

How to Hold a Virtual Vigil: Site Coordinator's Guidebook

In this year's toolkit you can find instructions for organizing a virtual vigil. You can find instructions for organizing an in-person vigil in the next section. **Do not hold an in-person vigil unless it is safe to do so.**

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Timeline

January

1. Choose a time and online platform (Zoom, Skype, Teams, etc).
2. Create a Facebook event.
3. Divide roles (who will lead advertising, who will speak, etc.).

Early February (First two weeks)

1. Start spreading the word about your vigil.
2. Create flyers and posters or use the templates we provide.
3. Create a press list.
4. Identify speakers and readings for your vigil.
5. Think of any materials you may need and how to get them.
6. Run a test of your software to make sure you know how to use it.

Late February (Last two weeks)

1. Reach out to the press.
2. Advertise.
3. Make sure that you have all your materials and speakers ready.

The final list of names will go out the week before.

March 1st

Before the Vigil

1. Prepare all materials: speakers' remarks, names, etc
2. Post on social media and the event page.
3. Ensure that you are ready for both names and readings.

Choose and confirm a time and online platform

Online events are more accessible to many disabled people, but they can also be inaccessible. [This guide](#) by Rooted in Rights has information about making virtual events more accessible.

Make sure that you have a way for people to contact you to ask for accommodations. For example, saying “If you need any accommodations, please contact: [email].”

It is recommended that vigils have CART (realtime subtitles) and/or ASL interpretation if possible. You would likely need to hire a company that provides transcription and interpretation services. These companies usually charge an hourly rate. You may want to look into budgeting or fundraising to pay for interpreters. [This PADSA guide](#) has advice on fundraising.

We have a \$5,000 fund this year to assist vigil sites to meet requests for CART or ASL interpretation, if the site coordinator or organization cannot otherwise afford to do this. We will reimburse sites on a first-come, first-served basis. If you want to be reimbursed for CART or ASL interpretation for your vigil, make sure to contact us when you get a cost estimate for these services, so we can confirm that funds are still available and reserve some for you.

Platform

An online platform is the software or website that you use to hold the vigil. Some examples are Skype, Zoom, Facebook and Microsoft Teams. You can view different platforms and information about accessibility in [the Rooted in Rights guide](#).

If your group has a platform that they already use for meetings, you can use that platform. If you are using a new platform, you’ll want to do a test run to make sure that this software will work and to learn how to use it.

The Day of Mourning is March 1st and all vigils should take place on March 1st. As a nationwide event coordinated by ASAN, we do this to ensure coordination and social media outreach. It’s also important that media outlets can report that all vigils are occurring on the same day. If you, as Site Coordinator, have a conflict and cannot attend a vigil on March 1st, think about partnering with someone or asking another person to coordinate the actual vigil. **If changing the date is absolutely unavoidable**, contact Haley Outlaw at houtlaw@autisticadvocacy.org to discuss your options.

Use Facebook to announce your vigil

Once you have your time, you can start spreading the word about your vigil.

Begin by making a Facebook event page. Add ASAN as a co-administrator of the Facebook event. You can find instructions on how to do that [here](#).

We recommend that you also require comments to have approval before they are posted. This prevents people from posting hateful or disrespectful things on the event page. Any comment will first be seen by the event coordinator, who can decide whether to delete it or to post it. For instructions on how to restrict comments, look [here](#). If any comments are threatening, please follow our guidance on page 20.

If you have comments that are not threats, but are argumentative and/or disrespectful, you can delete them. You don't have to engage with people on this emotional, distressing topic. If you do want to respond, follow the guidelines and information from [How do we talk about this?](#) and [Frequently Asked Questions about Filicide](#).

Advertise your event

As well as using Facebook to invite people you personally know, reach out to local organizations and ask them to send the link to the event information to their members. You don't need to stick to disability rights organizations – other groups focused on social justice issues, such as LGBT groups, may be willing to help promote the event as well.

