a large flat-screen TV lying face down on the rug, and a small white security camera on a wooden console. A window with white curtains is in the background, and a framed picture of a city skyline hangs on the wall. A dark door with a digital lock is visible on the right.

**Let's start investigating these the same way.
Even if she doesn't want to participate.**

MINDSET CHANGE



THE COST OF MISSING EVIDENCE

**Diminished
Probable
Cause**

**Weak
Prosecution**

**Missed
Indicators
of Coercive
Control**

**Increased
Victim
Danger**

Even tiny observations can provide significant corroboration.

MANY DV CASE DON'T LACK WITNESSES

They lack
investigators
who know where
to look

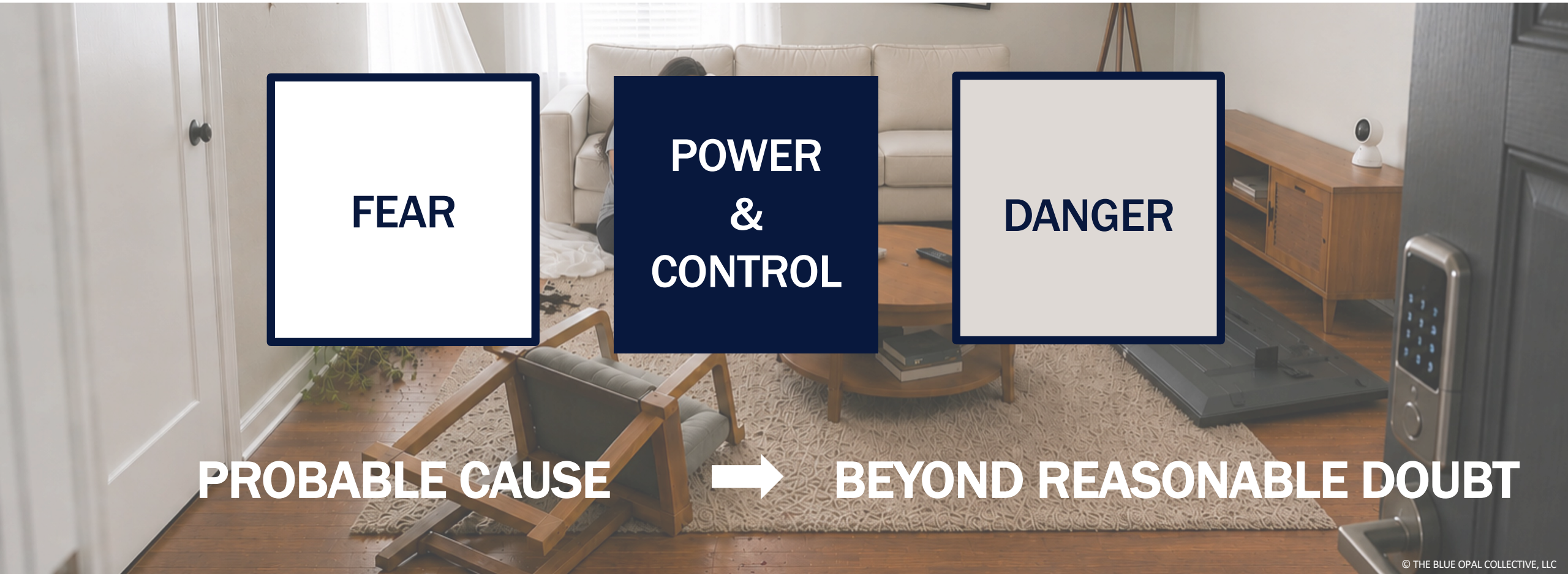
&

They lack
investigators
willing to look

**Thorough is as
thorough does.**

MINDSET CHANGE

WE MUST INVESTIGATE BEYOND THE ELEMENTS OF THE CRIME



FEAR

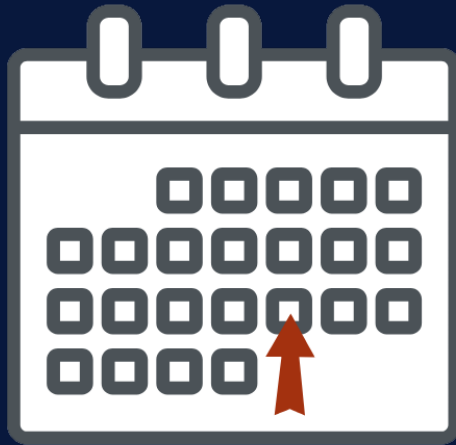
POWER
&
CONTROL

DANGER

PROBABLE CAUSE



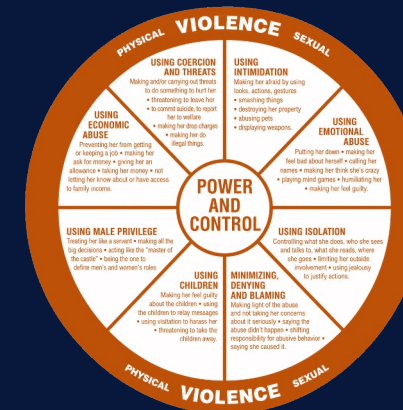
BEYOND REASONABLE DOUBT

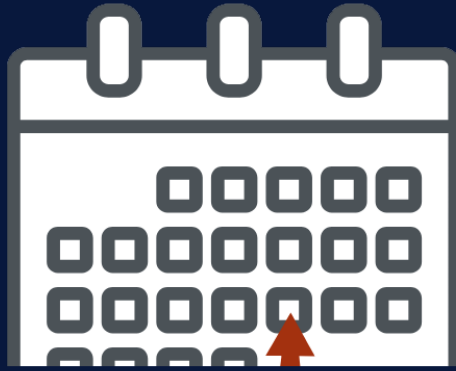


**CRIMINAL
ACT**

- ☒ dating
- ☒ married
- ☒ bio parents of same child
- ☒ members of household
- ☒ former

