

Practice Tool 4 Personal safety plan template

All victims of family and domestic violence require a safety plan, regardless of the level of assessed risk. An immediate safety plan should be developed with the woman experiencing the violence. This should begin by asking her if she has a safety plan, and the details of this plan.

Most women have developed a number of strategic and creative ways to keep themselves and their children safe, but may not have developed a formalised plan. It is important to ask the woman what she has done in the past to keep herself and her children safe. It is dangerous for service providers to assume that they know what will keep women and children safe in particular situations of family and domestic violence.

As professionals, service providers can guide a woman through a safety planning process that respects her knowledge of the perpetrator's behaviour and her understanding of what will keep her and her children safe.

The following is a standard template⁶ that can be used to guide the safety planning conversation with a woman.

6 Adapted from *Best Practice Approaches: Child Protection and Violence Against Women*, Ministry of Child and Family Development, British Columbia, 2010.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Review dates: _____

Personalised safety plan

The following steps represent my plan for increasing my safety and preparing in advance for the possibility of further violence. Although I do not have control over my partner's violence, I do have a choice about how to respond to them and how to best get myself and my children to safety.

Step 1:

Safety during a violent incident. Women cannot always avoid violent incidents. In order to increase safety, women may use a variety of strategies.

I can use some or all of the following strategies:

A. If I decide to leave, I will _____.
(Practice how to get out safely. What doors, windows, elevators, stairwells or fire escapes would you use?)

B. I can keep my purse and car keys ready and put them (place) _____ in order to leave quickly.

C. I can tell _____ about the violence and request they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from my house.

I can also tell _____ about the violence and request they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from my house.

D. I can teach my children how to use the telephone to contact the police.

E. I will use _____ as my code word with my children or my friends so they can call for help.

F. If I have to leave my home, I will go _____.
(Decide this even if you don't think there will be a next time.)

If I cannot go to the location above, then I can go to _____ or _____.

G. I can also teach some of these strategies to some/all of my children.

H. I can teach my children to call 000 in an emergency, and what they would need to say; for example, their full name, address and telephone number.

I. When I expect we are going to have an argument, I will try to move to a space that is lowest risk, such as _____.
(Try to avoid the bathroom, garage, kitchens, near weapons or in rooms without access to an outside door.)

J. I will use my judgement and intuition. If the situation is very serious, I can give my partner what they want to calm them down. I have to protect myself until I/we are out of danger.

Step 2:

Safety when preparing to leave. Women frequently leave the residence they share with the perpetrator of the violence. Leaving must be done with a careful plan in order to increase safety. Perpetrators may escalate their use of violence when they believe that a woman is leaving the relationship.

I can use some or all of the following safety strategies:

- A. I will leave money and an extra set of keys with _____ so I can leave quickly.
- B. I will keep copies of important documents or keys at _____.
- C. I will open a savings account by _____ (date), to increase my independence.

Other things I can do to increase my independence include:

- D. The domestic violence services number is _____.
I can seek safe accommodation by calling this number.
- E. I will keep my mobile phone charged and with me at all times.
- F. I will check with _____ and _____ to see who would be able to let me stay with them or lend me some money.
- G. I can leave extra clothes with _____.
- H. I will sit down and review my safety plan every _____ in order to plan the safest way to leave the residence. _____ [domestic violence advocate or friend] has agreed to help me review this plan.
- I. I will rehearse my escape plan and, as appropriate, practise it with my children.
- J. I can pack an emergency bag for myself and my children, and hide it somewhere safe; for example, at a neighbour's or friend's house. Try to avoid mutual friends or family. (There are some suggestions below for what you need to take with you when you leave.)
- K. I can try and keep a small amount of money with me at all times; for example, for bus fares and so on.

Step 3:

Safety in my own residence. There are many things that a woman can do to increase her safety in her own residence. It may impossible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step by step.

Safety measures I can use include:

- A. I can change the locks on my doors and windows as soon as possible.
- B. I can replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors.
- C. I can install security systems including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, an electronic system, and so on.
- D. I can install an outside lighting system that lights up when a person is coming close to my house.
- E. I will tell people who take care of my children which people have permission to pick up my children and that my partner is not permitted to do so. The people I will inform about pick-up permission include

_____ (school),

_____ (day care staff),

_____ (babysitter),

_____ (teacher),

_____ (others).

F. I can inform _____ (neighbour),

_____ (family member),

and _____ (friend)

that my partner no longer resides with me and they should call the police if he is observed near my residence.