If it is safe to go places, you can also create and spread flyers with the time and location of your event. Leave stacks of them with friendly organizations, and post flyers around your area. Email houtlaw@autisticadvocacy.org for a customizable copy of ASAN's template, or feel free to make your own. If your event is online, you can post a digital version of the flyer to social media sites like Facebook or Instagram. Share the Facebook event often. You can also use other forms of social media like Twitter to share information about your event, the Day of Mourning and murders that happen in your community.

Social Media Guide

Here are some example Tweets and Facebook posts that you can use for the 2022 vigils. You may want to share this guide with people attending the event.

You can also look at ASAN's Twitter [@autselfadvocacy](#) or in the Day of Mourning hashtag: [#DDoM2022](#) for tweets that you can retweet. On Facebook, you can share posts from ASAN.

Tweets

2/28

- Tomorrow the disability community will gather across the nation to remember disabled victims of filicide. You can find more info about [\[your organization\]](#)'s [\[pick one: virtual/in-person\]](#) vigil here: [\[your event link\]](#) [#DDoM2022](#)

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- Today is #DDoM2022. Join [your organization] as we honor our dead - find more info here: [your Facebook event link]
- Today is #DDoM2022. Join us as we honor and remember disabled victims of filicide - find a local in-person or virtual vigil at <https://autisticadvocacy.org/2021/12/2022-vigil-sites/>

Not date-specific

- On Disability Day of Morning March 1st, [your organization] will host a vigil to remember people with disabilities who were killed by their family and caretakers. Find more information about honoring their memory here: [your Facebook event link] #DDoM2022
- Join [your organization] this Disability Day of Morning March 1st as we host a vigil to remember people with disabilities who were killed by their family and caretakers. For more information about our [pick one: virtual/in-person] vigil, go here: [your Facebook event link] #DDoM2022
- Join us to commemorate disabled people killed by parents or caregivers - find your #DDoM2022 vigil site <https://autisticadvocacy.org/2021/12/2022-vigil-sites/>
- "I wish I could have known you. I bet you were a beautiful and interesting child." <http://owl.li/Nfds309l7no> #DDoM2022
- "You come from a group of people who have a history of being thrown away." <http://owl.li/9bqc309l7xA> #DDoM2022
- "When we are alive, we have to fight for recognition and in death our lives are cast in stereotypes." <http://owl.li/GaHe309l8fC> #DDoM2022
- When disabled people are murdered and abused, the way we talk about it matters. <http://owl.li/vCe6309l6Fc> #DDoM2022
- "Somebody calls autism a tragedy. Somebody kills an autistic person." <http://owl.li/2kzv309l6P7> #DDoM2022
- "I am not a burden. I need to repeat that, because the opposite is told to me too frequently" <http://owl.li/yD5H309l7Eo> #DDoM2022
- "After I wrote this, another child was murdered. Randle Barrow, drowned by his mother. My heart hurts." <http://owl.li/NnzF309l7JZ> #DDoM2022
- Closing out #DDoM2022 with Laura Hershey's powerful poem, "You Get Proud by Practicing." Let's get proud. <http://owl.li/hLk5309l8PI>

Facebook Posts

2/28

- Tomorrow the disability community will gather across the nation to remember disabled victims of filicide. You can find more info about [your organization]'s [pick one: virtual/in-person] vigil here: [your event link] #DDoM2022

3/1

- Today is #DDoM2022. Join [your organization] as we honor our dead - find more info here: [your event link]

