

**Grief to guilt**  
*Coping with trauma*

**Persistent parenting**  
*Taking care of children and the story*

**Under attack**  
*How to deal with threats*

# *The Investigative Reporters & Editors Journal*

THIRD QUARTER 2020



## **Pushing the limit:**

When the story  
becomes a heavy  
mental lift



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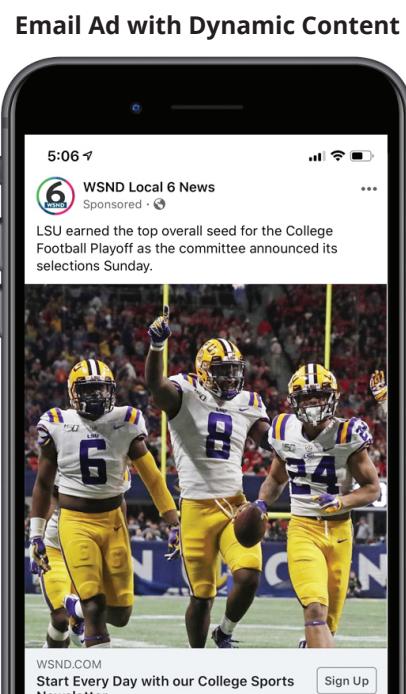
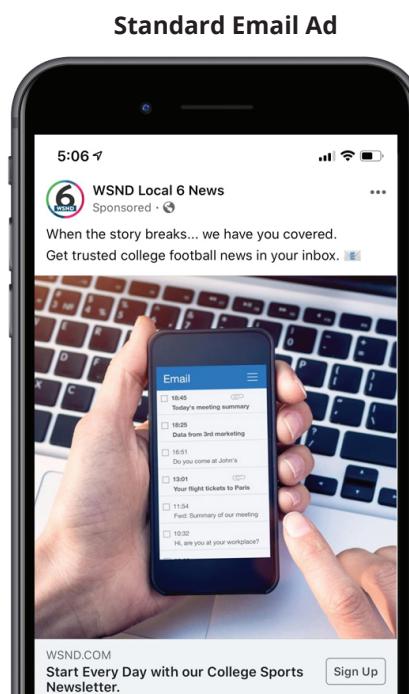
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# IRE Journal

THIRD QUARTER 2020



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**Cover Illustration**  
Avalon Nuovo is an illustrator living in Amsterdam. Her work draws from influences of music, video games, history and nature. Learn more at [avalonnuovo.com](http://avalonnuovo.com).

# Rebuilding IRE training

Imagine a Lego IRE diorama. Thousands of colorful pieces assembled and expanded over the years to capture the life of IRE: people, hotel ballrooms and bars, computer labs, university buildings and newsrooms.

Suddenly, a pack of feral dogs bursts onto the scene, running roughshod over the intricate structure. The parts and pieces remain, but everything's jumbled and scattered. That's what the global pandemic feels like.

The pandemic disrupted IRE's successful business model, which relied heavily on in-person events. After the NICAR conference in March, Team IRE was grounded. No travel, no in-person training and no end date in sight.

But IRE is far from broken or scattered. Five months of reimagining and pivoting have produced a silver lining. Our IRE diorama now has a new wing dedicated to online training. Here's a quick overview:

**#IRE20 virtual conference:** We hope you can join us for our first virtual conference Sept. 21-25. The conference will be more affordable and accessible than ever with reduced registration fees, additional fellowships and no travel costs. An added bonus: The video sessions, tipsheets, slide decks and other training materials will be available for a full year. We're grateful to our #IRE20 conference sponsors for their enduring support. Details: [ire.org/ire20](http://ire.org/ire20).

**Data bootcamps:** Our training team has retooled our popular data bootcamps for online delivery. We have deep-dive training available for spreadsheets, data visualization, SQL, Python and R. Some are mini-bootcamps (two days); others run nearly a week. In addition, we've added a new data bootcamp for college educators, with support from the Lumina Foundation and the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. Details: [bit.ly/ire-bootcamps](http://bit.ly/ire-bootcamps).

**Webinar series:** From late March through June, we produced 15 webinars that attracted more than 7,300 journalists, students and educators. Through generous funding from the Inasmuch Foundation, IRE was able to provide the webinars for free. They remain available at [ire.org/covidwebinars](http://ire.org/covidwebinars).

**NICAR-Learn:** We've added many new videos to our library of on-demand data training. Get one year of access for free: [bit.ly/nicar-learn](http://bit.ly/nicar-learn).

When we make it through to the other side of the pandemic — and we will! — IRE will continue to provide online options after in-person events resume.

Like you, I long to reunite in person with our IRE family. I miss our time together and cherish more than two decades of IRE memories. For our first in-person national conference, I'm already dreaming of some sort of IRE Lego challenge. ♦

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## IRE NEWS

# IRE welcomes 7 journalists to Board of Directors

Two incumbents and five newcomers were elected to the IRE Board of Directors in June. Cheryl W. Thompson of NPR will serve another year as IRE's board president, the full board decided unanimously during a livestreamed video meeting on June 30.

IRE members elected seven candidates to the board, including three Black members, increasing representation to a total of four. In addition, women hold a majority for the second consecutive year on the 13-member board.

The following candidates were elected to the board:

- Jennifer Forsyth, The Wall Street Journal
- Marisa Kwiatkowski, USA TODAY
- Jennifer LaFleur, Investigative Reporting Workshop
- Mark Rochester, Type Investigations
- Kat Stafford, The Associated Press
- Jodi Upton, Syracuse University
- Mark Walker, The New York Times

They join incumbent board members Cheryl W. Thompson, Bethany Barnes, Jodie Fleischer, Cindy Galli, Steven Rich and Brian M. Rosenthal. ♦



Jennifer Forsyth, The Wall Street Journal



Marisa Kwiatkowski, USA TODAY



Jennifer LaFleur, Investigative Reporting Workshop



Mark Rochester, Type Investigations



Kat Stafford, The Associated Press



Jodi Upton, Syracuse University



Mark Walker, The New York Times

## NICAR Course Packs updated for fall

IRE's popular NICAR Course Packs have been fully updated for the latest versions of Excel on PC and Mac, plus a new Google Sheets edition, for use in fall 2020 classes.

NICAR Course Packs contain everything instructors need to teach an introductory data journalism class in spreadsheets. Materials for students

include hands-on exercises, more than 15 real-world datasets and tips to help them learn data skills. In addition, educators receive a teaching guide with instructions for each lesson, plus teaching tips from IRE trainers learned over many years of hands-on training. The course packs cover about two to three weeks of class time.

The Course Packs can be used for classes taught in person, online, or in hybrid formats many colleges are considering during the pandemic.

The updated Excel and new Google Sheets Course Packs are free for instructors and \$20 for students.

Sign up for updates at [bit.ly/newNICARcoursepacks](http://bit.ly/newNICARcoursepacks). ♦

We talked to reporters who work from home to find out the best software and gadgets to get the story.

# Report from home

---

## CALL RECORDING

**Google Voice**  
[voice.google.com](http://voice.google.com)

Free

For Android users, the Google Voice app provides easy call recording with the added benefit of having a built-in “work phone number.” Click the “Calls” tab on your phone, then check the box next to “Call Options.” Now, you can record calls by pressing “4” to record.

---

**TapeACall Pro**  
[tapeacall.com](http://tapeacall.com)

Free basic app,  
get Pro for  
\$20-30

This app records standard phone calls for later transcription. Just call the phone number generated from the app, put the number on hold, then call your source. Once they’re on the line, you can merge the calls to start recording. The app keeps all your recordings, and you can email links or audio files.

## TRANSCRIBING

**Otter.ai**  
[Otter.ai](http://Otter.ai)

Free for three  
recordings,  
then \$9.99 per  
month

This transcription service works well with audio of varying quality and automatically transcribes recording. The transcriptions are editable, time-stamped and can easily be copied and pasted straight from the browser or exported as a text file. Users can also do live transcriptions of meetings. Don’t use Otter for audio file storage, though. While you can still download the audio from the site, the sound quality deteriorates significantly.

---

**Signal**  
[signal.org](http://signal.org)

Free

This messaging app encrypts all your communications with other Signal users, making it more secure. The app provides video and voice chatting, but there isn’t a built-in recording application.

If you’re interested in recording phone calls through a secure app like Signal, you’ll have to use hardware that doesn’t connect to the internet to keep the files secure. Journalist Julia Cardi uses a transmitter to connect her iPhone to her Zoom Recorder for recorded phone calls.

The transmitter and receiver allow the two devices to connect to each other remotely. TV reporters might already have a transmitter like this lying around, but if you don’t, you can use a TRRS adapter to hook into the line-out portion of the recorder. It’s best to get an adapter with a Y split cord so you can still hear the audio output – otherwise, you won’t be able to hear the call.

## Journalists share their favorite tools for remote interviewing

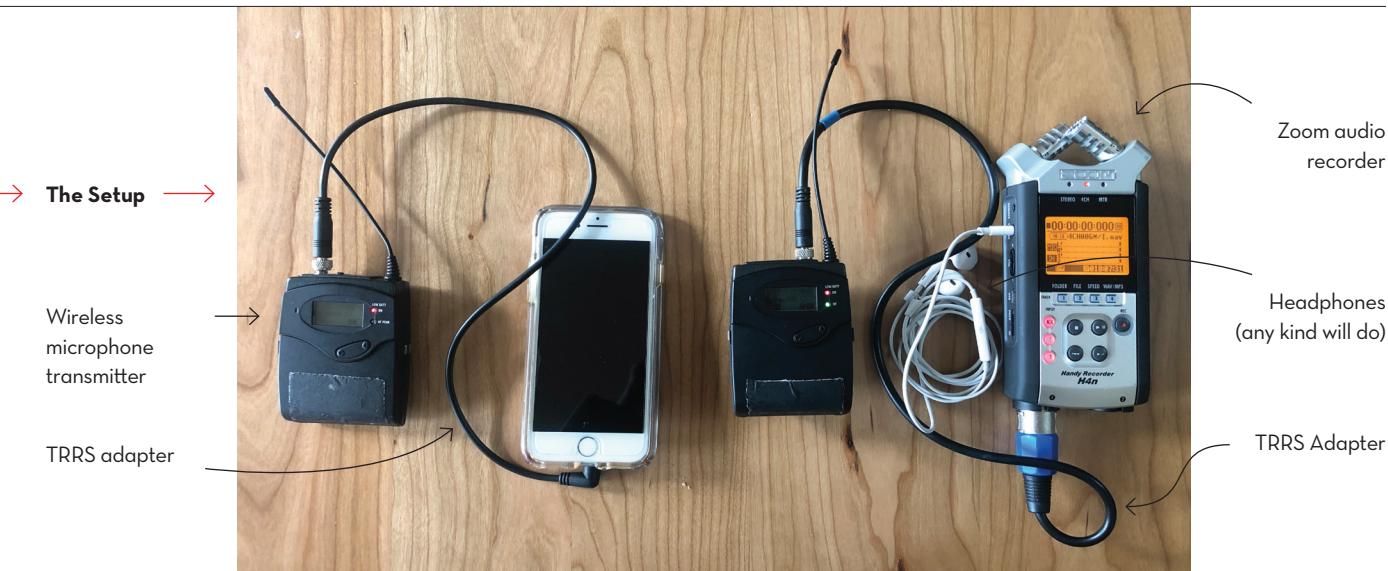
**JULIA CARDI,**  
Law Week Colorado

While working remotely, it can be a challenge to find the right video conferencing app. But **Zoom** (zoom.us) rarely drops calls and has consistently good quality audio as long as all participants are using some sort of external microphone. The company has taken some precautions to prevent hackers from making their way into a call. Zoom now requires passwords for meetings by default, and there's an optional waiting room feature where the host decides to let participants into the call, rather than it being automatic.



