



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUMMIT

SESSION GUIDE

From Awareness to Action

MIDFLORIDA EVENT CENTER | 8:30 AM-3:30 PM

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS + LEARNING OBJECTIVES

MULTIDISCIPLINARY | LEARNING | SHARED RESPONSE

AT-A-GLANCE SESSION OVERVIEW

9:15-10:30 AM
OPENING KEYNOTE

Beyond the Headlines: Lessons Every Professional Can Learn from the Gabby Petito Case

JIM SCHMIDT

10:45-11:45 AM
ALL-ATTENDEE PLENARY

Seeing What Trauma Hides: Understanding Victim Behavior and Improving Our Response

JIM SCHMIDT

12:30-1:30 PM
LEARNING TRACK 1

From Contact to Courtroom: Recognizing Risk, Documenting Evidence, and Improving Outcomes

JIM SCHMIDT

12:30-1:30 PM
LEARNING TRACK 2

From Recognition to Response: Practical Strategies for Identification & Referral Pathways

MELANIE AFANADOR

1:45-2:45 PM

Survivor Impact Story and Every Link Matters: Building a Coordinated Response That Saves Lives

CLOSING PLENARY

JENNY CARTER + JIM SCHMIDT

Designed for professionals across systems and disciplines

Practical strategies | Shared language | Stronger coordinated response

OPENING KEYNOTE | 9:15-10:30 AM | 75 MINUTES

JIM SCHMIDT

Beyond the Headlines: Lessons Every Professional Can Learn from the Gabby Petito Case

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

All summit attendees, including law enforcement, prosecution, 911/dispatch, fire/EMS, healthcare and mental health professionals, advocates, child welfare and school professionals, and community partners.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

Domestic violence response begins with recognizing what may be visible and what may go unseen. This opening plenary introduces the Unseen Advocates Program and the gaps in awareness, education, and coordinated response it was developed to address.

Participants will explore physical and non-physical abuse, coercive control, power and control dynamics, and the effects of trauma on the brain and body. National and local data, real-world examples, and interactive discussion will frame the impact of domestic violence and the importance of recognizing both visible and non-visible indicators of non-fatal strangulation, including symptoms that may emerge later.

Participants will leave with a shared foundation for recognizing risk and understanding how their professional roles contribute to a compassionate, coordinated response.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

BY THE END OF THIS SESSION, PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

- 1 Explain how the Unseen Advocates Program addresses response gaps and use national and local data to describe the scope and impact of domestic violence.
- 2 Differentiate physical and non-physical forms of abuse, including coercive control and power and control dynamics.
- 3 Describe how trauma affects the brain and body, including victim behavior, memory, and responses during and after an assault.
- 4 Recognize the lethality and warning signs of strangulation, including visible and non-visible symptoms, delayed onset, and behavioral or physiological indicators.



ALL-ATTENDEE PLENARY | 10:45-11:45 AM | 60 MINUTES

JIM SCHMIDT

Seeing What Trauma Hides: Understanding Victim Behavior and Improving Our Response

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

All summit attendees, including law enforcement, prosecution, 911/dispatch, fire/EMS, healthcare and mental health professionals, advocates, child welfare and school professionals, and community partners.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

Recognizing the effects of trauma is only the first step; how a professional responds can influence trust, safety, and continuity of care. Building on the opening session, this plenary turns foundational knowledge into trauma-informed, victim-centered practice.

Through case examples and practical application, participants will explore initial victim contact, scene safety, assessment, documentation, communication, and referrals. The session will connect understanding of victim behavior with approaches that foster trust, minimize re-traumatization, and support empowerment.

Participants will examine how professionals' actions at different points in the response process fit together, including how clear roles, accurate documentation, and effective handoffs connect survivors with medical services, safety planning, and advocacy support. Participants will leave with practical strategies for improving their own responses and strengthening multidisciplinary coordination.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

BY THE END OF THIS SESSION, PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

- 1 Apply trauma-informed, victim-centered communication to foster trust, minimize re-traumatization, and support survivor dignity, safety, and empowerment.
- 2 Assess scene safety and survivor needs, identifying medical, investigative, and support priorities appropriate to their professional role.
- 3 Document victim statements, injuries, and observations accurately to support investigations and ensure continuity of care.
- 4 Describe partner roles and use coordinated referrals and handoffs to connect survivors with local and national resources for safety planning, medical services, and ongoing advocacy support.



CONCURRENT LEARNING TRACK 1 | 12:30-1:30 PM | 60 MINUTES

JIM SCHMIDT

From Contact to Courtroom: Recognizing Risk, Documenting Evidence, and Improving Outcomes

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

Law enforcement, prosecution, fire, emergency medical services (EMS), 911/dispatch, and other first responders.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

A coordinated domestic violence response depends on what each professional recognizes, documents, and communicates to the next person. This discipline-specific breakout applies the Unseen Advocates Program to the practical realities of dispatch, law enforcement, fire/EMS, prosecution, and other first-responder settings.

Using case scenarios, participants will examine coercive control, escalation, non-fatal strangulation indicators, scene safety, trauma-informed communication, and documentation. Discussion will focus on victim statements, injuries, behavioral indicators, scene information, and what can be lost when documentation or handoffs are incomplete.