Not date-specific

- Join [your organization] this Disability Day of Morning March 1st as we host a vigil to remember people with disabilities who were killed by their family and caretakers. For more information about our [virtual/in-person] vigil, go here: [your Facebook event link] #DDoM2022
- On Disability Day of Morning March 1st, [your organization] will host a vigil to remember people with disabilities who were killed by their family and caretakers. Find more information about honoring their memory here: [your event link] #DDoM2022
- For the last ten years, we have come together on Disability Day of Mourning to send a clear message that disability is not a justification for violence. We'll be at our local vigils this Tuesday, March 1st – and we hope to see you there. Find your nearest vigil at <https://autisticadvocacy.org/2021/12/2022-vigil-sites/> #DDoM2022
- “You don’t know me. You will never know me. You were murdered when you were three years old. But we have something in common: We are both autistic. Both of us have brains that work differently than usual, perceive and respond to the world differently than usual. I wish I could have known you. I bet you were a beautiful and interesting child.” <http://owl.li/Nfds309l7no> #DDoM2022
- “And I, a woman with Down Syndrome, want to be the first to give you the second bit of news. Yes, you come from people who have a history of being thrown away, but you also come from a group of people who have learned how to survive.” <http://owl.li/9bqc309l7xA> #DDoM2022
- “When we are alive, we have to fight for recognition and in death our lives are cast in stereotypes and clichés that robs us of our innate humanity.” <http://owl.li/GaHe309l8fC> #DDoM2022
- “When journalists call murderers ‘loving and devoted parents,’ when television shows give Robert Latimer airtime, when parents normalize murder by saying that all special-needs parents have murderous thoughts, the result is an environment in which these murders are seen as acceptable.” <http://owl.li/vCe6309l6Fc> #DDoM2022
- “Somebody calls autism a tragedy. Somebody kills an autistic person.” <http://owl.li/2kzv309l6P7> #DDoM2022

- “I am not a burden. I need to repeat that, because the opposite is told to me too frequently, and digs in, and catches hold. I am not a burden.” <http://owl.li/yD5H3o9l7Eo> #DDoM2022
- “After I wrote this, another child was murdered. Randle Barrow, drowned by his mother. My heart hurts.” <http://owl.li/NnzF3o9l7JZ> #DDoM2022
- We close out Disability Day of Mourning with Laura Hershey’s powerful poem, You Get Proud by Practicing. “Remember, you weren’t the one who made you ashamed, but you are the one who can make you proud.” <http://owl.li/hLk53o9l8PI> #DDoM2022

If you receive threatening comments

In the run-up to the 2013 Day of Mourning, some vigil sites received threatening, offensive comments on their pages. The commenter did not show up to any of the vigils, but ASAN's policy is to take threats seriously to ensure our members' safety.

For virtual vigils, it is less likely that there will be threats of physical violence. However, it's important that we take any threats seriously, please follow the instructions below.

If you receive aggressive comments on your page, especially if they mention or allude to physical violence, these are the steps to follow:

1. *Do not* respond to the comment or contact the person who wrote the comment.
2. Take a screen capture of the comment. Screen captures are also called screenshots and screen-caps. How to screencap depends on the type of computer. There are four Wikihow articles for computer operating systems listed below. For other operating systems you might be using, you can Google or search Wikihow for "Screencap + [operating system]" or "Screenshot + [operating system.]"
 - a. **Mac OS:** <https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT201361> or <http://www.wiki-how.com/Take-a-Screenshot-in-Mac-OS-X>
 - b. **Windows PC:** <http://www.wikihow.com/Take-a-Screenshot-in-Micro-soft-Windows>
 - c. **Chrome OS**, runs on Chromebooks: <http://www.wikihow.com/Screenshot-on-Google-Chromebook>
 - d. **Linux:** <http://www.wikihow.com/Take-a-Screenshot-in-Linux>
3. Report the comment to Facebook. This should bring up an option to ban the commenter from the event page. You may have to report the multiple comments from the same person for this to work. If you need help figuring out how to ban the commenter from your event page, contact ASAN.
4. Once you have reported the comment to Facebook, delete it.
5. Get in touch with ASAN and let us know what happened as soon as possible. Include the screencap in an email. We take threats seriously and will have our Legal Director advise.
6. ASAN may advise you to alert the local police that you have received a threat. If this is necessary, call the police department using the non-emergency number to report that an online threat has been made about an upcoming event which will take place on public property. Give them the time and location of the event. Let them know that you have a screen capture of the comment and can email it to them.