**SAMMY GIBBONS**  
Door County Advocate

**Zencast** (zencastr.com) allows simultaneous recording from your computer and your source's computer with separate audio tracks. Whoever hosts the meeting gets copies of both tracks, which makes for easy audio editing after the conversation. The quality of the recording relies on the sound equipment, though users will also need an internet connection. Zencast works well for interviews because you only need one account to have a two-way conversation. It also permits .wav files instead of .mp3 files, along with options for automatic post-production.



# Viral disparities

Reporters take a look at how COVID-19 affects underrepresented communities.

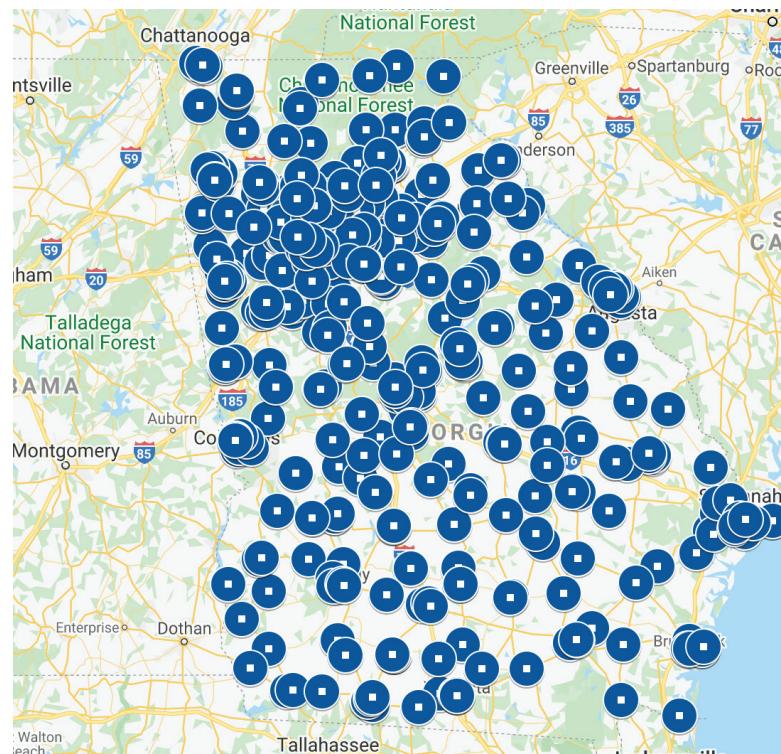
**Beginner Level** Carrie Teegardin and Brad Schrade, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

When Atlanta Journal-Constitution reporters published a year-long investigation into Georgia's assisted living facilities last year, they didn't anticipate a pandemic bringing new urgency to their work. But as COVID-19 made its way into nursing homes and other facilities, their data analysis took on new importance.

As part of their previous work, AJC had compiled ratings and inspection reports for facilities across the state, then flagged facilities with particularly egregious track records. The team built a searchable database from the ground up, where readers could see which facilities were flagged and why.

AJC reporter Brad Schrade said when they began looking into COVID-19's impact on the care homes, some of the same facilities they'd previously flagged were being hit hard by the virus. One facility, Cottage Landing, had an outbreak that left at least 22 residents infected and five dead. It came after AJC flagged the facility for medication errors, breakdowns in training and failure to report abuse to the state.

Audience specialist Pete Corson created a custom Google Map using Google My Maps to show readers which long-term care facilities had reported outbreaks. Google My Maps allows users to give their map a title, description and points.



## Tools

Excel, Google My Maps

## Link

[bit.ly/COVIDGeorgia](http://bit.ly/COVIDGeorgia)

Each facility was pinned as a place on the map, which then gives specific location and contact information about the site. The idea, Schrade said, was to make the data the state releases more user friendly and easier for readers to understand.

They also embedded a simple spreadsheet, updated regularly, with details about each facility's outbreaks: the total number of residents, the number of infected residents, deaths caused by the virus, and the number of infected staff. The sheet also specified the type of facility and its location information.

**Advanced Level** Reis Thebault, Andrew Ba Tran and Vanessa Williams, *The Washington Post*

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread through the United States, it became clear that people with preexisting health conditions were dying at greater rates than their healthy peers. When Washington Post reporter Vanessa Williams heard the news, she immediately thought of Black communities, where higher rates of heart disease, diabetes and other conditions are common.

Williams, along with fellow Washington Post reporters Andrew Ba Tran and Reis Thebault, used R to analyze Census data and determine areas with Black and white plurality populations, respectively. The idea was to use that data to compare population demographics to infection rates across the country.

Part of the story was the lack of recorded information on race. The CDC requires doctors to fill out a COVID-19 case report for patients, which asks about race, but many were leaving those questions blank or incomplete. Not all states and counties report racial data the same way, either. Some health departments only report infections by race, not deaths. Others don't report it at all.

Thebault said the discrepancies in reporting methodologies can be misleading. In Michigan, the state released aggregate numbers without breaking them down by county or city, but included racial data for the state as a whole. Black people accounted for 33 percent of cases and 40 percent of deaths, the team wrote, despite making up 14 percent of the population. The way the data was released made it difficult to know for sure if specific Black commu-

**Tools**  
R, Adobe Illustrator

**Link**  
[bit.ly/  
covid19disparities](http://bit.ly/covid19disparities)

nities were being hit hardest (as in Detroit, which has more than a quarter of the state's cases and is 79 percent Black), or if the racial disparities were the same across the state.

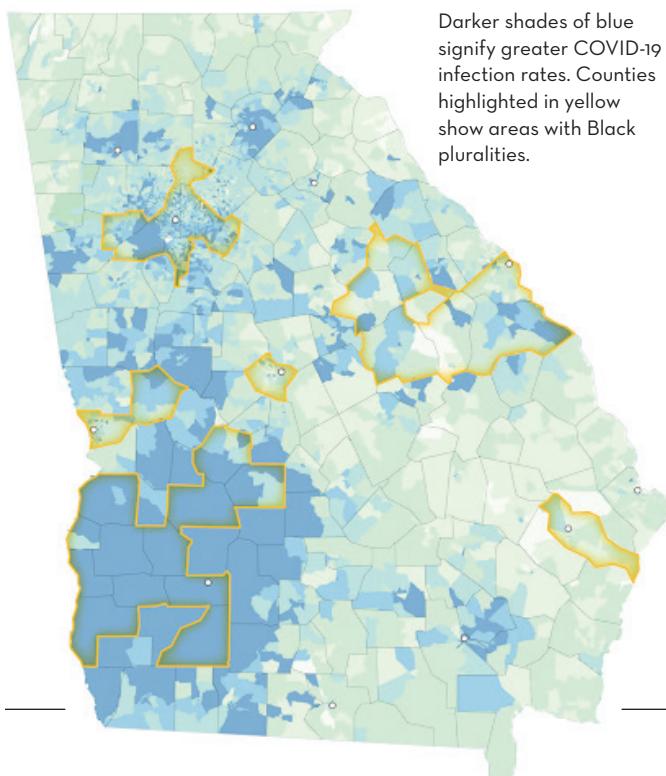
Instead of a problem in the story's construction, the reporters made it a feature, pointing out the lack of available information.

To help fill holes in knowledge, the Post scraped available data from local health departments. The data came in multiple forms — some non-searchable PDFs, some open-data portals, others in tables on health department websites. They built a database by hand, using the data from those sources. They then compared the rates of infection and death in Black and white plurality communities. Their analysis showed that counties with a majority Black population have three times the rate of infection and six times the rate of death.

In a follow-up piece on the racial disparities in Georgia's infection rate, Washington Post cartographer Laris Karklis used Adobe Illustrator to extract census block group data from PDFs released by the Georgia Public Department of Health. Tran then rendered the data in R to look for any geospatial patterns. From there, the team used that data to create a map, where darker shades of blue signified greater infection rates and highlighted the counties with Black pluralities in yellow.

Thebault said the most likely issue reporters will face is a lack of data. If your city or county isn't tracking racial data, ask why — that's a story on its own. If they're tracking it but not releasing the information, Thebault recommends filing records requests to get the data. He said the gold standard is a list of every person who has died after being infected with COVID-19, with columns for name, date of death, hometown, age, gender, race and underlying conditions. If the data shows a racial disparity, dig into the systemic causes. Is there distrust between people of color and medical professionals in your community? Are there resource gaps?

"Another way to get at this is to get cases and deaths by ZIP code or census tract so that you can map the outbreak against demographic data like race, income, etc.," Thebault said.



# Investigating inmate deaths

Every great investigation starts somewhere, whether it's a source tip, data set or information on a form. **CJ-9** forms document inmate deaths in local jails across the country. They're an easy, standardized starting point for more comprehensive and complex stories.

In "Booked and Buried," a collaborative project among the Northwest News Network, Oregon Public Broadcasting and KUOW Public Radio, Conrad Wilson, Ryan Haas, Austin Jenkins, Tony Schick and Sydney Brownstone compiled a database of inmate deaths in Pacific Northwestern jails and reported on startling trends — which neither Oregon nor Washington diligently monitored.

Here is their step-by-step guide on finding stories in the depths of a **CJ-9**.

**Form CJ-9**

**MORTALITY IN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS 2018  
DEATH REPORT ON INMATES  
UNDER JAIL JURISDICTION**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS  
AND ACTING AS COLLECTION AGENT:  
RTI INTERNATIONAL

OMB NO. 1121-0094 Approval Expires 01/31/2019

**FORM COMPLETED BY:**

Russell  
Olive Street  
t  
Zip 97365

Title **Jail Commander**  
Telephone 541 265-0701  
FAX 541 265-4926  
E-mail

**Instructions for Completion**

If no deaths occurred in 2018:  
• You do not need to complete this form.

If you had more than one death in 2018:  
• Make copies of this form for each additional death.  
• Complete the entire form for each inmate death.  
• Once your death records are complete, there are several ways to submit a death report:

ONLINE: Complete the report online at: <https://bjsmci.rti.org>  
E-MAIL: [bjsmci@rti.org](mailto:bjsmci@rti.org)  
FAX (TOLL-FREE): (866) 800-9179

MAIL: RTI International, Attn: Data Capture  
Project # 0215015.001.300.117.102.100  
5265 Capital Boulevard  
Raleigh, NC 27690-1652

If you need assistance, contact the data collection team at RTI International toll-free at (800) 344-1387 or [bjsmci@rti.org](mailto:bjsmci@rti.org).

**What deaths should be reported?**

**INCLUDE** deaths of ALL persons...

- Confined in your jail facilities, whether housed under your own or another jurisdiction
- Under your jurisdiction but housed in special jail facilities (e.g., medical/treatment/release centers, halfway houses, or work farms); or on transfer to treatment facilities
- Under your jurisdiction but out to court
- In transit to or from your facilities while under your jurisdiction

**EXCLUDE** deaths of ALL persons...

- Confined in facilities operated by two or more jurisdictions or those held in privately operated jails
- Under your jurisdiction but in nonresidential community-based programs run by your jails (e.g., electronic monitoring, house arrest, community service, day reporting, work programs)
- Under your jurisdiction but AWOL, escaped, or on long-term transfer to another jurisdiction
- In the process of arrest by your agency, but not yet booked into your jail facility

**BURDEN STATEMENT**

Under the Paperwork Reduction Act, we cannot ask you to respond to a collection of information and completing and reviewing this form. Send comments regarding this burden estimate of any aspect of this survey, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the Director, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 810 Seventh Street, NW, Washington, DC 20531. Do not send your completed form to this address.

