



## Family Violence Centers: Advocacy Role(s)

Family Violence Centers have the primary mission of supporting survivors of family violence and centering their needs, safety concerns, and healing. They can often best raise the survivor's needs on the team. Advocates are also most informed about the dynamics of domestic violence and the services a survivor may choose to utilize. With this in mind, it is a best practice to have the family violence center member lead or co-lead the DVHRT. This ensures that the victim's needs and wishes are centered in DVHRT processes as part of a survivor-centered approach. In addition, the Family Violence Center is in the best position to ensure that a survivor's privacy and confidentiality concerns are at the forefront of the DVHRT work. Privacy and confidentiality can unintentionally be overlooked by other members of the DVHRT or marginalized due to the fluid pace of a high-risk domestic violence case. To learn more about the federal confidentiality provisions of family violence centers, [click here](#). To learn more about Texas' victim-advocate privilege law, please see [Chapter 93 of the Texas Family Code](#).

Advocates should be familiar with local agencies and support and service options for survivors. While the DVHRT supports the survivor through the criminal legal process, the bulk of survivor needs reside outside the criminal legal system. High-risk survivors may have emergency and long-term housing needs, financial concerns, civil legal issues (such as Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement, divorce, etc.), and/or concerns about their children, such as childcare and custody. These concerns are escalated for high-risk survivors because of the lethality of their situations. Advocates' support creates space for survivors to focus on increasing their safety outside the criminal legal system.

Domestic violence advocates also help survivors navigate the criminal legal system and can help other DVHRT members understand how the dynamics of family violence might intersect with decision-making.

### **Roles of a Family Violence Center on a DVHRT include the following:**

- » Serve as the central point of contact for survivors and the DVHRT team members to accept, review, and make decisions on a DVHRT case.
- » Coordinate the efforts and resources on behalf of each survivor in the DVHRT program.
- » Host and participate in all scheduled DVHRT meetings.
- » Use a Risk Assessment with victims of domestic violence to identify high-risk cases, incorporate it into its practice and systems, and ensure that staff are certified in its use.
- » Offer training or referrals to training on domestic violence to other DVHRT members.
- » Offer community-based, non-residential, and residential services, including advocacy, safety planning, shelter, counseling, and legal advocacy.
- » Provide on-going follow-up with high-risk victims and members of the DVHRT.
- » Provide trauma-informed counseling to survivors and their children.