

Safety Starts Here: Introduction to Safety Planning

The following resource was developed in consultation with 30 GBV organizations across Ontario
(Between Risk and Safety: An Overview & Critical Analysis of Gender-Based Violence Risk Assessment & Management in Ontario, 2023).

This resource is not exhaustive of all possible safety planning considerations or strategies, however, it may be a helpful framework as you begin discussing risk and safety. In reviewing a survivor's safety, it can also be helpful to connect with GBV organizations who can support with safety planning and connect with more formal risk management processes.



When discussing safety with a survivor it may be helpful to consider the following:

- 👁️ Survivors may minimize abuse, or deny it. Your job is not to push or control them, but to offer them care and tools if and when they need.
- 👁️ Identified risk factors can help to guide discussions about safety planning, and specific strategies to increase safety.
- 👁️ Safety planning can include immediate strategies to reduce risk in a violent situation and can also consider the need for external resources or supports to help improve safety.
- 👁️ Survivors are the experts of their own experiences and should guide decisions about safety planning as they may be able to identify other areas of risk, additional needs and safety tips.
- 👁️ Remember that the responsibility should not solely lay on survivors - safety planning is just one component within larger risk management processes that should engage aggressors.
- 👁️ While this can be a helpful resource or reminder for survivors, it is important to consider the possible risk associated with an aggressor accessing this information. Ensure it always stored in a safe place or offer to store any of this documentation if needed.
- 👁️ Safety planning can occur in person or also in a digital format. Consider the following as it relates to the **collection/storage of client information**:
 1. Only collect information you need
 2. Collect general information (age range versus DOB)
 3. Limit access to data/documentation
 4. Review and delete client information regularly
- 👁️ Remember that risk can change - revisit this resource in ongoing discussions about safety.

General Safety Planning with Survivors



- ☐ **Make a list of a few trusted people to reach out to for different reasons or emergencies.**
- ☐ **Review resource and service options. This may include:**
 - ☐ Call a crisis line or shelter for support or to review available services
- ☐ **Create a code word or visual cue between the survivor and trusted parties to use:**
 - ☐ If they need you to call on the phone/attend in person to disrupt a situation
 - ☐ If they need you to call 911 for emergency help
- ☐ **Consider packing important documents, personal identification, other personal necessities**

Safety Planning for Older Women



- ☐ Consideration of caregiver roles and possible sources of violence (caretakers, children, partners) especially if abuser has power of attorney
- ☐ Exploring physical or cognitive limitations and consider how these might impact a survivor's safety
- ☐ Consider any health issues/concerns (increased health issues, lack of mobility or dependency on their abuser may increase an older woman's risk)
- ☐ Large-print assessment forms, safety plans and resources

Safety Planning with Children & Youth



- ☐ Keep safety planning session with children and youth brief - using multiple shorter sessions might be most helpful
- ☐ Identifying safe neighbours and adults outside of the home
- ☐ Clear language to describe the situation that is age-appropriate
- ☐ With youth, ensure their phones, emails and socials, gaming devices do not have a location tracking feature enabled or activated

Safety Planning for Survivors with Disabilities



- ☐ Ensure you helping the survivor find accessible shelters and services
- ☐ ASL interpreters should be available for any social or government services the survivor may need to navigate
- ☐ Offer resources in a range of formats including chat/text-based support
- ☐ You can also download accessibility apps and features for most websites, documents
- ☐ Ensuring extra assistive devices are available in emergency escape kits



Safety Planning in the Workplace



- ☐ Consider informing employers or schools of potential risk to support workplace safety planning
- ☐ Workplace-related accommodations (parking area, workplace location)
- ☐ Documenting violence within the workplace (e.g., harassing phone calls)
- ☐ Accommodating schedule changes (e.g., changes to start time or shift work)
- ☐ Arranging co-worker or security accompaniment to and from car or other form of transportation
- ☐ Review of situations when a survivor would want police called on their behalf
- ☐ Review/planning for escape routes in the workplace and/or alternate travel routes to and from work

Safety Planning for Head Injuries and/or Strangulation



- ☐ Ensure immediate medical attention for strangulation that occurred in the last 48 hours—high risk of stroke and asphyxiation
- ☐ Provide information on how to protect the most sensitive areas (e.g. protecting head, neck, eyes, mouth) in the event of an assault or strangulation or escape a violent situation
- ☐ Try to get closer to the exit to flee, or to a room that has a lock, or that you can barricade quickly
- ☐ Planning safe route/access in the event that they may require medical services
- ☐ Review severity of strangulation and provide information on symptoms, physical impacts and outcomes

Safety Planning for Technology / Online Safety



- ☐ Review electronic and mobile phones to remove malware, spyware, or unfamiliar apps
- ☐ Using programs such as www.malwarebytes.com to search for spyware
- ☐ Consider changing phone numbers or removing phone number listings from public spaces (e.g. social media, company website)
- ☐ Recommend screening calls, documenting and not answering unknown callers
- ☐ Review online account passwords (social media, online banking)
- ☐ Change passwords, create new accounts, increase privacy settings
- ☐ Capacity Building and empowerment
- ☐ Survivors can access support through shelter staff, online resources and the internal IT team when possible to learn about online/digital risk mitigation
- ☐ Can be extended to the survivor's children

Animals & Safety Planning



- ☐ Exploring steps to increase safety of the pet and survivor if access/custody of the animal is shared
- ☐ An “animal quick escape kit” can be prepared that includes food, ownership and vaccination documentation, medication, etc.
- ☐ Review of resources / safety plans for animals, including support animals, companion pets and livestock (e.g. temporary fostering, SafePet, onsite accommodations, etc.)