**LOCAL JAIL INMATE DEATH REPORT**

1. What was the inmate's name? LAST [ ] FIRST [ ] MI [ ]

2. On what date did the inmate die? MONTH [ ] DAY [ ] YEAR [ ]

3. What was the name and location of the correctional facility involved? Facility Name: Lincoln County Jail Facility City: Newport Facility State: OR

4. What was the inmate's date of birth? MONTH [ ] DAY [ ] YEAR [ ]

5. What was the inmate's sex?  Male  Female

6. Was the inmate of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?  Yes  No

7. In addition, what was the inmate's race? Please select one or more of the following racial categories:  White  Black or African American  American Indian or Alaska Native  Asian  Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander  Some other race  Please Specify

8. On what date was the inmate admitted to a facility under your jurisdiction? MONTH [ ] DAY [ ] YEAR [ ]

9. Was the inmate being confined in your jail facility on behalf of any of the following? PLEASE PROVIDE A RESPONSE FOR EACH ITEM (a-c)

a. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement  YES  NO  DONT KNOW

b. U.S. Marshals Service  YES  NO  DONT KNOW

c. State of federal prison, Bureau of Indian Affairs, or any other jail jurisdiction  YES  NO  DONT KNOW

10. For what offense(s) was the inmate being held?  Unlawful Use of a Weapon  Contempt of Court x 3  Menacing  Possession of a Prohibited Firearm  Endangering a Person Protected by a Fan

11. What was the inmate's legal status at time of death? (For inmates with more than one status, report the status associated with the most serious offense.)  Please Specify

a. Convicted—new court commitment  YES  NO  DONT KNOW

b. Convicted—returned probation/parole violator  YES  NO  DONT KNOW

c. Unconvicted  YES  NO  DONT KNOW

d. Other  YES  NO  DONT KNOW

12. Since admission, did the inmate ever stay overnight in a mental health observation unit or an outside mental health facility?  Yes  No  Don't Know

13. Where did the inmate die?  In a general housing unit within the jail facility or in a general housing unit on jail grounds  In a specialized unit  In a special mental health services unit within the jail facility  In a medical center outside the jail facility  While in transit  Please Specify

14. Are the results of a medical examiner's or coroner's evaluation (such as an autopsy, postmortem exam, or review of medical records) available to establish an official cause of death?  YES  SKIP REMAINING QUESTIONS AND SUBMIT THIS FORM—YOU WILL BE CONTACTED AT A LATER TIME FOR THE CAUSE OF DEATH  NO  Evaluation complete—results are pending  No evaluation is planned → CONTINUE TO Q15

15. What was the cause of death? → Please SPECIFY cause of death—it is critical information  Illness—Exclude AIDS-related Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome [Specify]  YES  NO  DONT KNOW

Accidental alcohol/drug intoxication [Specify]  Accidental injury to self [Specify]  Accidental injury to other (e.g., vehicular accidents during transport) [Specify]  Suicide (e.g., hanging, knife/cutting instrument, intentional drug overdose) [Specify]  Suicide  Suicide [Specify]  Other cause(s) [Specify]  Please Specify

16. In addition (e.g., accident, suicide, or homicide) causing the death take place?  Please Specify

17. In the inmate's place of confinement, did the inmate die in the following areas within the facility?  Please Specify

a. In the inmate's cell  In a temporary holding area  In a segregation area within the facility (e.g., yard, library, cafeteria)  In a special medical unit/inpatient  Elsewhere within the jail facility  Please Specify

b. In the mental health services unit  Please Specify  Elsewhere  Please Specify

18. Was the inmate under the care of a physician?  Yes  No  Don't Know

19. Was the inmate under the care of a physician?  Yes  No  Don't Know

20. Was the inmate under the care of a physician?  Yes  No  Don't Know

21. Was the inmate under the care of a physician?  Yes  No  Don't Know

22. Was the inmate under the care of a physician?  Yes  No  Don't Know

23. Was the inmate under the care of a physician?  Yes  No  Don't Know

24. Was the inmate under the care of a physician?  Yes  No  Don't Know

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# *The myth of “thick skin”*

By **Jeremy Jojola**, 9News Denver

**W**hen I decided to dedicate my life to journalism 24 years ago, I imagined a career full of excitement where I'd be in the front-row seat of history.

Recently, I found myself seated in a therapist's office recounting what I've witnessed and experienced over the last 20 years as a professional reporter.

I still deeply love journalism, but like any relationship, there are hidden caveats. Journalism is an exciting partner, but it can take so much out of you.

Reporters cover many painful events, but as human beings, how can we not experience that pain? We're supposed to have “thick skin,” right?

The death, the mass shootings, threats, the never-ending avalanche of hateful social media messages wore me down and burned me out.

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I can point specifically to May 9, 2019, when I realized my so-called “thick skin” was a myth. That’s the day I broke as a journalist.

That morning started with the best news of my life: My wife announced I was going to be a father. Beaming, I drove to work that morning and back into a somber newsroom that was covering yet another school shooting in our community.

The STEM School Highlands Ranch shooting two days prior prompted painful memories of Columbine for Colorado. Another case in suburbia where two students planned to shoot their classmates at school. One student was killed after rushing one of the shooters.

On the day I broke, I obtained a significant school district memo that was written up months before the STEM shooting. It was a public document that outlined a parent’s complaint that a shooting was bound to happen because of a toxic culture of drug use and bullying. The complaint compelled a school board member to warn the director of the school.

As an investigative reporter, I did what I was expected to do with public records amid a national event. I verified the memo and went on the news to report its contents while providing a reaction from the school (which denied a culture of bullying).

Minutes after my report, the onslaught of angry parent messages, many of them anonymous, began to arrive through my email, voicemail, and Twitter and Facebook accounts.

As a reporter, I’ve been in this seat many times before where an angry crowd unleashes on the messenger. It’s a storm of hateful messages that can include death threats, wishes for my suicide and insults that not only attack me but also my family.

I’ve experienced these storms countless times over my career, from when I covered other mass shootings, high-profile court cases and other incidents that cause community anger.

Add in so many methods of communication in an age of social media, and everywhere you turn as a journalist, there’s an angry note or tweet waiting for you.

I decided to return one phone call that changed me forever.

Angry STEM parents wanted to talk to me about the memo, so I listened to their tongue-lashings for 13 minutes. It was a phone call full of insults and attacks on me and my profession.

Then, they put their teenage daughter on the phone, which I didn’t expect.

As the child cried over the phone and blamed me for her

pain, I fell into a pit of shame. The family hung up, and I was left there at my desk feeling numb.

That night, I went home.

I was supposed to be happy about becoming a father, but instead, I found myself unleashing a flood of tears on the couch with my wife when I mentioned the words “I had this phone call today ...”

I was a mental mess for many months. I constantly played that phone call over and over in my head. I found comfort in alcohol and bad foods. My work suffered.

After talking with a therapist and being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, I’ve learned to accept that I don’t have thick skin. I have human skin. ♦

### Tips for keeping your focus

Journalism school offers no instruction or a course designed to help emerging reporters deal with an angry public. Here are some ways to drown out the noise and focus on what’s really important — getting the story.

**You aren’t obligated to respond to everyone.** Journalists will always be the target of online anger, especially on social media, and you aren’t obligated to respond to everyone. The mute and block buttons are your friends.

**Learn your diagnosis.** I went to a therapist for the first time to talk about my work. She told me I had clear symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

**Keep a journal.** Write down your thoughts, and acknowledge your own humanity.

*Jeremy Jojola is an investigative reporter for 9NEWS (KUSA) in Denver. Jojola was awarded the Don Bolles Medal in 2020 for his coverage of white supremacy in Colorado.*

# *When grief turns to guilt*

By **Silvia Foster-Frau**, San Antonio Express-News

**A**woman approached me on the international bridge between Brownsville and Matamoros, Mexico.

She had brown hair, partially tucked behind her ears, and a small child clinging to her leg. That afternoon, I was interviewing asylum-seekers like her, camped out on the bridge, forced to wait their turn under the latest President Donald Trump administration tactic to curb immigration.

Someone had told her that the U.S. government was separating families.

“It’s not true, is it?” she said, eyes wide. She was looking to me, 25 at the time and nearly half her age, for guidance.

Wind whipped our faces, the Rio Grande flowing below.

“It’s happening to some people,” I said.

In the end, as many as 5,500 families were separated under the Trump administration.

I never found out if it happened to her.

I became an immigration reporter for the San Antonio Express-News in May 2018. That was around the time the Trump administration ramped up its zero-tolerance policy, which separated migrant parents from their children when they crossed the southern border from Mexico into the U.S.

I hit the ground running, traveling frequently to the border, calling immigration lawyers across Texas and visiting rallies and detention centers. I interviewed pregnant women and new moms with no shelter living along the border for months. I saw other migrants in prison uniforms, under the thumb of immigration officials in detention centers. I attended the an-

nual Border Security Expo, where contractors showed off their latest cutting-edge technology to catch migrants.

Becoming an immigration reporter instantly became a test in maintaining my own mental health while covering one of the biggest, most emotionally charged stories in the nation.

Journalists across the globe must grapple with vicarious, or secondhand, trauma and its manifestations. Whether its humanitarian policy shifts, natural disasters or mass shootings, journalists hear, see and absorb stories of trauma. The stories are from different events and in different communities, but the grief's effect is largely the same — it shakes your own sense of security and often, your hope for a world without pain.

Many journalists have been exposed to traumatic events while working, many of them exposed repeatedly, research shows. It's part of our job: We feel our sources' pain, empathize and translate their humanity to paper, while also trying not to get too hurt in the process.

That first year of covering immigration, I wrote dozens of pieces about asylum-seekers — the terrors they fled in their home country, the perils of their journey north and their separation from their children in the United States. Murder, rape, violence and abuse pervaded these stories that were told repeatedly.

I also was getting calls at all hours from detained mothers who had been separated from their children and wanted any kind of outside help. Many thought I was a lawyer, and I had to explain that I could not help their individual case, I could only tell their story and hope people listened.

The more I listened, the guiltier I felt. It is difficult to talk to people with no freedoms while you get to experience and relish in all of yours.

After months of weighty, strenuous work and canceling on friends because of it, I was determined to find frivolity and reaffirm my friendships, so I went on a weekend getaway with two friends.

I remember sitting in the kitchen at an Airbnb, about to hop



BOB OWEN/SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS

on the wine tour we'd planned for weeks when my phone rang for the third time on the first day of the getaway.

My chest tightened because I knew where the call was from. I had genuinely missed the other two calls. But I could answer this one if I wanted to.

My finger slid to the phone and, click, set it to silent.

It's your day off, I told myself. You could've just not heard the phone ring.

"Let's go!" I said, standing up from the table, as if the work I'd been doing for weeks didn't exist.

Was it selfishness or self-preservation to not take that detained mother's call and all the subsequent ones that weekend? I like to think I came back to work recharged and more engaged with the interviews I conducted, the calls I received. But I don't forget that moment, and others like it.

There are scientific theories about secondhand trauma. One boils it down to minuscule clusters of cells in your brain called mirror neurons, which replicate the reactions and emotions of others by only seeing, hearing or reading about them — as if you were experiencing them yourself. The neurons were discovered during a 1996 study, which found that the same segments of the brain that lit up when a monkey ate also lit up when a monkey observed another eat.

Those findings suggest trauma relayed to a journalist is experienced, to a lesser degree, in a neurophysiological and very real way by that journalist.

I have relied heavily on all the support and coping mechanisms I have — my parents, my friends, playing the piano and, well, doing more journalism. I count myself lucky. For many, those support systems are not enough — and not everybody has all of them.

Orlando Sentinel reporter Naseem Miller and I started a Facebook group called "Journalists Covering Trauma" to add one more piece of support to journalists across the country who are thrust into covering tragedies in their communities. The group has grown to more than 800 members, and in addition to offering personal and professional resources for journalists, we have sent care packages to several affected newsrooms throughout the country.