Step 4:

Safety with a violence restraining order (VRO). Many perpetrators obey VROs, but it is difficult to predict which perpetrator will abide by the VRO and which will breach a VRO.

The following are some steps that I can take to help the enforcement of my VRO:

- A. I will keep my VRO _____ (location).
(Always keep it on or near your person. If you change bags, that's the first thing that should go in.)
- B. I will inform my employer, my closest friend and _____
and _____ that I have a VRO in place.
- C. If my partner breaches the VRO, I can call the police and report a breach, contact my lawyer, call my advocate.

Step 5:

Safety on the job and in public. Each woman must decide if and when she will tell others that she is experiencing family and domestic violence and that she may be at continued risk. Friends, family and co-workers can help to protect women. Each woman should consider carefully which people to invite into her safety network.

I might do any or all of the following:

- A. I can inform my boss, or supervisor and _____ at work of my situation.
- B. I can ask _____ to help screen my telephone calls at work.
- C. When leaving work, I can _____.
- D. When driving home if problems occur, I can _____.
- E. If I use public transport, I can _____.
- F. I can use different shopping centres to conduct my business and shop at hours that are different than those when residing with my violent partner.
- G. If I use social media websites (for example, Facebook), I can _____
_____.
- H. I can also _____.

Step 6:

Safety and drug or alcohol use. Many people use alcohol. Many use mood-altering drugs. Much of this use is legal and some is not. The legal outcomes of using illegal drugs can be very hard on a woman experiencing family and domestic violence, may hurt her relationship with her children and put her at a disadvantage in other legal actions with her violent partner.

Therefore, women should carefully consider the potential cost of the use of illegal drugs. But beyond this, the use of any alcohol or other drugs can reduce a woman's awareness and ability to act quickly to protect herself from her violent partner. Furthermore, the use of alcohol or other drugs by the perpetrator may give him an excuse to use violence. Therefore, in the context of drug or alcohol use, a woman needs to make specific safety plans.

If drug or alcohol use has occurred in my relationship with my violent partner, I can enhance my safety by some or all of the following:

A. If I am going to use, I can do so in a safe place and with people who understand the risk of violence and are committed to my safety.

B. I can also _____

C. If my partner is using, I can _____

D. I might also _____

E. To safeguard my children, I might _____

Step 7:

Safety and my emotional health. The experience of being physically and verbally abused by violent partners is exhausting and emotionally draining.

The process of building a new life for myself takes much courage and incredible energy. To conserve my emotional energy and resources and to avoid hard emotional times, I can do some of the following:

A. If I feel down and ready to return to a potentially abusive situation, I can

_____.

B. When I have to communicate with my partner in person or by telephone, I can

_____.

C. I can tell myself, ' _____ ',
whenever I feel others are trying to control or abuse me.

D. I can read _____ to help me feel stronger.

E. I can call _____, _____ and
_____ as other resources to be of support to me.

F. Other things I can do to help me feel stronger are _____

and _____

G. I can attend workshops and support groups at a domestic violence program or

or

to gain support and strengthen my relationships with other people.

Step 8:

When women leave violent partners, it is important to take certain items with them. Beyond this, women sometimes give an extra copy of papers and an extra set of clothing to a friend just in case they have to leave quickly.

Items with asterisks on the following list are the most important to take. If there is time, the other items might be taken, or stored outside the home. These items might best be placed in one location, so that if we have to leave in a hurry, I can grab them quickly.

When I leave, I should take:

- * identification for myself
- * children's birth certificates
- * my birth certificate
- * social security cards
- * school and vaccination records
- * money
- * ATM (automatic teller machine) card
- * Credit cards
- * Keys—house/car/office
- * driver's licence and registration
- * medications

passport(s)

divorce papers

medical records—for all family members

lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage details

bank details

insurance papers

small saleable objects

address book

pictures

jewellery

children's favourite toys and/or blankets

items of special sentimental value

telephone numbers I need :