Investigate beyond the criminal elements & look for:





CRIMINAL
ACT

- ☒ dating
- ☒ married
- ☒ bio parents
of same child
- ☒ members of
household

Look for **CORROBORATION**



FEAR



DANGER



**It's INSANE how some
people need NO EVIDENCE
to believe a LIE but
REQUIRE endless
EVIDENCE to BELIEVE the
TRUTH.**

CORROBORATION

evidence
of the crime

evidence
of the family
relationship

evidence
truthful
statements

evidence
of the
untruthful
statements

PROBABLE CAUSE



BEYOND REASONABLE DOUBT

evidence
of the crime



She reported he punched her on the left side of her mouth with his right fist.

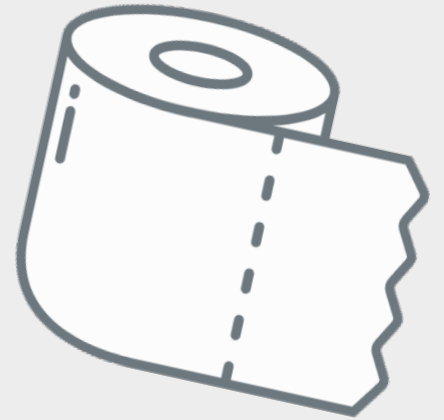
- ✓ **She has swelling & bruising to her left lip.**
- ✓ **She has cuts inside her lip to this area.**
- ✓ **You verify he's right-handed.**

The physical evidence is consistent with her reporting.

evidence
of truthful
statements

She said he struck her as she was
getting out of the shower.

- ✓ Her hair is still wet
- ✓ The shower is still wet
- ✓ A towel is still wet



**evidence
of untruthful
statements**

He said she invited him over.

- ✓ **There's nothing on the call log.**
- ✓ **There's no text message.**
- ✓ **No carrier pigeons in sight.**

evidence
of the
family
relationship

Verbal declarations

- ✓ **Photos of them together**
- ✓ **Text messages**
- ✓ **Prior reports**
- ✓ **Other parties**



evidence
of the
family
relationship

Texas CCP 38.371

Domestic Violence is...

A PATTERN of abusive behaviors by one person to **gain or maintain control** over an intimate partner or family member.

**I DON'T TRUST WORDS. I EVEN
QUESTION ACTIONS. BUT I
NEVER DOUBT PATTERNS.**

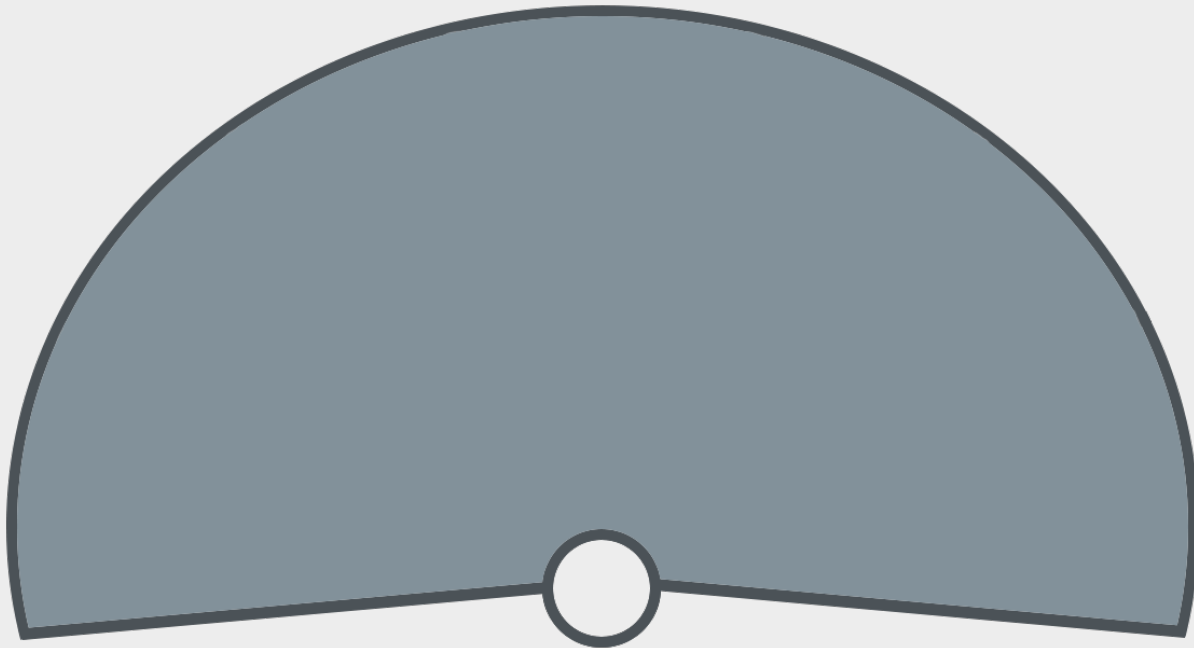
PROSECUTION

Some information may not be admissible for the guilt/innocence phase.

It could be great evidence for the punishment phase.