Interestingly, though journalists tend to have been exposed to a high number of traumatic events compared to the average population, many show a strong resilience, according to the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma.

There's one more human phenomenon that those mirror neurons are credited for. I cling to it on days when the guilt and grief of covering another human tragedy are overwhelming, because I know that is what those feelings also represent.

It's empathy.

Worse than feeling the pain of others would be not feeling their pain at all. ♦

*Silvia Foster-Frau is the immigration reporter for the San Antonio Express-News. She is vice president of the San Antonio Association of Hispanic Journalists. A native of Galesburg, Illinois, Foster-Frau graduated from Grinnell College in 2015.*

# Maintain a healthy workspace

By Vicki L. Friedman, independent journalist

More journalists are working from home as COVID-19 continues to alter routines. Whether it's a kitchen table doubling as a desk or an actual home office, the space should be mentally stimulating.

Donald M. Rattner, an architect who wrote the book "My Creative Space: How to Design Your Home to Stimulate Ideas and Spark Innovation," suggests incorporating natural light, color and beauty in a workspace.

"Mental and physical health are thoroughly intertwined, and both are profoundly influenced by our physical surroundings," Rattner said. "What's more, in times like the present, the need to maintain a healthy workspace is doubly critical because of the persistent mental stress we're all experiencing as a result of the pandemic."

Mallorie Sullivan of the Dallas Morning News offered her home office (right) for Rattner's evaluation.

## A

Abundant daylight, views into the distance and glimpses of foliage through a window are beneficial to mental and physical wellbeing.

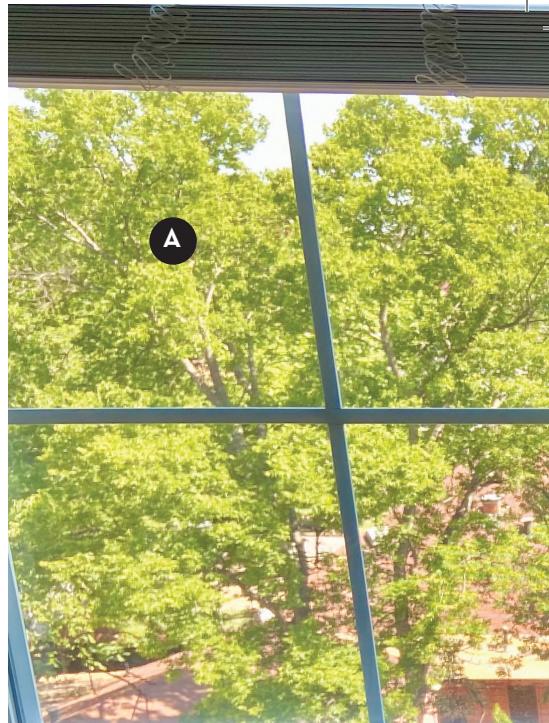
## B

The theme of nature by means of a desk plant compound the restorative effects of natural stimuli and enlarge the sense of space by connecting indoors to out.

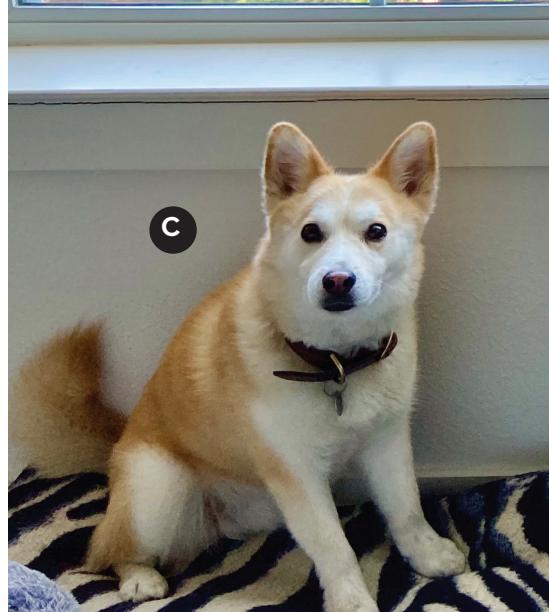
## C

One study found that employees who brought their dogs to work registered lower stress levels, higher levels of job satisfaction and had a more favorable view of their employer than those without canine companions.

A



C



## D

Subtle allusions to organic growth, such as the basket under a desk, with a design that evokes palm fronds or similar plant-based products, can improve our mental state.



MALLORIE SULLIVAN /  
DALLAS MORNING NEWS

E

The color blue lowers blood pressure and instills a sense of calm.

F

Propping up the laptop with an inexpensive stand could stave off back and muscle ailments by discouraging the user from hunching over the keyboard.

G

The optimal height for a desktop computer places the top of screen at or slightly below eye level. Depending on the user's height, it might be necessary to swap out the dictionary underneath to achieve the proper alignment. In any case, picking a book with a different cover color would be a good idea. Red is known to increase heart rate, blood pressure and appetite. Work (and staying slim) are already hard enough.

H

The desk should be turned 90 degrees so that its short side abuts the window wall and the individual faces into the room. This would help eliminate the anxious feelings we sometimes experience when our back is to a space and we can't see who's approaching. It would also reduce the optical strain that comes from looking at a computer placed in front of a window. ♦



**Erica Green, The New York Times**

Over the years, when my daughter has asked about the long days I spent at the office, the nights I missed bedtime, I've said, "Mommy tries to help other kids by writing stories for the newspaper. Thank you for sharing Mommy with other kids."

I've never really distinguished between my role as a journalist and my role as a mother. As a national education reporter at The New York Times, I feel my two children are part of the millions I'm now responsible for.

When the nation's education system began to collapse under the weight of the coronavirus, I felt a sense of responsibility to be on the front-lines for the country's children.

My own kindergartner watched patiently as the journalist in her home consumed her mother. She didn't complain when I went from planning out her days in colorful chalk to not even discussing schoolwork. She didn't complain when I went from hosting "recess" outside to barely leaving my home office.

Children offer the reality check you need, right when you need it. Mine came when my daughter reminded me that my role as a mother and a reporter are, in fact, distinct.

She asked for a playdate, and I found myself invoking the "Thank you for sharing me with other kids," that had gotten me through the mom guilt of her earlier years.

She politely responded, "You're welcome, but can those other kids share you with me, now?"

# Persistent parenting

*Raising humans while reporting*

**Matt Flener, KMBC**

In early May, as shutdown orders remained in effect in Kansas City due to COVID-19, I commented to my kids about not going on a date night with my wife in a while.

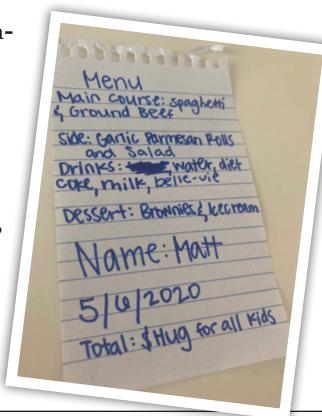
Our kids took it from there.

A few nights later, our kids set up a dinner date in our dining room.

My oldest daughter served as the cook with a menu of spaghetti, salad and brownies.

My youngest two served as waiter and waitress.

They allowed my wife and me to spend a special hour together to talk about life, work and a way forward during COVID-19, and it created a family memory we will always cherish.



## Joey Guerra, Houston Chronicle

Being a full-time parent and a journalist requires multitasking.

It's constantly switching hats, summoning immense patience and learning to juggle, sometimes literally, when you're trying to make lunch and meet a deadline at the same time. It never fails that my son asks me for something to drink five minutes into a phone interview.

The other side of that is he's getting a better understanding of what I truly do.

My job has allowed me the opportunity to include him, most recently when covering a new drive-in theater and a drive-in concert. He was impressed that, in his words, we were "VIP."

Best of all, it's created moments for us to be together. We helped develop a digital storytime series for the Houston Chronicle, reading books



on camera for other kids stuck at home during the pandemic. He's picked a few of his favorites and is a natural on camera.

Be patient. Be present. And, if you can, let them participate. Working from home doesn't always have to mean working alone.

## Emily LeCoz, USA TODAY

The repairman arrived unannounced during the first of two important Zoom meetings. He carried a giant sheet of glass to replace the one my younger son had shattered days earlier running full speed into what he thought was an open door.

"He's lucky he didn't kill himself," the repairman remarked.

I slipped away from my laptop to wave in the repairman, offer him water and excuse myself to return to my meeting — the one whose organizer told participants to remain focused on the call — "no multi-tasking."

Minutes later, I heard the deafening sound of glass shatter. The repairman was knocking out the remaining glass from the slider.

I thought working from home would be fun. I thought I would bond with my children and make them lunches. They would spend their days engaged in online learning while I planned projects and edited stories.

But those plans went south. My children turned feral — surviving on cereal and hotdogs and slacking off at e-school — as my workload increased. I committed to ensuring their survival. But even that was starting to slip.

The repairman was installing new glass when my second Zoom meeting started. I logged on and hit the mute button just in case.



Minutes later, the smoke detector beeped. I dashed from my Zoom call into the kitchen. A pan of bacon caught fire on the stove, and my older son had tried to toss the flaming mess out a window, burning a curtain.

Fortunately, the repairman, a retired firefighter, extinguished the flames. I thanked him profusely.

"It's all right," he said. "He's lucky he didn't kill himself."

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### Denise M. Watson, *The Virginian-Pilot*

A word of advice: Don't panic.

My children are now adults, but one of my parenting mantras was, "Please, God, just don't let my kids end up on Oprah."

I worried that not being home because of covering late-night school board meetings or long days of hurricane coverage would damage my children, and they would end up on a "bad moms" episode of Oprah's daytime show.

I forgot how my job introduced my children to people, places and ideas. I didn't realize that my children were watching as I brought home stacks of books or court documents to study before I wrote a big project. I didn't know they actually listened to me talk about the importance of journalism, knowing your community and knowing your facts.

Now, I see my two adult children being independent, productive citizens. They tweet links to news stories to bolster their rants. They understand the importance of accuracy.

As journalists, I believe one of our drives is to make the world a little better than when we got here. With my 30 years in the business and my two rascals, I feel that I have.



### Marina Trahan Martinez, independent journalist

Wake up, fill diffusers with calming oil blends, nudge teenagers awake, sweep kitchen, cook breakfast, feed teenagers, ensure they're doing schoolwork, log them into Zoom classes, get them outside for sunshine, cook lunch, then dinner, log them into cheer and dance Zoom classes, sweep kitchen, go to bed, repeat.

A typical shelter-in-place day from mid-March until the last days of school in May.

Any hope for an emotional break or time to reflect on the fear coronavirus created was quickly swept away by another outbreak — police brutality of Black lives, which I began covering for *The New York Times*.

There were days when I panic-cried in my SUV before or after another nerve-racking, anxiety-laced trip to buy whatever food and supplies could be found on grocery shelves, not knowing whether the mask-less shopper inching toward me was a coronavirus carrier.

"Why put yourself at risk for protests after being so careful during lockdown?" one friend directly forced me to consider.

Mostly, I felt more protected at protests than at grocery stores. Some shoppers were defying protective orders, and cashiers were somewhat careless.

Protesters were likely just as scared as I was to contract the virus.

My kids seemed confident I did everything to protect them while sheltering, and they seem proud of why I had to emerge.



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### Shaun Courtney, Bloomberg Government

On March 16, many parts of my world changed. Instead of roaming the halls of the U.S. Capitol, I now share an office/bedroom/gym/laundry room with my husband while our preschooler and baby play downstairs.

My older son understands enough of the stay-at-home orders to be afraid but not enough to reconcile that he can't play with his friends or go to the playground.

