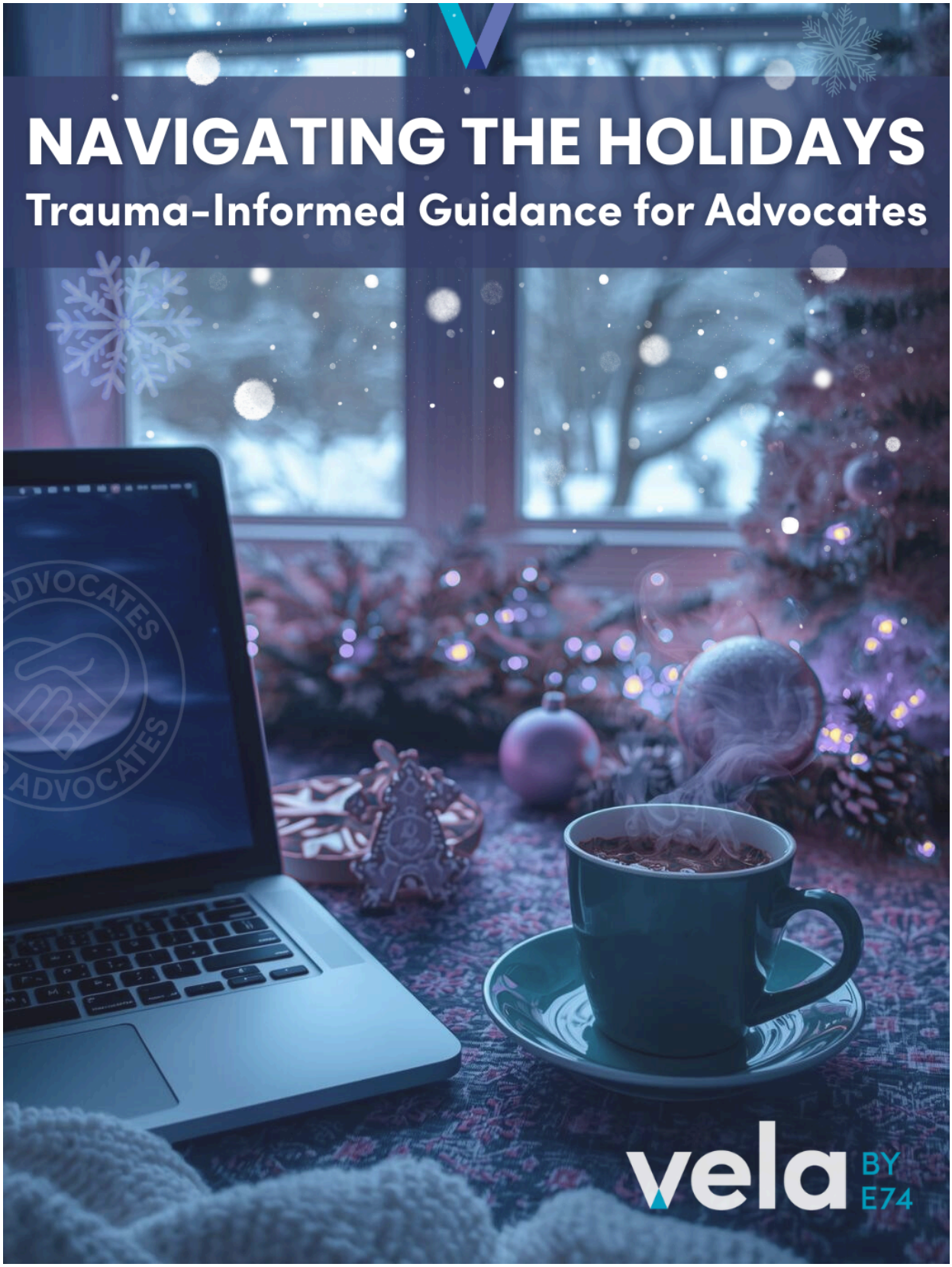
NAVIGATING THE HOLIDAYS
Trauma-Informed Guidance for Advocates
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Trauma-Informed Guidance for Advocates Navigating the Holidays

At Vela, many of us are former advocates, case managers, and direct-service providers. We remember what the holidays really felt like. We recall the long shifts, the sudden crises, and the heaviness that stays after a difficult hotline call.