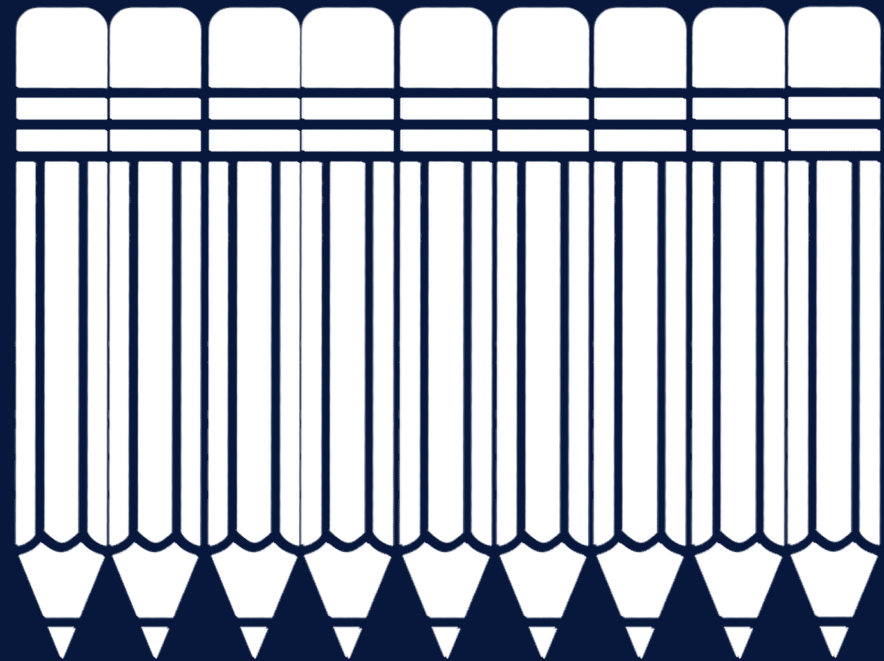
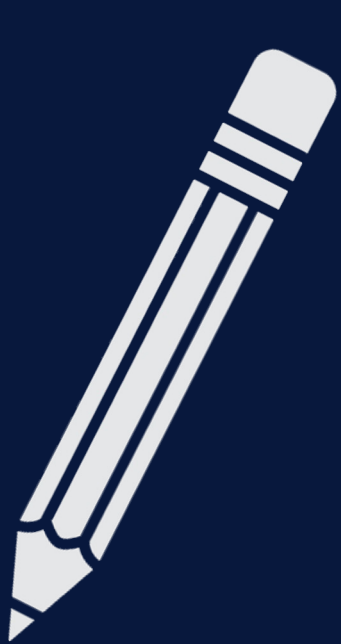
We may never know what information is going to be vital, so we treat it all as vital.

EXPAND YOUR VIEW



Look beyond
PROBABLE CAUSE

Investigate to support
**BEYOND A REASONABLE
DOUBT**



TOTALITY OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES

CIRCUMSTANCIAL EVIDENCE

Proof of facts offered
as evidence from
which other facts may
be inferred.

=

Evidence that points to a
conclusion, **even if nobody
directly saw or heard** the
actual event.

