

SAFETY PLANNING GUIDE

FOR

FRONT LINE WORKERS



SAFETY PLANNING

Any social worker or family violence worker who knows about the violence that a woman is facing can help to increase her safety. This section focuses on making a “take home” safety plan. But, you can also help her gain an understanding of her situation, as well as get important safety resources. Remember:

NEVER MINIMIZE A WOMAN’S SAFETY SITUATION

BE AWARE OF RESOURCES FOR BATTERED WOMEN IN YOUR OWN COMMUNITY

MAKE CONTACT AND DEVELOP COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER WOMEN’S ADVOCATES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

RESPECT A WOMAN’S CHOICES - BY BEING BATTERED SHE HAS LOST POWER AND CONTROL, YOU CAN HELP HER REGAIN HER OWN “EMPOWERMENT” BY RESPECTING HER CHOICES

WOMEN MAY LEAVE MANY TIMES BEFORE THEY ARE OUT OF THE RELATIONSHIP PERMANENTLY. THIS IS A CHOICE THAT NEEDS TO BE RESPECTED AND SUPPORTED.

SAFETY PLANS

WHAT IS A SAFETY PLAN?

A safety plan is an individualized plan that women who are abused develop to reduce the risks that they and their children face. These plans include strategies to reduce the risk of physical violence or other harm caused by the abuser. They also include strategies to maintain basic human needs such as income, housing, healthcare, food, child care and education for the children. The particulars of each plan vary depending on the woman's unique situation – whether she is living with the abuser, separated from the abuser, plans to leave the abuser, plans to stay with the abuser as well as what resources are available to her.

It is important to remember that these plans will change as life circumstances change and they should be reviewed and edited when things change to ensure safety.

RISKS

A common image of domestic violence is a woman with a black eye and bruised face. Domestic violence is often seen solely as physical violence. However, physical violence is just one of the tactics used by batterers to control their partners, and therefore, is just one of the risks abused women and their children face. Abusers controlling behavior may also cause risks to the children.

An abused woman will face one set of risks if she stays in the relationship and a different set if she leaves. Leaving a relationship does not guarantee reduction or elimination of a risk. For some abused women, leaving may create new risks or increased risks.

ABUSED WOMEN'S SAFETY PLANNING STRATEGIES

When an abused woman faces violence, she tries to figure out why it happened and how to keep it from happening again. She may develop a number of strategies to reduce or eliminate the risk. She may reach out to family or friends, try to talk with her partner about what happened, seek the help of a shelter or a social worker. These strategies are safety plans although few abused women would call it that. Each abused woman faces different risks and different options. Therefore, each woman's safety plan will be unique.

Abused women use complex safety plans to reduce their risk. Abused women must consider the consequences of pursuing certain options.

Example: If I call the police, they will stop the abuse, but my partner will lose his job and I cannot afford to support the family on my own.

 If I move out his family will harass me and my children.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A SAFETY PLAN

Although every abused woman's risks and plans are unique, there are some common characteristics of most safety plans: They are:

- Safety plans seek to reduce or eliminate the range of risks abused women face, not just physical violence.
- Safety plans include strategies for staying in the relationship and/or leaving the relationship.
- Safety plans include consideration of life-generated risks.
- Safety plans may have short and/or long term timeframes.
- Safety plans will change as a result of changed circumstances.

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN A SAFETY PLAN?

- How to get away if there is an emergency
- How to get help if leaving is not a choice
- Where to go if you leave
- How to be safe at a new place
- How to keep in touch with people who will help you
- How to keep your children safe
- How to protect "what is yours" (personal property, clothes etc.)
- How to stay safe in public and at work
- Anything else that the woman and children need to feel they have a viable safety plan.

Attached is a "hand-out" section for social workers to help a woman complete or for a women to take away with them in order to create their own personalized safety plan. She may choose to complete it with her social worker, advocate/counselor, her support network (friends or family), or by herself. It is important to emphasize that she does not have control over her partner's violence. She does, however, have choices about how to respond and how she may get herself and her children to safety.

A COPY OF THIS PLAN SHOULD BE KEPT IN HER FILE IF THERE IS A CHILD PROTECTION CONCERN.