Reach out to the press

Getting media presence at your vigil is very important. Our goal is not only to mourn our dead, but to send a message that our lives are equally valuable, and society should treat us as such. We are calling for states to prosecute these murders as aggressively as they prosecute the murders of non-disabled children. We are calling for journalists to write about these murders in a way that respects the victim, not in a way that excuses the murderer. These demands are more powerful if more people know about them. This is why it is **vital to maximize press presence at your vigil**. For virtual vigils, press coverage could look like a reporter writing about the event, or wanting to interview the organizers of the event. If you or someone at your org would like to, you can also write an op-ed to send into local papers.

The first step is to **create a press list**. Look up your local newspapers, radio and TV stations – they should have a “contact us” or “report a news tip” page on their website which will tell you where to send a press release. You can also contact local non-profits and ask them if they have a list of press contacts they would be willing to share with you. This may save you time if your vigil has to be planned quickly. If there has been a murder or attempted murder in your area recently, you should also contact the reporters who wrote articles or reported on TV about the case. Compile the email addresses and phone numbers you find into a list of contact information. This is your press list.

You may want to get in touch with your Mayor and/or District Attorney’s office and invite them to send a representative. If they agree, you should include this in your press release and mention it when you speak with reporters. This will give local media more incentive to attend your vigil.

If you are planning your vigil for more than two weeks out, send the first press release to everyone on your press list 1-2 weeks before the event. If your vigil will be sooner, just send the press release as soon as possible. If you do not have time to send individual emails, you can enter every email address on your list into the “BCC” field of a message, and then begin it with a generic salutation such as “To whom it may concern”. If you can, follow up with another email one week before the event, or on a shorter timeline, a few days before. In the few days immediately before your vigil, you should also make some phone calls to the offices of local newspapers and TV stations.

See the next page for a template press release. Please note that this template press release requires customization.

You should use the template from *the current year’s guidebook*, rather than copying and pasting one from a previous year. This is because the statistics included in the press release change each year.

Template Press Release

NOTE: If there has been a recent murder or attempted murder case in your state, or especially in your local area, make sure to include a paragraph on this in your press release.

For Immediate Release

[the date you are sending out the press release]

Local Contact: [your name]

Phone: [phone number where you can be reached during the day]

Email: [your email]

Local Disability Community Commemorates Lives of Disabled Filicide Victims

[YOUR CITY] – As part of a nation-wide Day of Mourning, disability rights advocates in the [your city] area will be holding a virtual vigil on [date] to honor the lives of disabled people murdered by their families and caretakers. **[If this vigil is for a specific incident in your community, replace “As part of a nation-wide Day of Mourning,” with “In memory of [victim]”]**

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN), which tracks these cases, has compiled a list of over 1600 reported murders of people with disabilities by relatives or caregivers over the last 40 years. The total number of killings is likely higher than the amount which are reported in news media. This problem is made worse by irresponsible news coverage which presents these murders as the sympathetic acts of loving and desperate parents, by a justice system which often gives a lighter sentence to a parent who kills a disabled child, and by the dangerous cultural prejudice that says a disabled life is not worth living.

ASAN held the first Day of Mourning in 2012 as a response to the murder of George Hodgins, a 22-year-old autistic man from California, by his mother. ASAN has continued to organize the event each year, partnering with other disability rights groups including Not Dead Yet, the National Council on Independent Living, the Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, ADAPT, and the American Association of People with Disabilities. Day of Mourning is a national event, with 30-40 participating cities each year.

Little public attention is paid to the disabled victims of these violent acts. Media coverage and public discourse about such killings frequently justifies them as “understandable” and sometimes “merciful,” rather than appropriately condemning these crimes and those who commit them. The national Day of Mourning is a time for the disability community to commemorate the many lives cut short. By honoring disabled victims of murder and celebrating the lives that they lived, these vigils send a message that disability is not a justification for violence.

The [your city] vigil will be held online, and begins at [time]. For more information, view the event details: [Facebook event link]. Speakers will be [if you have a list of speakers, put it here, making sure to include job titles if relevant].