HOMICIDE INVESTIGATION

EXPECT & ACCEPT

Circumstantial Evidence

Fragmented Timelines

Indirect Witnesses

Offender Minimization

Victim Silence

NON-FATAL INVESTIGATION

EXPECT & ACCEPT

Circumstantial Evidence

Fragmented Timelines

Indirect Witnesses

Offender Minimization

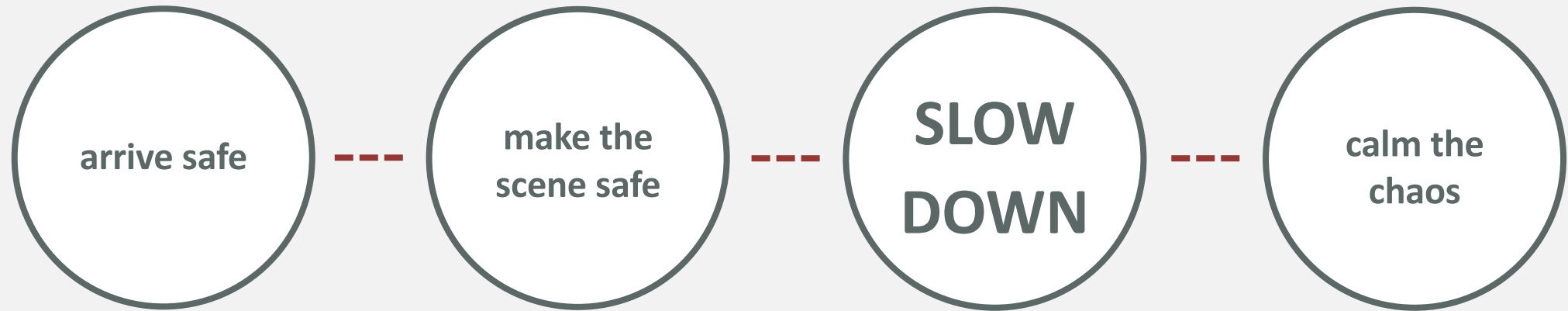
Victim Silence

ARRIVING ON SCENE



**A thorough
investigation can't
happen until the
SCENE IS
SAFE!**

THE APPROACH

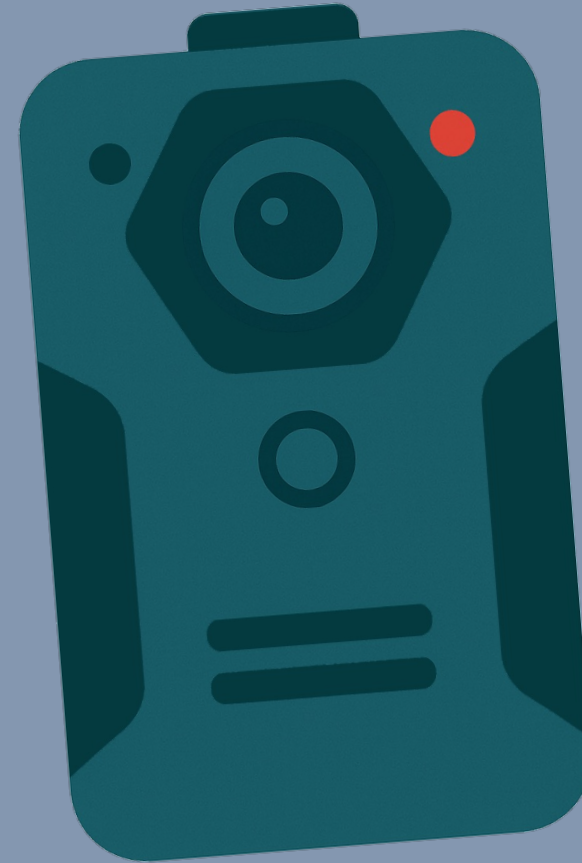


SAFETY is **ALWAYS** the **PRIORITY!!**

Preserve the scene

Safety Sweeps

**Maximize Legal
Authorities**



**You only get one chance at a
fresh scene, so make it count.**

**We should constantly be
reevaluating - Do we need a
search warrant?**

OBSERVATIONS

What do you
hear?

What do you
see?

Tactile
observations

Notable
smells

OBSERVATIONS

What do you
hear?

What do you
see?

Tactile
observations

Notable
smells

CAPTURE THE EXPERIENCE

OBSERVATIONS

What's
significant?

What's out of
place?

What's
inconsistent?

What's
corroborating?

CAPTURE THE EXPERIENCE

OBSERVATIONS

Broken household items

Broken phones

Broken cherished items

Wall damage

Overturned items

OBSERVATIONS



Broken household items

Broken phones

Broken cherished items

Wall damage

Overturned items

Bedding disturbances

Displaced furniture

Hidden phones/keys

**Signs of
isolation/confinement**

(locks – keep folks out and keep folks in)

OVERLOOKED EVIDENCE

Hair

Blood transfer

Broken nails

Damaged Jewelry

Torn clothing

Smearred makeup

Notes

Written Instructions

COLLECT EVIDENCE

Collect all physical evidence at the scene

Remember to photograph evidence before moving it.

Photograph vs. collect – consider consulting with the prosecutor

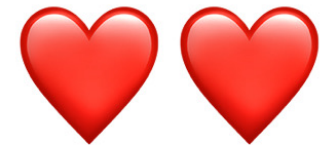
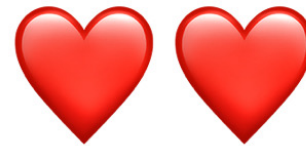
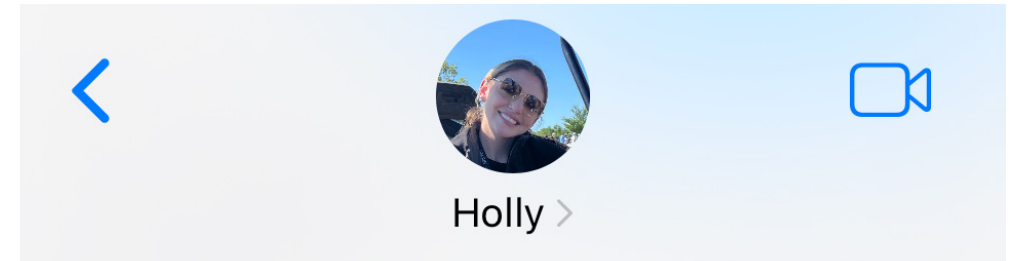
EVIDENCE OF LEAVING