He started giving us daily news reports, standing in front of his imaginary green screen.

"The coronavirus is spreading. Meanwhile people have been risking their lives from the coronavirus. OK, now let's go to the weather."

My journalism training has helped when my son's feelings become too big for him. When my parenting brain wonders, "What am I doing wrong?" my journalism brain takes over and asks open-ended questions: "How are you feeling right now?" "What is making you feel that way?" "What would help you feel better?"

I use this time to teach my son how to contextualize and provide perspective on the world around him. As a journalist and parent, it's the best I can think to do.



### Ryann Grochowski Jones, ProPublica

Be kind to yourself. Pre-pandemic, juggling full-time work with parenting was already a dicey affair. Now, with no childcare for my 3-year-old daughter, only questionable amounts of screen time and flat-out bribery help me get work done.

A lyric in one of my favorite songs goes "We do what we do to get by." It's been my go-to response when anyone asks, with some concern, how I've handled work and childcare. If your kid feels loved at the end of the day and you were mildly productive, you're doing OK. You do what you do to get by. ♦

# UNDER ATTACK

## HOW TO DEAL WITH THREATS

**A**sense of dread swept through me as soon as I heard the voice. The voice, seared deeply into my mind, belonged to a man who had once threatened to kill me in retaliation for my reporting. Because I knew he had shot and killed a man, supposedly in self-defense, I took him at his word. But, oddly enough, the caller wanted me to investigate someone else — and those subjects, he was convinced, would plot to kill me as well, but he would be on the inside to secretly record them and send them to prison.

Never mind that there seemed to be one potential pitfall with his plan: that the plot actually might work. To him, it seemed like a brilliant idea.

The tip involved a cast of characters who had been the focus of an investigation into corruption inside the Metro Nashville Police Department two decades earlier. One of them had threatened to kill me, while another hired a private firm to investigate me and my family. What followed was a smear campaign using my then-wife's bat-

By  
**Phil Williams,**  
WTVF-TV

tle with alcoholism to try to discredit me, then a well-financed pair of libel lawsuits designed to make my life miserable.

Within weeks, I received another huge tip involving the same people, including allegations about the suicide of a mistress who some suspected was murdered and a police investigation that had stumbled into a sordid tale of sex and judicial corruption.

In my mind, I knew it would be another incredible investigation, a significant addition to my body of work exposing the corruption of Nashville's old guard.

Yet, I was paralyzed.

Huddling with colleagues to plan next steps, I suddenly and inexplicably began fighting back tears. Needing to call sources who were identified in the police files, I sat with phone in hand unable to dial the numbers. Logging onto my computer to examine the police file, I repeatedly turned to Google for answers: "What does a nervous breakdown feel like?"

Years of threats and retaliation had finally caught up with me.

In more recent years, there had been other re-

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## Reporters share how they deal with physical, sexual and cyber harassment

taliatory lawsuits — one of them filed at the very moment I was burying my wife. Another investigation brought bogus accusations that I had made racist comments in calling Black ministers to verify campaign contributions to a local district attorney. Fortunately, I had recorded the interactions and could prove to my bosses that the claims were fabricated. Still, there was a community effort to try to get me fired from the job I loved.

As a result, I was emotionally exhausted. I did not have it in me to take on this cast of characters. I did not have the bandwidth for what might lead to another retaliatory lawsuit.

With the support of WTVF management, it was decided that my well-being was more important than the story. We knew a competitor was working on the same project, so we made a calculated decision to let them take the lead on what would become an award-winning effort.

And, for the first time in my career, I decided to seek help for the emotional trauma that had gripped me.

What I discovered almost immediately after beginning therapy was that I was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and that I had made a serious mistake in failing to recognize the emotional trauma that came with the job. My mantra over the years — “If I don’t do it, who will?” — brought no sense of perspective about how I needed to take care of myself in the face of threats and other forms of retaliation.

In hindsight, I had done a lot of things right.

When faced with death threats, we made a conscious decision to report them, figuring that no sane person would follow through knowing they would become immediate suspects. I installed a security system at home that was visible (with some invisible aspects) to discourage anyone with bad intentions. And, after a custodian warned me that I was being followed as I left work, I learned the fine art of detecting possible surveillance.

What I failed to do was to take care of myself emotionally.

As much as investigative journalists treasure our self-image as good people single-handedly taking on the powerful and the corrupt, I never took time to process what such intense pressure does to the psyche. A retired FBI agent later reminded me of the tagline of an old commercial

for FRAM oil filters: “You can pay me now, or pay me later.”

These days, thanks to a concerted effort to take care of myself and understand my PTSD, I am healthier — and more productive — than I’ve been in years.

But, having learned a painful lesson, I still keep an occasional therapy session on the calendar to make sure I balance out the pressures that come with the career I’ve chosen.

I’d rather pay now than pay later. ♦

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### Steps to safety

Phil Williams shares tips on how to keep yourself and your family safe if you feel threatened

1. Where legally allowed, record conversations with individuals who might be inclined to make threats.
2. Report threats to your audience and police. You do not need to prosecute, but get the threats on record to discourage the individual(s) from following through. Police can offer risk assessments based on the history of the person making the threats.
3. Assess your security at work. Post pictures throughout your newsroom of the person(s) making threats so others can be on guard as well.
4. Evaluate your security at home. Motion-activated video cameras can offer peace of mind to you and your family, as well as discourage individuals from bringing the threats to your doorstep.
5. Talk to a therapist or other mental health professional. You might think you’re perfectly fine, but talking through the events can still bring clarity to the situation — and help you avoid more difficult times down the road.

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# SOURCES AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

**A**few months into my first journalism job, I met a source at a bar. I'd met sources at bars before, including this particular source, who was decades older than me. To my shock, he kissed me. In the moment, I froze and went numb. I extracted myself without commenting on what had happened.

The next day, I woke up, went to the courthouse and did my job. I attended the sentencing for a man who'd bitten off a chunk of his girlfriend's lip. I went back to my tiny, windowless courthouse office, filed the story and sobbed. My editors had no idea anything was wrong.

That night, I called a former professor for advice on the source. She shared similar experiences she'd had reporting, which made me feel better. I asked her if she thought I should tell my editors. No, she advised. It was possible my editors could see me as not tough enough to handle the beat or, worse, decide I had somehow been asking for it.

This advice might sound shocking or bad, but I have never regretted not telling my editors. What I have regretted is a world where sometimes that truly is the best advice.

One male journalist I told about the issue at the time responded, "Why were you at the bar?"

I could have stopped reporting in bars. I could have stopped talking to that source. But those choices felt deeply unfair.

What I decided to do was call the source and tell him his behavior was unacceptable and that I needed him to do better. In this case, that worked.

Back then, I had just graduated and moved for a job to a city where I didn't know a soul — the path so many of us take. That time period was an

By  
**Bethany Barnes**,  
Tampa Bay Times

## ADVICE FOR REPORTERS AND EDITORS

achingly lonely navigation. What should I be doing to avoid a problem? How do you avoid becoming the story and still get the story? What was being scared and what was being cautious? Should behavior be called out? Redirected? Ignored or brushed off? And how did you know which move was the right one?

Later that year, I went to my first IRE conference. I was both vindicated and confused by the number of panels I went to that urged reporters to get sources by meeting them at the bar.

We can't eradicate sexual harassment, but we can reduce the shame and fear of talking about it.

In 2017, as women began posting #MeToo with

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### Handling harassment

Women journalists who have participated in IRE's conference panels on harassment have tips for dealing with unwanted sexual advances.

#### For reporters:

Set the tone early. Too often, the advice we get is to cut off communication with a sexual harasser. You'll find many sources are not repeat offenders, and if you set the tone early, you'll have a good, reliable source of information.

Different sources call for different strategies:

- Does this person seem like they don't understand your role as a reporter? Because you're asking very intimate questions, they might feel a

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*Bethany Barnes is a reporter on the investigations team at the Tampa Bay Times. She came to the Times from The Oregonian, where her coverage of Portland Public Schools prompted the Education Writers Association to name Barnes the nation's best education beat reporter in 2018. Barnes is on the IRE Board of Directors.*

stories of harassment, I anguished over if I should share an experience on social media. I feared I would be viewed by other journalists as biased. Ultimately, I took that risk and posted about an official who'd touched my hair. When I asked him to never do that again, he refused and said, "Red is my favorite color."

That post sparked a conversation with mentor Matt Apuzzo, who reached out to tell me he was proud of me for calling out these issues. I told him about my experience all those years ago at the bar, and he encouraged me to pitch an IRE panel, which I did.

I've learned so much from the journalists who

shared their thoughts: those I spoke to while researching the panel, those who gave their time as panelists, those who shared tips during the Q&A and those who reached out privately in response.

One of the sinister aspects of harassment on the job is how these issues often leave journalists with the fear that they should have handled a moment differently, that there was a right solution they failed to find. But there aren't right or wrong ways to do this. What I've found from talking to others is the best approach is one that matches your style and helps you maintain the power in the dynamic, which is different for everyone. ♦

closeness to you. Explain your role to them. You're here to learn and ask questions. That could be enough to stop the behavior and carry on.

- Are they testing the waters? A single response will tell them all they need to know. Try ignoring the comment or laughing extra loudly. You can also be direct. "No." Another option is to flat out ignore it and steamroll ahead. Whatever your tactic, follow up with a question that brings it back to the reporting. A line Sarah Stillman suggested in

a great video made by DART: "That's not going to work for me." This shifts the problem to being about you, not them (saving them some face) and is clear, direct and easy to remember.

- Is this person a predator? Are they trying to make you uncomfortable, take advantage of you or cross the line? Cut them off. Inform your editor or a trusted person in the newsroom.

**For Editors:**

- Don't dismiss the reporter's experience by trying to reason out or explain what happened as the source being from an older generation. Don't justify the source's actions.

- Be a good listener. A well-intended impulse can be to try and protect a reporter by advising them to cease contact with the source or to offer to call and chew out the person, but often this takes agency away from the reporter. It can be tempting to want to solve the problem, but

reporters need a trusted and patient ear to be a sounding board about what happened.

- Be present. Ask yourself: If one of my reporters were being harassed, would they be comfortable telling me?

*Shoshana Walter of Reveal, who co-planned IRE's harassment panels with Bethany Barnes, helped compile these tips.*

# TARGET OF HATE

KEEPING  
AGGRESSIVE  
MESSAGES IN  
YOUR INBOX AND  
OUT OF YOUR  
MIND

**T**he emails arrive with no indication of the hatred in store.

The one from February, with the subject line “Supply and demand” suggested that I was unpatriotic and should be raped and killed.

Another from April, with the subject line “Coronavirus brings new level of misery to impoverished California trailer park”—an article I wrote out of Riverside County.

“Your incessant empathy for your illegal brethren is nauseating. btw, I notice your ILLEGAL parent(s?) spelt your first name incorrectly, due to their illiteracy.”

In the nearly six years I have worked at the Los Angeles Times, I’ve received more than my fair share of harassing and, at times, threatening

By  
**Brittney Meja**,  
Los Angeles  
Times

emails. Sometimes it’s not even clear what article they’re upset about; other times, I hear complaints about a story I didn’t even write.

I’ve never forgotten an email from my first year at the paper. I wrote about street vendors, and someone reached out and said, “Are these people your family and you just want us to feel sorry for them?”

Because I’m Mexican American, I often get emails like that. And because I’m a woman, more than a few readers will email wishing for me to get raped or calling me derogatory terms. None of this is unique to me. I often hear from women colleagues who are dealing with the same attacks, and they typically brush them off.