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization run by and for autistic people. The Autistic Self Advocacy Network seeks to advance the principles of the disability rights movement with regard to autism. ASAN believes that the goal of autism advocacy should be a world in which autistic people enjoy the same access, rights, and opportunities as all other citizens. We work to empower autistic people across the world to take control of our own lives and the future of our common community, and seek to organize the autistic community to ensure our voices are heard in the national conversation about us. Nothing About Us, Without Us!

Materials

All you really need for a vigil is the list of names and your prepared remarks, but it can be helpful to have additional materials. Some sites make a Powerpoint with names and photographs. A display of photographs of the victims is a good way to honor them as individuals, and many people find it more moving to look at pictures of people who have died, than to hear or read their names. You can find photographs on the Disability Day of Mourning website, <http://disability-memorial.org/>. You can also send out the self-care and next steps handout to attendees, or post it in the Facebook event.

The list of names

Every year, ASAN sends site coordinators the list of names that will be read at the vigil, as well as a file which can be used to print large-sized posters displaying these names. **The names and posters are not sent out until the week before the vigils.** This is because it is likely that we will find out about more murders in the months and weeks leading up to the vigil, and we will want to include those victims' names on the list.

The list includes each victim's name, age, and date of death, as well as how they were killed. After several years of maintaining the list of victims and adding to it through research, the list now has over 1400 names on it. Reading out all these names can be a logistical challenge. You will want to decide in advance how you plan to tackle this. Some options are:

- Read just names, names and ages, or all of the information provided.
- Ask one person, or several volunteers, to read all the names from the list. Having each volunteer read a full page (around 50 names) before switching to a different volunteer can make the reading go more smoothly.
- Pass the list around to everyone at the vigil, asking each person to read a name until the whole list has been read (note: this takes longer than having just a few people read from the list).
- Read the list from start to finish at a specific point in your vigil.
- Divide the list into a few sections and break up the sections with speakers and other readings.
- Use the entries on disability-memorial.org to create a slideshow commemorating the victims.

In addition to the full list, **ASAN will release a list of names added to the Day of Mourning list in the last year.** Because of the way we find out about these murders, we are constantly adding names to the list of people who were killed years or even decades ago. This is why ASAN creates a list of names added to the list in the past year, rather than a list of those murdered in the past year. If we read only

the names of the people who died most recently, some people's names would never be read at all.

The list of names added in the last year is the shortest list organizers can read. If you think that you will not have the capacity to read the full list at your vigil, you can choose to read this list instead.

ASAN will also be sending out a recording of all the names being read (both the full list and the list of names added in the last year), which site coordinators can play at the vigil, rather than having someone at the vigil read the list.

ASAN will also be sending out a recording of all the names being read (both the full list and the list of names added in the last year), which site coordinators can play at the vigil, rather than having someone at the vigil read the list. For virtual vigils, we will also include a video that displays the list as the names are read out loud.

To ensure your vigil goes smoothly, plan for reading the names to take a significant chunk of time. One person reading just the names (as opposed to including age and date) might be able to read the full list in about a half an hour. Passing the list around and reading all the information could take well over an hour. It's okay to factor this into your decision-making about how much information to read aloud and how to logistically manage reading the list.

If you have the capacity to read the full list at your vigil, we encourage you to do so. For some of the people on the list, the vigils may be the only time when their deaths are mourned. We are trying to make sure that their lives are commemorated for years to come - and in some cases, we are the only people who will do that.

What kinds of things to do at a vigil

- It's a good idea for the site coordinator, or someone on your team, to prepare remarks for the event. If you can line up additional speakers in advance, this is even better. The next page has some readings written by members of our community you can read.
- Remember, the purpose of this vigil is to remember disabled people who were killed by their parents or caregivers and to mourn our dead, but also to send a message that our lives are equally valuable, and society should treat us as such. We are calling for states to prosecute these murders as aggressively as they prosecute the murders of non-disabled children. We are calling for journalists to write about these murders in a way that respects the victim, not in a way that excuses the murderer.
- Read the list of names (see above for more information on handling the list)
- Moment of silence
- Invite attendees to speak if they have things to say
- Take pictures or video of your vigil and send them to ASAN
- If friends or family members of people with disabilities who have been killed come to your vigil,

you will want to be very nice to them. They've also come to grieve. You may want to give them the opportunity to speak about their loved one. They may not use perfect language, but unless they are being actively hostile or disruptive, you should give them an opportunity to share without correcting them. It's also possible that they may not want to speak.