Packed bags

Go-bag

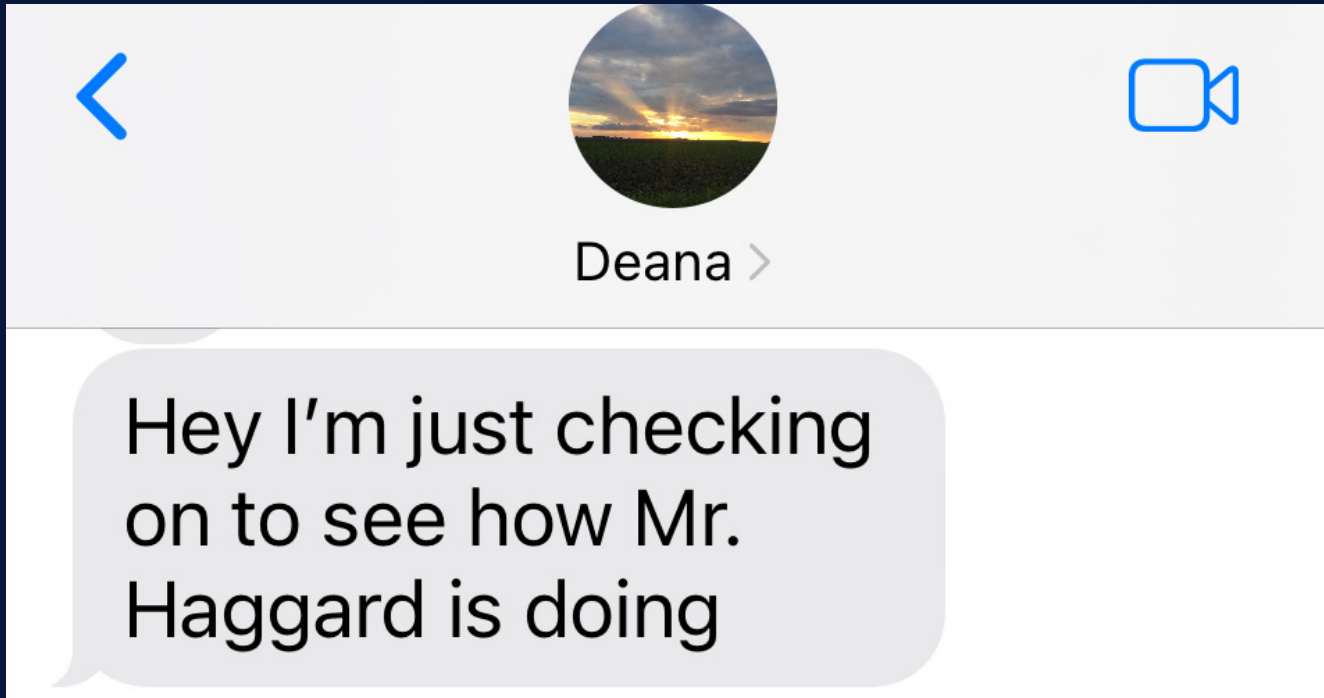
Safety planning

Interference with attempts
to leave.



First hearts meant come get me. Second hearts
acknowledged I'm on my way.

CODE WORDS



Commonly referred to as Merle or Merlito. Mr. Haggard meant send the police.



DOCUMENTATION

INVESTIGATIVE GUIDE

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIM STATEMENT

Case # _____ Today's Date: _____
Completed by: _____ # _____

Incident Date/Time: _____ Location: _____

VICTIM Name: _____ R/S: _____ DOB: _____
Home Address: _____ Email Address: _____
DL # _____ State: _____ Cell Phone: _____ Alternate Phone: _____
Employer: _____ Employer Address: _____
Emergency Contact: _____ Relationship: _____ Phone: _____
Home Address: _____ Email Address: _____

Are you planning to relocate? ☐ No ☐ Confidential ☐ Yes - Address: _____

SUSPECT Name: _____ R/S: _____ DOB: _____
Home Address: _____ Email Address: _____
DL # _____ State: _____ Cell Phone: _____ Alternate Phone: _____
Employer: _____ Employer Address: _____
Vehicle Year: _____ Color: _____ Make: _____ Model: _____ LP: _____
Military? ☐ N/A ☐ Branch: _____ Rank: _____ Stationed: _____ Active? ☐ Yes ☐ No
Probation/Parole? ☐ Yes ☐ No Probation Officer Name: _____ Location: _____

☐ Arrested ☐ Not in State ☐ From Out-of-State ☐ Spun/Marked/Tattoo: _____

RELATIONSHIP ☐ Married _____ years _____ months ☐ Blood Relative Date relationship ended: _____
☐ Engaged/Other _____ years _____ months ☐ Household Members ☐ Former Household Members ☐ Biological Parents of the Same Child (if of children _____)

VICTIM'S PHYSICAL CONDITION ☐ New ☐ Old ☐ Scarred ☐ Swelling ☐ Bruised ☐ Cuts ☐ Scratches ☐ Bite Mark(s) ☐ Bleeding ☐ Loose Hair ☐ Complaint of Physical Pain ☐ Other: _____
☐ Engaged/Other _____ weeks ☐ Does the suspect know? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ None ☐ Declined ☐ Self - Basic First Aid: _____

MEDICAL TREATMENT ☐ EMS - Personnel ☐ Transported - Hospital ☐ Sought/Will seek own doctor - Physician: _____ Location: _____

Has she ever threatened you if you call the police? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
When you prohibited from making an emergency call for assistance? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
Has she ever harmed/threatened to harm household pets? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
Has she ever hurt you before? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
Was this reported? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
Charges filed? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
Do you want an Emergency Protective Order? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
Current/prior protective orders? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____

LETHALITY SCREENING

1. Has she ever threatened you a weapon? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
2. Has she ever used a weapon against you? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
3. Has she ever threatened to kill you? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
4. Has she ever threatened to kill your children? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
5. Do you think she might try to kill your children? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
6. Does she have a gun? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
7. Can she get a gun easily? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
8. Does she ever try to choke/strangle you or cut off your breathing? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
9. Is she violent or constantly jealous? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
10. Does she control most of your daily activities? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
11. Has she ever forced you to have sex when you did not wish to do so? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
12. Have you ever felt fearful or separated after being together or being married? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
13. Is she jealous? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
14. Has she ever tried to hit themself? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
15. Has she ever threatened suicide? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
16. Do you have a child that is not father's? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
17. Have you ever been beaten by her/him after pregnant? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
18. Does she follow you? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
19. Does she spy on you? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
20. Does she leave threatening messages? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____
21. Is there anything that worries you about your safety? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Describe more: _____

see written statement (if V declined written statement)
NOT MANDATORY VSU RESPONSE

CRIME SCENE OBSERVATIONS (photograph and detail in report)

Photos taken of: ☐ Signs of Disturbance ☐ Clump(s) of Hair ☐ Broken Furniture ☐ Blood ☐ Broken Phone ☐ Hole(s) in Wall ☐ Broken Glass ☐ Children Crying ☐ Weapons ☐ Other: _____

EVIDENCE ☐ Blood ☐ Broken Furniture ☐ Broken Phone ☐ Hole(s) in Wall ☐ Broken Glass ☐ Children Crying ☐ Weapons ☐ Other: _____

SUSPECT DEMANDS ☐ Demand ☐ Apologizing ☐ Calm ☐ Crying ☐ Fearful ☐ hysterical ☐ Desperate ☐ Physically combative ☐ Other: _____