I initially brushed off a lot of these emails, not realizing how much they were affecting me. I read some of the emails aloud to my family over



Brittny Mejia @brittny\_mejia

Truly sick of waking up to emails like these. The one from D.J. was sent to me on June 30. The one from Howard came in today. Female journalists have to deal with being attacked not only as journalists, but also for the simple fact that we are women. It's BULLSHIT.

### Tips on how to manage online harassment

**Have a support system.** Despite how commonplace these emails might feel, it's important to talk about the harassment and not downplay it. It's been a huge help for me to have friends — many of them women of color — to whom I can vent, and who understand the toll this can take.

**Don't be afraid of therapy.** I have a therapist whom I trust and who often hears about what I'm dealing with at work, including these messages. She's urged me to share the emails with editors if I'm feeling threatened and also to talk it out with friends, family and colleagues so I'm not just letting it build up and wear me down.

**You don't have to respond.** I've learned that it's fine to ignore people who are more interested in tearing you down than engaging in a meaningful conversation.

**It's OK to be mad.** In July 2018, I tweeted two emails I got and said, "Truly sick of waking up to emails like these ... Female journalists have to deal with being attacked not only as journalists, but also for the simple fact that we are women ..."

More than 300 people shared the tweet, and around 100 people responded. I'm glad I shared because it allowed people a window into what some of us deal with on a regular basis.

Thanksgiving and was somehow surprised when they all looked horrified.

When I wrote any story about the Latino community, I braced myself for the feedback. One person said I couldn't be unbiased "with a Hispanic last name like Mejia." Another accused me of being in the country illegally and then called me "an anchor baby" when I told her I was born in California.

We find ourselves weighing which ones are just people with nothing better to do than terrorize reporters and which emails are actually threats — like the one where someone wrote, "Certainly the events at the Maryland newspaper, though not condoned or approved by me in any way, should be a warning," in reference to the Capital Gazette shooting. I forwarded that email to our lawyer.

It's good practice to have a paper record of emails just in case the threats escalate. It's always good to flag these messages for higher-ups.

A colleague once suggested that I send someone's racist email to their boss. But truthfully, I felt scared that he would get fired and have even more time on his hands to email me or perhaps try and find me. What might seem like an over-reaction to some is a calculation many of us have to make. ♦

*Brittny Mejia is a Metro reporter at the Los Angeles Times, covering breaking news and stories on immigration and race. She has worked at the paper since 2014.*

# Investigating abuse

*Reporters need to take care of themselves  
— and with editors' support*

**P**art of me has always felt that I killed someone. I was a 21-year-old sophomore in college when it happened, skipping as many classes as I could to work at my school paper. I was beginning a story on how the school handled sexual assault when a mutual friend introduced me to A. She was a junior; we were both 21. She was the first survivor I had ever interviewed. She wanted to tell her story.

We sat in the school paper's conference room for an hour. She cried. I stumbled my way through questions. When I walked her out of the windowless maze of an office, I gestured toward the bathroom and asked if she wanted me to get her a tissue.

"No thanks," she said. "I'm fine."

She died by suicide 10 days later.

I thought, however self-absorbed it sounds, that by bringing her traumatic memories to the front of her mind, I'd put her in the mindset to do what she did. And, selfishly, I was petrified of anyone finding out. I envisioned myself on a witness stand with a lawyer asking me if I thought I had somehow contributed to her death.

I would be under oath. I would have to say yes.

I thought I was broken every time I cried after an interview or felt my anxiety rising during one. I felt weak, so I tallied every death I had to write about on the wall of my school paper to show I could take it. I pushed A.'s death away.

I didn't really unpack what happened with A. until last year. I was 26 and had been interviewing survivors of clergy sexual abuse for a year and a half. I stopped sleeping for a week and snuck

By  
**Sarah Smith,**  
Houston  
Chronicle

off at least once per day at work to cry. Part of me thought, after what happened with A., that I deserved to feel horrible. After a few months of therapy, I accepted that it had been her choice to talk to me.

As reporters, we are learning to pay attention to how we interview people who have been through trauma. We explain the reporting process up front. We remind them they have power over when to tell their story and that it's perfectly fine to stop if they feel overwhelmed. We let them pick the venue. We let them ask us questions to get to know us, so they know the person who is responsible for retelling the worst moments of their lives. We listen.

We need to learn how to treat ourselves with the same courtesy and understanding we give our sources. I'm not advocating that we break down in the middle of an interview, but I am saying we need to give ourselves time to process how that interview made us feel.

A few times, I've seen reporters tweet about major depression and suicidal thoughts without any of the usual self-effacing humor. I've seen people talk about how they took mental health leaves. It's still not enough, because the real change has to be in the newsroom.

More of us are reporting on trauma now: chronicling Black death at the hands of police and counting well over 150,000 Americans dead due to the coronavirus. We're isolated from our usual support networks and coping mechanisms. Even so, it's not routine for editors to check in on how their reporters are mentally coping.

As I finished this piece, I saw a tweet quoting a journalism job description. The requirements were "no prima donnas" and to "leave personal

*As reporters, we are learning to pay attention to how we interview people who have been through trauma. We explain the reporting process up front.*

drama at the door.”

Then, set off by parentheses, came this sentence: “None of us are qualified therapists.”

No one is asking an editor to be a qualified therapist. I just ask this: Realize that we can’t leave our emotions “at the door.” We shouldn’t. And if someone could post a job description with a throwaway line that degrades therapy just over a year ago, then we have a long way to go. ♦

*Sarah Smith is a reporter at the Houston Chronicle covering mental health, poverty, housing and homelessness. She’s a Livingston Award finalist and was a Rosalynn Carter Fellow for Mental Health Journalism.*

## Advice on navigating the trauma landscape

By **Miles Moffet**, the Dallas Morning News; **Anjali Kamat**, Reveal/The Center for Investigative Reporting; and **Sarah Smith**, Houston Chronicle

Understanding the psychology of victimization deepens your investigative rigor, builds trust with survivors, broadens your inquiry and allows you to nail down more facts.

### Study up on PTSD and other anxiety orders.

Symptoms can grip victims for years, sometimes decades. Knowledge of flashbacks, hypervigilance and avoidance, for example, helps you explore their experiences in more meaningful detail. Ask what objects, smells or settings trigger their traumatic memories. Explore the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at Columbia University ([bit.ly/dartselfcare](http://bit.ly/dartselfcare)), which is dedicated to informing journalists on ethical and innovative ways to cover violence, conflict and tragedy.

### Build trust using TLC.

- Transparency means informed consent – clearly explaining your reporting process and what to expect.
- Listening means empathic listening – putting down the notebook at times to connect on a human level and sharing common experiences if you’re comfortable doing so.
- Compassion means sensitivity to their emotions and boundaries: Trauma can rob victims of a sense of control. Unlike routine interviews, you’ll give them more control by allowing them to choose interview times and locations, or to bring an advocate or a therapist. You’ll allow them to take as many breaks as they need.

### Think of the first “interview” as a get to know you.

Consider offering to first meet off the record. You can always go back later and ask for strong quotes on the record.

### Be genuine.

In the first real interview, ask your source whether she wants to launch into telling the story herself or respond to your questions. Don’t interrupt.

### Practice self-care.

It’s OK to feel upset, angry and exhausted during and after interviews. Find a support group. Reach out to a Dart Center fellow who’s explored the same territory. Remind yourself this is important work. Pace yourself – set aside personal time when you won’t talk to sources.

If the stress and anxiety turn severe, talk to a therapist. It’s one of the healthiest acts you can take and an exercise in strength to help yourself and others.

# INTENDED HATE

*Staying safe while covering extremist groups*

**I**n October 2017, two months after I covered the aftermath of the deadly extremist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, I flew to Shelbyville, Tennessee, to cover a White Lives Matter rally.

I was looking for extremist factions that I might recognize from Unite the Right, where neo-Nazis and other far-right groups donned a range of uniforms, from preppy khakis and polo shirts to military fatigues and swastikas. In Shelbyville, the vast majority of some 150 neo-Nazis in attendance were of the latter persuasion. But one man stood out to me: He was tall, wearing a cream suit, white shirt and a Pepe the Frog pin on his lapel.

I approached him and asked why he was wearing a suit. He looked at me and said, "As a woman going around out here, you're lucky you don't get raped."

The comment didn't make me feel like I was in immediate danger, but I recognized the man's intent. He was trying to throw me off and make me feel uneasy about doing my job by spotlighting the fact that I was a woman surrounded by men who didn't want me there. For a moment, it worked. I walked off, in a bit of a daze. Later, I looked him up and found that he was a known white supremacist who had advocated for things like "white rape gangs" and blogged about how men should be allowed to "rape, pillage, and plunder."

That's a story I tell when people ask me what it's like on the extremism beat. It's not the most violent or the most terrifying story. Journalists on this beat are threatened and attacked online and in person with sobering regularity. But it touch-

By  
**Tess Owen**,  
VICE News

es on the two issues people tend to ask me about most: my personal safety and the psychological toll of engaging regularly with violent, disturbing people and content.

While plenty of extremists like the one mentioned earlier are willing to threaten you to your face, the majority of targeted harassment happens online, where they can stay anonymous and team up to destabilize you and thwart the journalistic process.

To be clear, I've had it pretty easy as far as online harassment goes. After I publish a story, I'll usually get a wave of poisonous DMs, emails or tweets. I don't engage, but I do monitor in case anything rises to the level of a threat. I've blocked a few repeat harassers on social media, but sometimes I prefer to know the tenor of the harassment in case there is a security issue. The ability to "mute" replies on Twitter is a godsend.

If I were particularly concerned about something, I'd alert our security team at VICE. Freelancers rarely have the same kind of support.

Every now and again I'll search my name on image-board sites like 4chan — a site that was originally a hub for anime fans but today is probably best known for its /pol section, which is a cesspool of racism and hate.

Recently, after I published a story about the armed anti-government extremist "Boogaloo" movement, I got a message from an academic researcher of the far-right who said the so-called "Boogaloo bois" were talking about my story on their private Discord server. They discussed a harassment campaign against me but concluded that my story was bad news for their optics and that harassing me would just make things worse for them.

To date, I've never really had to fear for my personal safety, unlike many other journalists or researchers I know who've been stalked, doxxed and threatened. I'm white, with a white-sounding name, which I think makes me less of a target.

In some instances, friends and colleagues' parents have received menacing calls in the middle of the night. Others have gone into hiding. A Huffington Post reporter was targeted in a sexual harassment campaign by a 72,000-person alt-right Facebook group. An editor for Arizona Jewish Life, a lifestyle magazine, found a flyer for the neo-Nazi group Atomwaffen Division glued to her bedroom window saying "You've been visited by your local Nazis" and was so alarmed that she didn't leave her house for a week.

While harassment is the most obvious toll of the beat, we're also regularly looking at vile, hateful content that doesn't exactly do wonders for one's mental health. The job requires monitoring fringe sites and combing through stomach-turning memes to try to identify patterns that inform my sense of what's happening on the far-right.

Like the rest of us, I try to plan for holidays that would allow a mental and physical break. But sometimes, the need for a break comes when I don't anticipate it. For example, late last year, I investigated the presence of violent neo-Nazi "accelerationists" (who advocate violence to speed up the collapse of society) on the messaging app Telegram. I analyzed 150 of the biggest far-right channels, where users share bomb-making instructions and highly stylized images of war and destruction and trade in vile, racist rhetoric. Writing it made me feel a bit sick at times. Two days after publishing, a neo-Nazi livestreamed his attempted shooting spree near a synagogue in Halle, Germany. On Telegram, he was hailed as a "saint." For the next two weeks, I hit a wall.