And we remember this truth: The holiday season is often one of the hardest times to do this work.

Between increases in crisis calls, reduced staffing, complex case dynamics, and your own personal pressures, it's easy for this season to stretch you thin. So we created this resource with one intention in mind:

To support *you,* the people supporting survivors.

Below is trauma-informed, practical guidance designed to help you navigate the holidays with compassion for your clients and care for yourself.

1. Acknowledge That Holiday Stress is Real and Valid

Advocates and caseworkers often feel pressure to "push through" the holiday season.

After all, survivors are facing even bigger challenges, right?

However, minimizing your own stress is *not* a requirement of the job, and it isn't healthy.

A trauma-informed mindset starts with acknowledging that:

- Your body carries the emotional labor of your work.
- Holidays can reactivate your own histories, memories, trauma, or grief.
- You deserve safety, grounding, and care just as much as the people you serve.

Naming your experience is the first step in preventing burnout.

2. Prepare for Increased Emotional Labor

Many advocates notice a shift in client needs around this time of year. Family gatherings, financial strain, isolation, and holiday expectations can escalate risk for survivors. This means:

- More crisis calls
- More safety-planning
- More emotional intensity

Prepare yourself gently:

- Review boundaries early. *What is mine to hold? What is not?*
- Make a small "grounding kit" for your workspace (tea, headphones, a sensory tool, a quote that anchors you)
- Normalize post-shift decompression, even if it's just a five-minute reset in your car before heading home

Small grounding practices done consistently protect you from emotional overload.

3. Protect Your Time Off Without Guilt

Advocates often sacrifice their holidays for others. While this is courageous, it can also be draining.

If you have time off:

- Take it fully (no checking email "just in case").
- Set a handoff plan with coworkers so you're not mentally on call.
- Resist feeling guilty for resting; rest is what allows you to keep showing up.

You cannot pour from an empty cup.

4. Strengthen Your Support Network

A trauma-informed approach includes *community care*, not just self-care.

Consider:

- A quick check-in with a coworker at the start or end of your shift
- Debriefing with a teammate after a tough call
- Creating a shared "holiday encouragement board" or Slack channel
- Asking leadership for structured support: supervision, debriefs, or temporary staffing adjustments

Advocacy can feel isolating, but it isn't meant to be done alone.

5. Use Internal Boundaries to Navigate Holiday-Specific Triggers

You may hear holiday music playing while reading notes about a violent incident. You may be helping a client plan how to get through a family gathering safely while heading to your own.

It's dissonant. It's heavy. And it's normal to feel that tension.

Internal boundaries can help:

- "I am supporting someone through their experience. Their emotions are not mine to hold."
- "This moment is hard, but I am grounded in the present."
- "I can care deeply without absorbing everything."

These boundaries don't make you less compassionate. They make you more sustainable.

6. Celebrate the Small Wins

During a high-stress season, joy can feel distant, but it's needed more than ever.

Celebrate moments like:

- A client feeling safe for the first time in months
- A survivor being heard and believed
- A coworker checking in on you
- You taking a break for yourself when you needed one

Small moments of humanity matter. They carry you.

7. Remember That You Are Not Alone

If you're feeling stretched thin this season, you're not failing. You're human.

Advocacy is heart-work. It is brave work. And it requires support, structure, and compassion for the people doing it.

Vela is here to help create that support. Through better workflows, collaborative tools, and trauma-informed design, we're committed to helping your work feel more sustainable… not just during the holidays, but all year long.

Thank you for showing up. Thank you for caring. Thank you for making safety possible for survivors.

Want to learn new ways to simplify your work or explore features you may not be using yet? Visit veladirect.com or reach out to our team. We're always here to help.

Developed with input from advocates at every stage, Vela by Element 74 is a trauma-informed case management and reporting platform built specifically for domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking organizations.

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