VICTIM ☐ Front ☐ Back ☐ Other: _____

SUSPECT ☐ Front ☐ Back ☐ Other: _____

CRIME SCENE OBSERVATIONS

(photograph and detail in report)

- ☐ Signs of Disturbance
- ☒ Clump(s) of Hair
- ☐ Broken Furniture
- ☐ Blood
- ☐ Broken Phone
- ☐ Hole(s) in Wall
- ☐ Broken Glass
- ☐ Children Crying
- ☐ Weapons
- ☒ Other:
Clothing scattered under carport
V & S verbally arguing

Capture the
Current Event

Capture the
Relationship Dynamics

DON'T GET DISTRACTED

Drugs / Alcohol / Sex

Unless relevant

Victims are not perfect

They may voluntarily participate in “bad behaviors”

For their pleasure

For coping

DON'T GET DISTRACTED

They may INVOLUNTARILY participate
when

They are fearful

They are trying to survive

DON'T JUDGE

Document the scene

Collect evidence

Be thorough & methodical

**They owe you
NOTHING.**

**You owe them EVERY
effort**

COERCIVE CONTROL

A pattern of behavior by an abuser to

DOMINATE, ISOLATE, & INTIMIDATE

an intimate partner

Achieve power through

FEAR

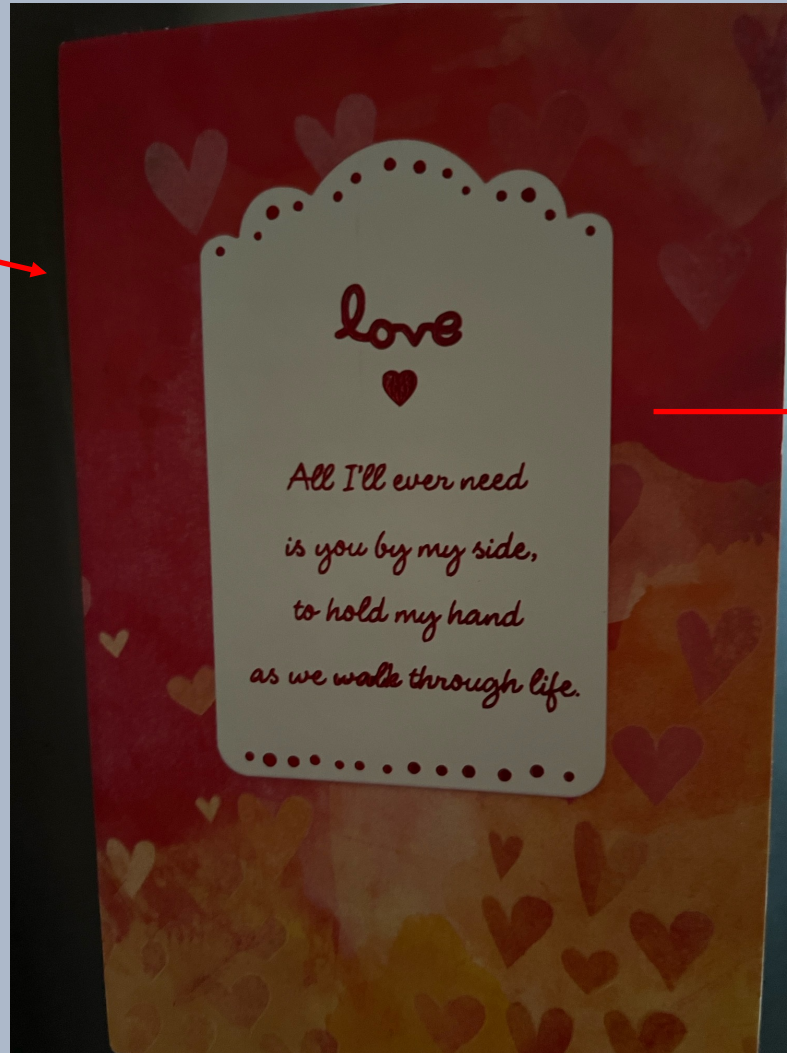
but also through

**CONFUSION, HUMILIATION &
DEPRIVING FREEDOM**

An “invisible cage” that keeps victims trapped,
even when there are no visible bruises.



LOVE BOMBING



Love

All I'll ever need is you
by my side, to hold my
hand as we walk
through life.

To laugh with
me when
things are easy
and encourage
me when times
are hard.

To tell **me** that
either way you'll
always love **me** —
that's all **I'll** ever
need.