But there are ways to combat this kind of mental strain. I'm in a couple of group chats with researchers, and it's nice to have that kind of support network. We've even met up for happy hours — there's a lot of gallows humor at those things. I like to run, and I've recently been trying out the Headspace meditation app, though I haven't gotten very far on it. Also, I have a 7-month old puppy named Dolly — she's done my mental health a world of good. ♦



A man at a White Lives Matter rally in Shelbyville, Tennessee, sports a Pepe the Frog pin on his lapel.

TESS OWEN/VICE NEWS

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### Safety tips from the VICE security team

- Fill out request forms to remove your information from LexisNexis (optout.lexisnexis.com) and other similar services like Spokeo or PiPl. There are some companies that will wipe your information for you for a fee.
- Aim for good separation between professional and personal social media accounts. Personal accounts should be set to private and minimize any publicly available information about your background, location, routines, family and friends, etc. Professional accounts should not include personal information and contacts.
- Use an alternative, encrypted email account to create log-ins if you monitor any fringe social media.
- Rely on a VPN in combination with encrypted forms of communication.
- Consider use of a burner phone or number, and regularly scrub devices of unnecessarily sensitive information.

*Tess Owen is an award-winning senior reporter at VICE News covering extremism and guns. Owen is originally from the U.K. but is currently based in Brooklyn and has worked at VICE since 2015.*

# IDENTIFYING EXTREMISM

*What keeps one journalist coming back, despite the death threats*

**I**nvestigative reporting on right-wing extremists is, in some ways, easier than it used to be. In other ways, it has never been more difficult.

On the upside, there's less resistance from editors on covering such topics, and they give it more attention than when I first arrived in this country seven years ago. The old news business doctrine on coverage of the far-right — ignore them and they will go away — was bound up with a perception that extremist groups had little political influence and little relevance to mainstream politics. Many thought the worst thing we could do was to give these fringe dwellers undue attention.

This was a complacent belief. Events over the last half decade have made it untenable.

Dylann Roof's massacre of nine churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina, began a long sequence of mass shootings around the world motivated by white supremacist ideology. The Malheur occupation in Oregon showed that the so-called Patriot Movement still had an appetite for confrontations with the federal government. The Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, revealed the violence lurking just below the surface of a growing far-right street protest movement, which had been convulsing cities around the country. The apparent murders and hate crimes associated with groups like Atomwaffen Division and The Base showed that some Americans had been radicalized to the point where they were prepared to commit acts of terror in order to realize their dream of a white ethnostate.

The election of Donald Trump, who ran on an explicitly anti-immigrant platform, brought white nationalists into the White House.

By **Jason Wilson**,  
independent  
journalist

The argument has been won by the work of journalists who have exposed the leaders of terrorist cells, captured the violence at street protests, disclosed links between extremists and ostensibly mainstream conservatism, and shown how senior figures in the Trump administration are motivated by some of history's most poisonous ideas.

In doing this work, these journalists have honed new investigative techniques which supplement traditional methods. So-called "open source intelligence" techniques help reporters approach the massive amounts of publicly available data and the digital traces that all of us leave. Open source intelligence can be as simple as the aggressively targeted use of free search engines or taking the trouble to consult the large databases those search engines do not index. More sophisticated techniques can harvest all online pictures of a specific event or locate a criminal actor using an image.

Such techniques have been employed to track the rise and fall of far-right groups and to identify extremist propagandists at high levels of government.

In my work, I was able to use such techniques to identify the leader of the accelerationist terror group, The Base. My investigation progressed from public records requests, to land and company records, to DNS records, to pulling down video from anything-goes social media platforms and internet archives.

True, I drove to Villanova College to procure a picture of Rinaldo Nazzaro from an old college newspaper article. But I was able to conclusively link that photo with Nazzaro's identity by scouring an unauthorized online archive of the Rus-

sian social media platform, Vkontakte, which had swept up since-deleted wedding and vacation photos published by Nazzaro's wife.

As far-right extremists become more security-savvy, journalists will need to continue to hone the skills needed to bring their activities to light. But this is simply a matter of practice, tenacity and wide reading.

The greatest difficulty in this work arises from the fact that simply by covering the far-right, journalists make themselves into a target. The threat comes not just from the most extreme actors, but from a nesting doll of movements which have grown to unprecedented size, and which are more prepared than ever to use violence.

After I wrote a series of reports on Washington state Rep. Matt Shea, which included details of leaked chats where he and his Patriot Movement lieutenants discussed subjecting their perceived enemies to surveillance and violence, Shea posted an article to his Facebook page from an Australian white nationalist website which claimed to show that I was a member of Antifa. Shea posted versions of this falsehood at least four more times and didn't remove death threats posted as comments by followers.

In another instance, the right-wing website Quillette allowed a far-right Internet troll and fraudulent "extremism expert" to publish a junk science article claiming that myself and 14 other journalists on the extremism beat were "cogs in an activist enterprise that churns out pro-Antifa propaganda." It used photos and tweets by Andy Ngo, then a Quillette editor, whose political activities I had previously written about.

Neither I nor the other people named in the piece were contacted for comment prior to publication.

Days later, a video surfaced using iconography associated with accelerationist neo-Nazi

*Jason Wilson is an independent journalist who reports on the political right and extremism, publishing mostly in The Guardian. Born in Australia, he now resides in Oregon.*

groups like Atomwaffen Division, which featured the same journalists' faces and in coded language encouraged viewers to assassinate us. The video made its way to a white supremacist forum site, and for a number of weeks, many of us received a torrent of death threats.

The approach to such threats varies among the reporters I talk to. Reporting every veiled promise of violence to law enforcement would mean that we would do little else. Above a specific threshold of seriousness, however, it is best to create a record. Movements that have inspired people to kill before might do so again. Authorities might not be willing or able to investigate each threat very closely, but they must make note of them.

Beyond that, every reporter must take a certain level of responsibility for their own security. This starts with digital security. VPNs, a privacy-friendly browser like Firefox and some choice extensions, the use of disposable voice over IP numbers or burner phones in professional settings, password managers and two-factor authentication on all accounts constitutes the bare minimum.

It's advisable, also, to have your personal details removed from the galaxy of people-finder sites out there. It's possible to do this yourself, but paying a dedicated privacy service is a wise investment. Investing in a virtual mailbox or another service that offers a street address which can be used in publicly recorded transactions is also wise.

What keeps me coming back to this topic is neither the fun, nor, sad to say, the money. Nor is it any kind of fascination with the culture of this movement, which though appalling, is also drearily monotonous.

It is that whatever extremist movements do to journalists is nothing compared to the violence they have enacted, or planned, on the groups in society they despise: people of color, women, LGBTQ+ people, immigrants and Jews. It is that wing extremists are responsible for an overwhelming majority of the domestic terror attacks in the United States over the last quarter of a century. It is that the recent political climate in the United States has seen the ranks of these groups swell and allowed them to act more boldly.

The fact that the political right, writ large, presents a serious existential threat to press freedom is just one more reason why my colleagues and I will continue ringing the bell. ♦

**“... whatever extremist movements do to journalists is nothing compared to the violence they have enacted, or planned, on the groups in society they despise: people of color, women, LGBTQ+ people, immigrants and Jews.”**

# Avoiding burnout

## *How to keep your internal battery charged*

By **Kim Brice**, Grace and Grit and **Mar Cabra**, Acumen fellow

**I**t was early 2017. I had everything I wanted in my career: a meaningful job, a great team and success. I was 33 years old. I had won a Pulitzer Prize with my colleagues for the Panama Papers, an investigation and the largest data leak in journalism history, which resulted in world leaders resigning, legal reforms and governments recovering more than \$1 billion in unpaid taxes.

None of this mattered, though. I felt empty inside. I had no personal life and would spend the weekends on the sofa, doing nothing. It felt like somebody had unplugged me. My internal battery was empty. A few months after publishing the exposé, I stopped feeling motivated. Not even the Pulitzer Prize was able to pull joy back into me. I felt guilty for feeling so low during such a high point in my life.

I later learned that I had burned out. A bomb had been silently ticking inside of me due to several years of working remotely with little sense of boundaries or self-care and an intensive use of technology to connect 400 journalists around a global investigation. By the end of 2017, I quit my job because I simply could not keep going. I took a gap year. “I’m now jumping into a new project,” I told my ICIJ colleagues in my goodbye email. “A year-long investigation into [my] life.”

Investigating myself has been the most satisfying journey I’ve taken so far. Two and a half years into it, I believe I’m closer to my essence than ever. I am feeling happy and healthy. Don’t get me wrong, I still have bad days. But I now have developed the awareness to know when I’m going over my limits and to avoid or redress the pitfalls that get me into trouble. During this time, one of the great gifts was working with personal development coach, Kim Brice. She was key in helping me reconnect with my purpose and find my path to recovery. Had I known then what she taught me, I might not have had to stop the work I love.

I’m concerned that many journalists find themselves in similar circumstances right now due to this extraordinary period of disruption and uncertainty. The risk of depression, burnout

and other stress-related ailments is a real threat. I would prefer you be spared the hardships I went through.

- *Mar Cabra*

### **Tips from a personal development coach**

All of us are first and foremost a body. We only get one to take us through life. Learning to become more aware of how our body, mind and emotions react to stressful, oppressive or traumatic events is essential to relating to adversities of life in a more skillful way and to understanding our limits.

Our internal energy levels are like a battery’s energy levels: when our electronic devices get low on energy, we recharge them and avoid them running out of energy entirely.

Anita Roelands speaks about four levels of energy in her book about burnout prevention. When our battery is fully recharged, we are in a green zone. We feel vital and healthy, there is less tension in our body; we are more positive, more active and social and better at problem-solving.

When our battery level goes down a notch, we enter the yellow zone. Our bodies tend to hold extra tension. We might get headaches, contract digestive problems, get short-tempered and withdraw from socializing. This is a sign that we are overworked or overwhelmed and need to create regular recovery time to avoid our battery’s danger zones.

When we are overextended, we enter the purple zone. We might be overly anxious, experience a panic attack, hyperventilation or chronic sleep problems. We find it hard to sit still or are too tired to do the things we love. If, at this stage, we are unable or unwilling to change certain habits, we risk the red zone. This is when our battery is empty. \*

- *Kim Brice*

*Kim Brice and Mar Cabra launched a project to help journalists manage stress and digital overload, co-funded by the European Union through the Stars4Media program. You can learn more about the initiative at [www.theselfinvestigation.com](http://www.theselfinvestigation.com).*



TEDXSANFRANCISCO/ ICIJ  
Mar Cabra, longtime journalist and current Acumen fellow, experienced burnout after she won a Pulitzer Prize for the Panama Papers in 2017.

## What can you do now?

### 1. Start a self-investigation.

You are as important as the work you do. Start by investigating yourself.

- Check in with yourself on a daily basis. Accept that it is OK to feel tired, anxious or angry.
- Get to know your yellow zone. Imagine a situation that brought you into the yellow zone. Sense what changes in your body or the rhythm of your breath as you imagine it. Notice if you feel open or shut off from others.
- Think back, what did you do when you were in the yellow zone? Consider what you could you have done differently to bring yourself back to your green zone.

### 2. Identify what gets you into your green zone.

Regular mini breaks help you rebalance your energy. You already engage in activities that make you feel good. Practice them more regularly. After all, we become what we practice.

- Write down six things you do – inside and outside of work – that help you feel most energized and satisfied? Often these are activities that get you out of your head and connected to your senses. Which one could you blend into your day in five minutes and in 30 minutes?
- During what time of day do you have the most energy? What tasks should you be doing during that time? What tasks should you reserve for later?

### 3. Have a clear intention for change.

Personal motivation is what keeps you going as a journalist. Identify what you want to do differently, decide on a deadline and an accountability mechanism. It usually takes two months to adopt a new habit.

- What is one thing you can do differently starting tomorrow? Be concrete.
- How will you remind yourself or be reminded daily? How will you stay accountable to your intention?