Participants will consider how information moves from dispatch to responders, fire/EMS to healthcare, law enforcement to prosecution, and first responders to advocates. They will leave with practical strategies to strengthen role clarity, information continuity, referrals, and follow-up across the response process.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

BY THE END OF THIS SESSION, PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

- 1 Recognize domestic violence, coercive control, escalating risk, and non-fatal strangulation indicators while assessing scene-safety, medical, investigative, and victim-support priorities.
- 2 Apply trauma-informed communication and accurate documentation practices to capture victim statements, injuries, behavioral indicators, scene information, and objective observations.
- 3 Identify critical information for referrals, transfers, and multidisciplinary handoffs and distinguish the roles of dispatch, law enforcement, fire/EMS, healthcare, prosecution, and advocacy partners.
- 4 Apply the Unseen Advocates framework to a case scenario to identify missed warning signs, documentation gaps, and opportunities to improve communication, continuity, and follow-up.



CONCURRENT LEARNING TRACK 2 | 12:30-1:30 PM | 60 MINUTES

MELANIE AFANADOR | SAFESPACE

From Recognition to Response: Practical Strategies for Identification & Referral Pathways

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

Healthcare and mental health professionals, advocates, case managers, child welfare/DCF professionals, school social workers, counselors, educators, and community providers who work with children, youth, parents, and families.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

Domestic violence affects far more than an adult survivor's immediate safety. It can shape children's well-being, parenting, relationships, and a family's ability to heal and move forward. Professionals in every setting have an opportunity to offer support before, during, and after a crisis occurs.

This practical session will help participants integrate trauma-informed and empowerment-based approaches into their work. The session will explore how to assess safety and support needs, respond appropriately, and connect families with domestic violence services throughout Florida's 19th Judicial Circuit. Participants will also learn why universal information sharing and education are essential to increasing access to resources.

Participants will leave with practical language, response strategies, safety-planning principles, and referral pathways they can immediately apply in their professional roles.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

BY THE END OF THIS SESSION, PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

- 1 Recognize the effects of domestic violence on children, youth, parenting, family relationships, safety, and resilience.
- 2 Use trauma-informed, empowerment-based strategies to initiate conversations, assess safety and support needs, and respond without judgment or pressure.
- 3 Partner with survivor-parents to strengthen family safety through individualized safety planning, supportive responses, and safe connections to domestic violence programs in the 19th Judicial Circuit.
- 4 Integrate universal domestic violence education and resource sharing into routine client interactions and materials without waiting for a disclosure or visible signs of abuse.



CLOSING PLENARY | 1:45-2:45 PM | 60 MINUTES

JENNY CARTER + JIM SCHMIDT

Survivor Impact Story and Every Link Matters: Building a Coordinated Response That Saves Lives

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

All summit attendees, including agency leaders, law enforcement, prosecution, 911/dispatch, fire/EMS, healthcare and mental health professionals, advocates, child welfare and school professionals, and community partners.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

This closing plenary brings the summit's learning together around a shared goal: a coordinated community response to domestic violence in which partners collaborate, communicate, and understand their roles.

Beginning with Jenny Carter's Survivor Impact Story, the session will connect survivor experience with the ways systems recognize risk, respond, document, refer, and follow through. Participants will examine where gaps between agencies can interrupt safety and support, and how clearly defined responsibilities and coordinated handoffs can strengthen the overall response.

The session will focus on practical next steps for the DV Task Force and its partners, including communication pathways, safe and appropriate information sharing, referral and follow-up responsibilities, and opportunities to improve agency procedures and supervisory support.

Participants will leave with an action to advance with community partners, strengthening coordination, accountability, and ongoing system improvement while keeping survivor dignity, safety, and choice at the center.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

BY THE END OF THIS SESSION, PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

- 1 Identify systemic gaps in domestic violence response and explain how missed connections can affect survivor safety, access to support, and continuity of care.
- 2 Clarify partner roles and responsibilities across dispatch, law enforcement, fire/EMS, healthcare, prosecution, advocacy, and community services, including referrals and follow-up.
- 3 Develop strategies for coordinated communication and handoffs that preserve information continuity while respecting survivor safety, choice, and confidentiality.
- 4 Outline one practical system-improvement action with identified partners, assigned responsibilities, and a follow-up step to support accountability and ongoing collaboration.

FEATURED PRESENTERS

EXPERIENCE ACROSS ADVOCACY, FIRST RESPONSE, TRAINING, AND SYSTEMS CHANGE



Jim Schmidt

National Keynote Speaker | Trainer | Advocate | Board Secretary, Gabby Petito Foundation

Jim Schmidt is a national keynote speaker, trainer, advocate, former fire chief, firefighter/EMT, and emergency services dispatcher. He serves as Secretary and a board member of the Gabby Petito Foundation and is co-owner of JNS Consults LLC. His career spans more than two decades of fire, EMS, dispatch, training, supervision, and emergency-scene leadership. Jim holds specialized training in trauma and resilience, strangulation prevention, crisis intervention, and domestic violence advocacy. He has presented across the country to law enforcement, prosecutors, fire/EMS, healthcare professionals, advocates, and multidisciplinary response teams.



Melanie Afanador

Chief Program Officer | SafeSpace, Inc.

Melanie Afanador is Chief Program Officer at SafeSpace, Inc. She joined SafeSpace in October 2023 as Director of Programs. Since 2007, Melanie has dedicated her career to social change by strengthening domestic violence prevention and response in collaboration with survivors and communities. She has led specialized work to advance survivor-centered systems, safer outcomes, community accountability, and restorative approaches. Melanie is a certified Core Competency Trainer with the Florida Department of Children and Families and has trained child welfare professionals, community agencies, medical practitioners, professional sports teams, and culturally specific audiences. She oversees SafeSpace's hotline, shelter, community-based outreach, intervention and prevention services, and IFP Legal Project.



CLOSING PLENARY SURVIVOR IMPACT SPEAKER

JENNY CARTER