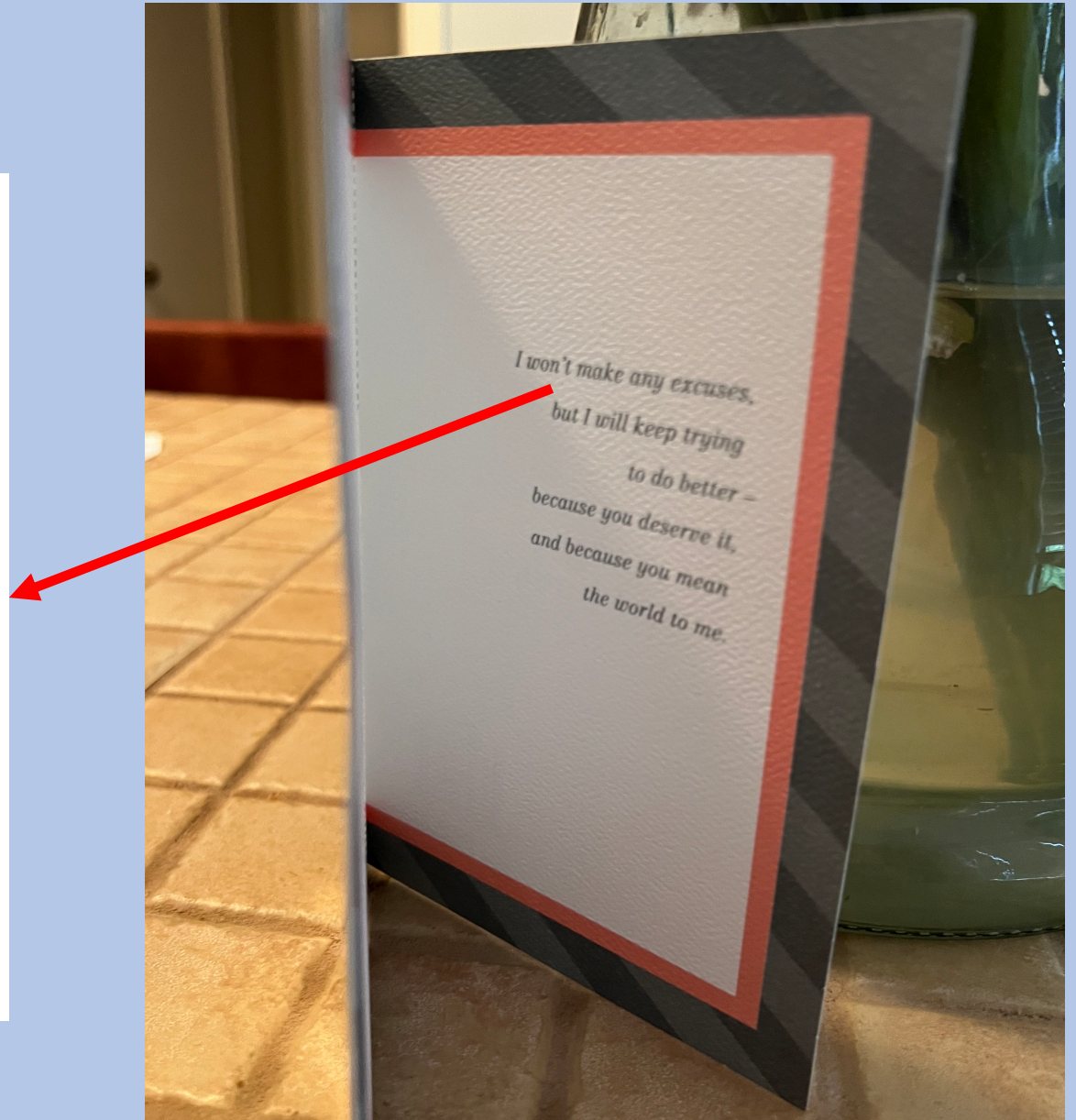


Because
all **I've** ever
needed,
I've found
in you.

APOLOGIES



I won't make any
excuses, but I will
keep trying to do
better – because you
deserve it and
because you mean
the world to me.



PHOTOS

**YOU ONLY GET
ONE CHANCE AT A
FRESH SCENE**

**“FOUR CORNERS”
PHOTOS**

**PHOTOGRAPH
EVIDENCE IN PLACE
BEFORE MOVING**

**PHOTOGRAPH
EVIDENCE IN
CONTEXT**

**RECORD THE
SCENE DOCUMENTATION**

PHOTOS

Wide

Establishing

Room orientation

Entry/exit points

Mid-range

Relationship
between
evidence items

Close Up



INJURIES

Delayed bruising

Progressive photos during healing stages

Alternative light sources

Defensive injuries

Absence of injury

Absence of something could be something



2 days



4 days



6 days



8 days

ELECTRONICS

Look for & identify electronic evidence sources.