Readings

On this Day of Mourning, our community is coming together from all across the country--this year, from all across the globe. After the devastation we've endured all year, we take strength in each other and in our shared community.

At times like these, we can find ourselves speechless. We rely on others to speak the words we may not have. ASAN has collected links to a number of readings you may want to consider using at your vigil. Together, we speak out. Together, we mourn.

Self-Care and Next Steps Handouts

ASAN has made two handouts that you can distribute at the vigil. You can share the file on social media or post them on the Facebook event. One handout outlines self-care steps that people can take after the vigil and the other gives ways that people can take action. If you are printing them out, it may be best to print one on one side of the paper and one on the other.

Next Steps

If you want to take action to prevent filicide and honor victims of filicide, here are some ways you can act in the future.

- **Read the Anti-Filicide Toolkit.** Download it at autisticadvocacy.org/anti-filicide. This toolkit is intended to provide advocates and allies with concrete tools and resources to use in their own communities, including in response to local incidents. The toolkit includes information about how to understand and respond to filicide, frequently asked questions about filicide, and a guidebook for Day of Mourning vigil site coordinators.
- **Connect with ASAN.** You can sign up for national action alert emails from the ASAN website. Go to autisticadvocacy.org/get-involved/newsletter/ to sign up. You can also find a list of our affiliate groups at autisticadvocacy.org/get-involved/affiliate-groups/. If there is an affiliate group near you, you can join them.
- **Educate yourself and others about abuse, domestic violence, hate crimes, and bias against people with disabilities.** Seek out resources on these topics to read and share with others. One resource is ASAN's Autism and Safety Toolkit, which you can find at <http://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/toolkits/safety/>
- **Challenge ableism (anti-disability bias and prejudice) everywhere you see it.** Challenge the idea that it is better to be dead than disabled, that disabled people are a drain on society, that disability means suffering, and that disabled lives are not worth living. Promote inclusion, community integration, and acceptance.
- **Lobby your state legislature to include disability in your state's hate crimes statute, if it is not already.** You can ask your representatives and state government to insure that hate crimes based on disability are punished.

Self-Care

Attending a Day of Mourning vigil can stir strong emotions, and you might not know how to react or what to do afterwards. Here are some things you can do to help process what you're feeling:

- 1. Remember that your feelings are valid, whatever they are.** People experience events in different ways. Just because your experience is different than the person next to you, it doesn't mean either of you is wrong, reacting too much, or reacting too little.
- 2. Listen to your body.** If you need to cry, then cry. If you need to talk to someone, seek someone out who will listen. If you need to go somewhere to be alone for a while, do that.
- 3. Give yourself a break.** Vigils can be incredibly emotionally draining, and it's okay if you can't do things at full capacity for a while afterwards.
- 4. Take time for self-care.**
"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation." -Audre Lorde

What is self-care?

Self care is any intentional actions you take to care for your physical, mental and emotional health. Self-care looks different to everybody. All of these things could be self-care:

- creating art
- sensory and self-regulatory activities
- journaling
- writing blog posts on other things
- interacting with pets or getting support from service/support animals
- watching TV shows and movies
- watching funny videos on the Internet
- taking a nap without setting an alarm
- listening to a new podcast
- punching a pillow
- taking a long shower
- eating comfort foods
- going for a walk
- getting a massage
- coloring
- calling a friend just to say hi
- cuddling a stuffed animal
- writing a letter to somebody
- practicing yoga
- treating yourself to something nice
- taking a bubble bath
- watching a hockey game
- wearing an outfit that makes you feel good
- decluttering your room
- turning off your phone for a day
- swinging on a swingset
- reading your favorite book