# Managing moral outrage to avoid burnout

“What most characterizes the investigative reporter is a sense of outrage,” wrote IRE’s founders. Righteous anger is a double-edged sword; it can drive and enhance performance, but it also can negatively impact mental health.

When moral outrage is chronic, it can take a toll, stressing the body and eroding morale. It can breed excessive distrust of others that can bleed over, negatively affecting relationships with friends, colleagues and family. Over time, if not managed, moral outrage may lead to burnout.

## Here’s how to develop a self-care plan.

**Conduct a self-assessment.** Examine your own experience of outrage. Do you experience indignation? When you feel ire, where do you feel it in your body? How does it affect your mood or performance? When is it helpful? When does it get in your way?

**Define your signature strengths.** Under what conditions are you at your best? What are your best strengths? How can you use these strengths best when dealing with outrage or other work-related stress?

**Remind yourself of the importance of your work.** Individuals who have a clear sense of mission and purpose manage stress better and make better ethical choices. Create a personal mission statement or motto to have at your desk. Alternatively, create a success file to dig out when you are feeling discouraged, exhausted or ineffective. It can contain meaningful compliments

By  
**Elana Newman,**  
Dart Center  
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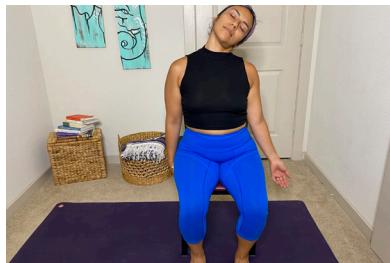
from readers or sources. Perhaps you can begin a list of policy changes or prosecutions that have occurred as a result of your past work to keep in this file.

**Social support is key.** Social support is associated with higher levels of well-being, better coping skills, a healthier life, decreased stress and resilience. When you need support, consider the type of support you are seeking and consider who in your network would be most helpful. Consider ways to mentor, engage or help colleagues regularly as well.

**Take breaks.** Breaks allow your body and mind time to disengage with work tasks and restore resources, which help improve performance. Unwinding can vary in length from micro-breaks between tasks, short work breaks, evenings, weekends or vacations. Even during a crunch time, small breaks are vital. Stretch. Look out the window. Listen to music. Take five deep breaths. Play a distracting game. Call a loved one. Longer breaks in the evening, weekend or holidays should involve activities that replenish, recharge and relax you. ♦

*Elana Newman, Professor of Psychology at the University of Tulsa, is the Research Director for the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma.*

*When you need support, consider the type of support you are seeking and consider who in your network would be most helpful. Consider ways to mentor, engage or help colleagues regularly as well.*



## Bend before you break

How yoga can help manage trauma

By **Leslie Rangel** "The News Yogi," Fox 7 Austin

The nervous system is in "fight or flight" mode when journalists experience stress on the job. When the sympathetic nervous system is triggered, it can become stuck or hung up in fight, flight or freeze, said Dr. Peter Levine, a pioneer in somatic therapy.

The body then responds by holding stress in the somatic tissues.

### Here are a few things to do right now:

**Pranayama.** Close your eyes, or soften your gaze and practice slow breathing, really expanding your belly in an inhale and opening the mouth to exhale anything that's not serving you.

Inhale for one count, hold for one count, release for one count. Repeat the process five times.

**Meditate.** It doesn't have to be sitting. Take a walk and meditate in nature. Look at what makes up the trees, its roots, trunk, branches, leaves and buds. Notice the sounds outside and where they come from. Look at the sky, flowers, people, anything to release your mind.

**Chair Yoga.** For back relief: Sit with your feet planted on the ground, and gently move into cat/cow pose as you hold the sides of your seat. Take 4-7 rounds. Once you're finished, clasp your palms together, roll your shoulders open and lean forward. For neck and shoulder tension: Hold one side of the chair and gently lean the opposite ear to the shoulder as you breathe and hold for 4-7 breaths.

**Yin Yoga.** Restorative legs up the wall: Start by lying down, come to a wall and allow legs to rest against it. This promotes blood flow, stress release and clarity. Hold for five to 10 breaths or longer.

**Reclined Spinal Twist.** Start by lying down. Bring knees into the chest and gently allow them to fall to one side and if it feels good, take eyes and head to the opposite direction of the knees. Arms are out to the sides like a "T" and palms face down. Hold 5-10 breaths and repeat. ♦

*Leslie Rangel is a TV news anchor in Austin, Texas. Outside of news, she's a 500-hour registered yoga teacher specializing in trauma-informed yoga and yoga for journalists, currently studying yoga psychology. You can find her @thenewsyogi on social media.*

# Riot redux

## Debunking assumptions through social science

**A**s armored police closed in, looters hurled rocks and bottles, breaking store windows and setting fires. Hundreds were arrested and injured, some killed. A nation watched horrified during the Detroit riots of 1967, and some pundits blamed disgruntled, uneducated Black people for the revolt.

The riots, more than 50 years ago yet so relevant to today, were much more complex than what white Americans believed, and it took an enterprising journalist applying social science to set the record straight: African Americans from all education and socioeconomic backgrounds were fed up with systematic, institutional racism.

Philip Meyer demonstrated through his Pulitzer-winning work for the Detroit Free Press that journalists could apply sophisticated statistical approaches in collaboration with academics to dispel societal assumptions and go beyond the anecdote.

Meyer, now retired from teaching journalism, founded computer-assisted reporting and new approaches to acquiring and analyzing data. Reporters continue his legacy today.

Robert Gebeloff, a data journalist at The New York Times, said he learned a lot from an IRE statistics bootcamp in North Carolina, taught by Meyer.

“What it taught me was there is some possibility of using data to study what is really going on, and to quantify disparities,” Gebeloff said. “He didn’t make assumptions or rely on talking to three people on the street.”

Here are some tips for finding academic collaborators, acquiring government scientific data and applying sophisticated statistics to analyze it.

### Finding academics

Before embarking on a data project, Gebeloff uses Google Scholar to conduct a literature review, finding studies and researchers who have already explored the topic. He might find a study that looks promising and replicate it in consultation with the original researcher.

“I would never in a million years be able to read through their paper and duplicate it,” he



By **David Cuillier**,  
University of  
Arizona School of  
Journalism

*David Cuillier, Ph.D., is an associate professor at the University of Arizona School of Journalism in Tucson, Arizona, president of the National Freedom of Information Coalition, and co-author, with Charles N. Davis, of “The Art of Access: Strategies for Acquiring Public Records.”*

said. “I talk to them and go back and forth. We don’t need a Ph.D. in statistics. We just need to know who to talk to.”

Another technique is to check the online faculty bios of sociology or political science departments at a research university nearby or within the state, said Paul Overberg, a reporter at The Wall Street Journal.

A university’s news bureau might be able to identify scholars on campus who specialize in the topic. ProfNet ([bit.ly/expertjournalismsources](http://bit.ly/expertjournalismsources)) and The Conversation ([theconversation.com](http://theconversation.com)) also can provide connections. Free keyword-searchable databases available for finding peer-reviewed research include PubMed ([bit.ly/pubmedresearch](http://bit.ly/pubmedresearch)) and SSRN ([bit.ly/ssrnresearch](http://bit.ly/ssrnresearch)). More academic journals are moving to open access online, as well.

### Benefits

Steve Doig, a data journalism professor at Arizona State University, said some academics have funding that can cover research costs, as Meyer had in 1967, or graduate students could be willing to assist.

Some academics will share documents and data they acquire through Freedom of Information Act requests, said Sinduja Rangarajan, senior data journalist for Mother Jones. Journalist-academic collaborations have included tracking COVID-19 fatalities by race, investigating H-1B1 visas, and a school testing project between The New York Times and Stanford University.

Scholars also have access to national datasets that can be localized. Examples include ICPSR, a consortium of 750 institutions based at the University of Michigan, providing 250,000 files involving social science research. American National Election Studies and Roper Center for Public Opinion Research provide decades of public opinion polling and IPUMS archives census microdata.

Once data is in hand, Rangarajan said social scientists can help make sure the analysis is solid, including regression, analysis of variance, structural equation modeling and text analysis. Researchers also can ensure a study is methodologically sound.

Some researchers are happy to work with journalists because they can get their work out to the public, and some federal grants require a public education component.

“There are so many studies on structural racism that debunk a lot of myths and stereotypes,” Rangarajan said. “The easiest thing to do is look at those studies, look at what the researcher did and follow their steps.” •

# Teaching journalism during a pandemic

## Compassion goes a long way in academia

**T**he abrupt move to remote teaching in the spring was not a seamless transition, but I already teach a few journalism courses online, so at least I had done this before.

Most colleges and universities plan to have face-to-face instruction in the fall, but we know a return to remote learning is a possibility. While the best practices for teaching online abound, this is different. Students need and deserve more care and consideration when online instruction is forced upon them. So do faculty.

I keep one student in mind as I consider this. Yunuen Alvarado has taught me how to be better.

In her last semester, Alvarado was just weeks from graduating with a bachelor's degree in journalism when the pandemic forced us online. She was a leader on campus, appointed to the Under-represented Student Advisory Council, the University Star (newspaper) Advisory Board, and the Student Government Supreme Court.

Alvarado is a DACA recipient who worked 20 hours per week to put herself through school. Then COVID-19 changed virtually every aspect of her life. Her undocumented parents lost their jobs. DACA status allowed Alvarado to keep working at an Austin coffee shop, but now she was working up to 60 hours per week, bringing in the only income for her family. She was taking a full load of classes — now delivered remotely, sometimes by faculty unfamiliar with teaching online.

"One of my professors actually increased our workload because she assumed we had more time to do it," Alvarado said. "I was suddenly tasked with keeping afloat my family while being a full-time student in my final semester, and I felt like I was drowning."

One professor was different. Senior Lecturer Jon Zmikly, who had Alvarado in his VR and 360 Video class.

"His kindness helped me tremendously, and after the semester concluded, he emailed me



By **Kym Fox**,  
Texas State  
University

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individually to tell me he was proud of me and my hard work," Alvarado said. "In this moment, his kindness was the thing that really helped me."

Alvarado's sentiments were echoed by other students: It helps when faculty members care. As the semester ended, I reached out to several students by email to ask them how they were doing, personally and in school. I wanted to know how we, the faculty did, from their perspective.

Carrington Tatum, another May 2020 grad, was supposed to have an internship at The Washington Post during the summer until it was canceled due to the pandemic. He would have been our first student to intern at the Post. In the spring, Tatum was a fellow at the Texas Tribune. Like the rest of the Tribune staff, he started working remotely. His classes all went online. He said he needed to be able to work ahead in his classes so he could juggle his fellowship duties.

"It's important to remember that when students are stuck at home, there is an increased burden on self-care activities because the mental load is increased," Tatum said. "This is especially true if students are working as journalists, essential workers that work from home."

While not all of our students work as journalists or even have paid internships, my experience tells me that most do work at least part time and a number work full time in all sorts of jobs from food service to dental hygiene.

At a university like Texas State, with our 38,000 students, this is something faculty need to consider. We are a Hispanic Serving Institution with 54 percent students of color. Almost half of our students are first-generation college students, and 35 percent of our students receive Pell Grants.

These are the students who should become journalists. Alvarado is Latinx, and Tatum is Black. Our newsrooms need more journalists of color, but that won't happen if we don't listen to them.

The journalism students I emailed universally agreed that they preferred what academia calls asynchronous teaching. That's when all the material is posted and students can watch lecture videos, take quizzes and complete assignments on their own at any time of day. But the students also appreciated having a specific time when they could Zoom with their professor and classmates to ask questions and just to check on each other.

The community of a classroom, much like the community of a newsroom, helps us cope in difficult times. ♦

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