Security cameras

Alarm systems

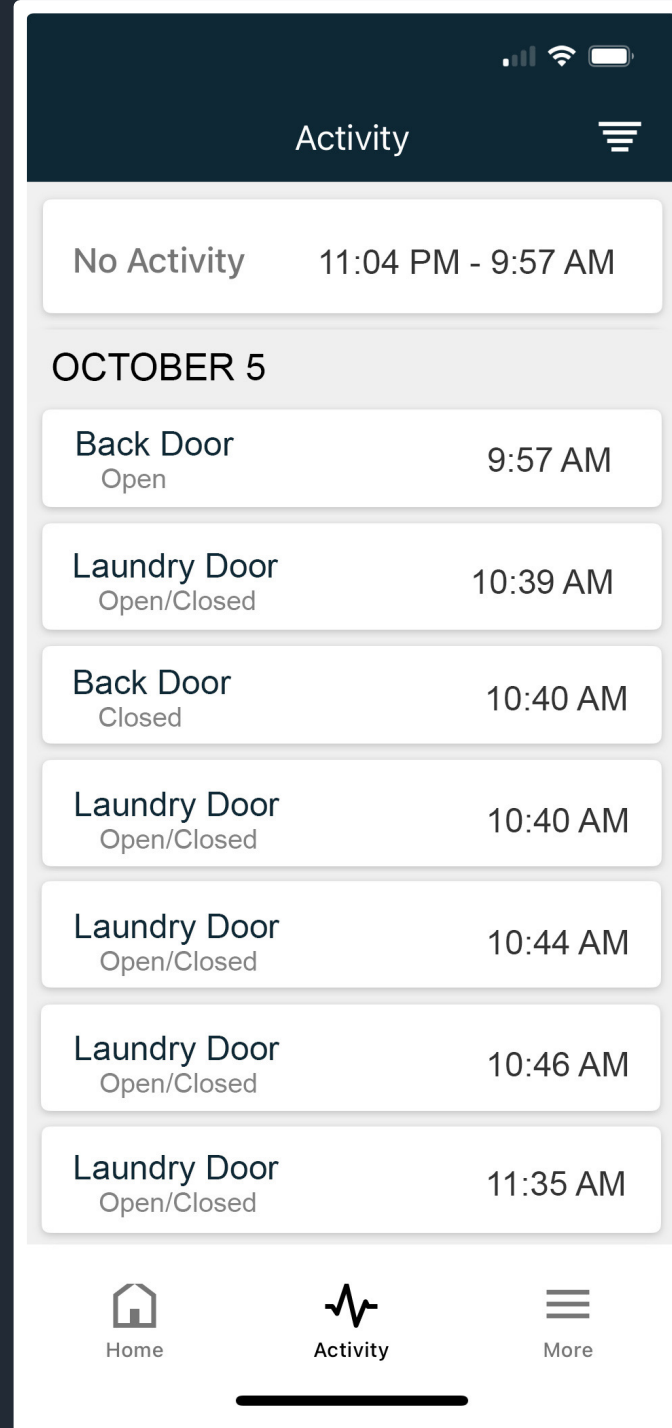
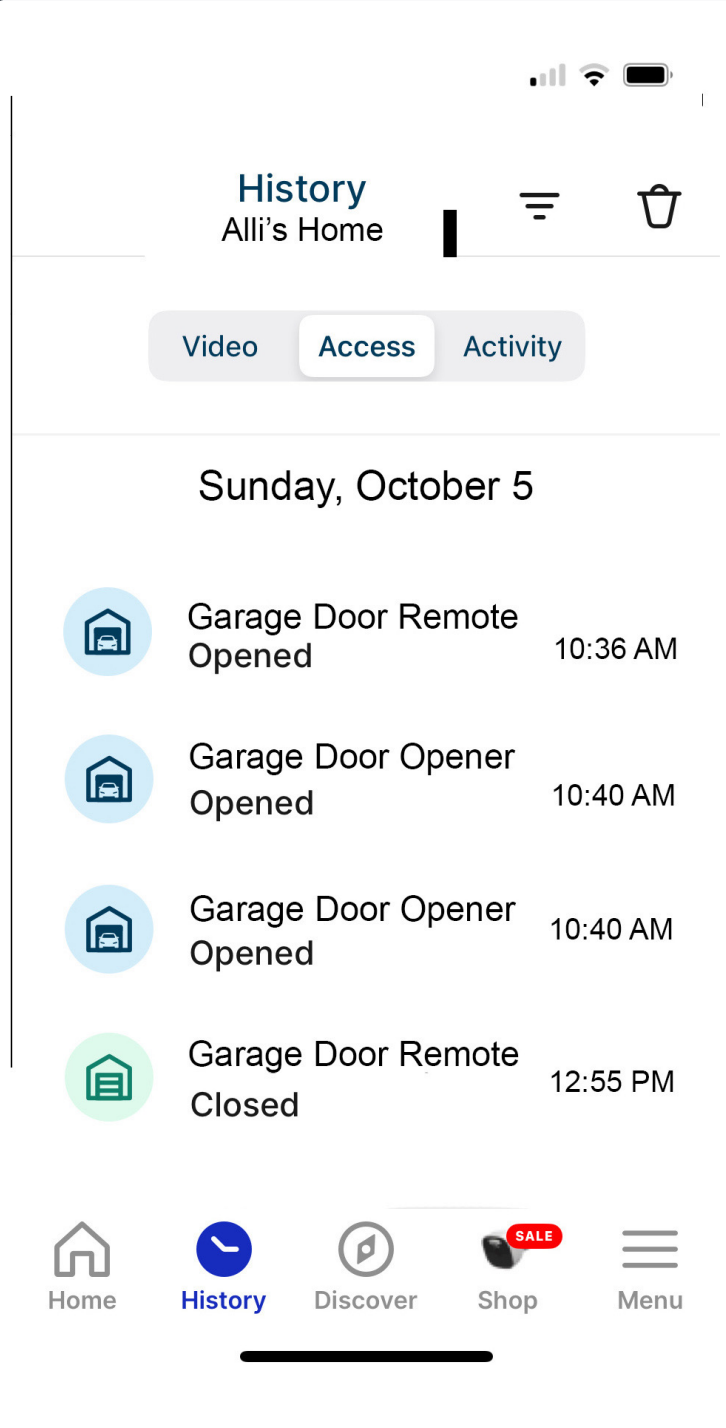
Smart Assistants – Alexa, Google Assist

Other....

ELECTRONICS

- WiFi
- Phones
- Computers/Tablets
- Garage door openers
- Alarm systems

SEARCH.ORG



Collect
app-based
logs.

DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS



**Text
Messages**

Email

**Voice
Messages**

**Social
Media**

**Video
&
Photos**

These give direct insight into the abuse.

They often hold evidentiary value.

BEHAVIORAL EVIDENCE

- Repeated calling
- Monitoring
- Forced Communication
- Harassment Patterns
- Threat escalation

**One piece may not
prove the case.**

**Multiple pieces
may reveal the truth**

**They can tell the story when the survivor
is not in a place to do so.**

**They can support her
when she is!**

Too often...

Verbal disclosures become the entire case.

A survivor's "cooperation" becomes confused with proof.

Investigators stop at "uncooperative".

**A living victim should not reduce
the quality of an investigation.**

We have to work harder...

SURVIVORS DESERVE

SAFETY

**OFFENDER
ACCOUNTABILITY**

Do the best you can
until you know better.
Then when you know better,
do better.

-Maya Angelou

**PLEASE
REACH
OUT**

**If I can ever
assist you.**



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