

Case Action Planning: Safety Planning

Safety Planning (For Case Workers)

Safety planning is a process within case management which includes the identification and formation of goals and strategies that the survivor can use to bring positive change to her situation. It is a structured process which requires the case worker to use a safety planning tool with the VAWG survivor. It is typically most relevant to survivors living in situations of intimate partner violence and can be useful in cases where the survivor is still living with, or is in contact with, the perpetrator, or being persecuted by a perpetrator whom she has attempted to leave. It enables the survivor to proceed with a pre-determined course of action when she is in a life-threatening situation. This is a contingency mechanism that helps her to minimize the harm done by the perpetrator by identifying resources, ways to escape, means to avoid harm, and places she can run to for safety. Safety planning empowers the survivor to have some control over of a situation that is usually quite victimizing and demeaning.

Violence against women and girls includes Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).¹ IPV refers to “any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship. Examples of types of behavior are listed below:

- Acts of physical violence, such as slapping, hitting, kicking and beating. Sexual violence, including forced sexual intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion.
- Emotional (psychological) abuse, such as insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation (e.g. destroying things), threats of harm, threats to take away children.
- Controlling behaviors, including isolating a person from family and friends; monitoring their movements; and restricting access to financial resources, employment, education or medical care.”²

IPV is a pattern of abusive behavior in an intimate relationship that is used by a man to gain or maintain power and control over a woman. Behaviors by male partners using IPV to control a female partner causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors. These controlling behaviors

can lead to the man killing the woman in some cases. This definition covers violence by both current and former spouses and other intimate partners.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a major public health and human rights concern, with intimate partner violence and sexual violence among the most pervasive forms of violence against women. VAWG is related to structural inequalities between men and women in society. Because IPV follows a pattern of abuse, the violence happens over and over again. Isolated incidents of violence are rare, and the danger of repeated violence is high and it is common for the frequency and severity of the abuse to increase over time. It is intentional behavior, used by the perpetrator (usually a man) to establish and exert power and control over the survivor (usually a woman). Violence, and the threat of it, is used by perpetrators to prevent survivors from seeking help or leaving an abusive situation. Since the frequency and severity of IPV abuse increases over time, some women, may feel like they are safer to stay in a violent relationship than to end it. The riskiest time for a woman in an abusive relationship is when she is thinking about and attempting to leave – meaning the abuse can result in death.

Case workers have an important role to play in supporting a survivor through helping her assess potential risks of further violence, supporting her in her safety planning, as well as offering referrals to additional services that she needs. Case workers need to understand risk factors for repeating or escalating IPV. It is impossible to always accurately predict whether a perpetrator will seriously harm or kill the partner, himself/herself, or another person. However, a key predictor of further violence from a perpetrator is that they have already used violence, so knowing the danger signs can help us to support a survivor in identifying situations where they are at risk and actions they can take to mitigate further/severe harm.

During GBV case management, a safety plan is critical tool, used only by GBV case workers with the survivor, to help a survivor of IPV to think through her resources and plan her safety – from day to day, and to support her planning if she decides to leave the relationship. GBV case workers should only be engaging in safety planning and GBV case work for IPV if they have a supervisor who is technically trained on IPV and VAWG and can provide support to the GBV case worker.

Remember, as a GBV case worker, we cannot “fix” the situation; our role is to work with women to assess risks, mitigate harm, provide information and support, and listen. ALWAYS, trust what the survivor is indicating in terms of her feelings of safety. She is the one who best understands the danger of her own situation.

Safety plans should:

- Assess a survivor’s current level of safety.

- Find out the exact circumstances in which the survivor is in the most danger and assess the severity of these risks and threats.
- Find out what resources the survivor possesses and develop a plan for safety that incorporates those resources.

How to Complete a Safety Plan

Complete a safety plan **WITH** the survivor if there are threats to the safety of the survivor in relation to the incident she sought case management for. The safety plan should be realistic, easy to remember, and based on the survivor's situation and what SHE wants to do. Safety plans look different for each survivor. This means survivors do not need to answer every question on the safety plan, only the questions that are useful to her. Prioritize the questions most supportive of each individual survivor's safety needs. Safety plans must be completed in person in a private space with no one else present other than the survivor, the GBV case worker, and if the woman/girl requests – a female friend accompanying her.

Information from this safety plan **MUST BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL** and can only be shared if the survivor signs a release of information and gives informed consent for her information to be shared or if the woman/girl is a danger to herself or others. *(Remember, women and girls are continuously safety planning in their mind since we live in a patriarchal, oppressive discriminatory society which continuously threatens women and girls! This is a life-saving resource to help her guide her in thinking through options in relation to safety from a perpetrator after a violent incident against her).*

As safety decisions are made together - with the survivor at the center - the survivor can fill in the safety plan herself if she wants to and is able. If the survivor keeps a copy of the safety plan, help her to keep it in a safe place and understand potential consequences if it is found. Review all decisions multiple times to help the survivor clearly remember the plan. Clearly explain when a survivor should seek help from GBV staff and when she should call an emergency contact.

How to Talk about the Safety Plan with a GBV Survivor

Sample script before commencing the safety plan

"It is important to know that [the perpetrator's (use survivors' language)] behavior is not your fault. You cannot control his violent behavior. Let's think about ways you can increase safety for you [and your children] and be prepared if there is an emergency. I will ask you some questions to help you think about a plan. You can decide what will work best for you [and your children]. I will be here to support your decisions no matter what they are. Again, we cannot guarantee the safety plan will work but it can help us think of ways to increase safety. Again the perpetrator's violence is not your fault.

As always, everything you tell me is confidential, which means that I will not tell anyone other than my supervisor what you tell me unless you ask me to

or unless it is information I need to share because you are in danger [include mandatory reporting requirements as they apply to the setting]. I want you to know these limitations to your confidentiality so that I do not break your trust and so that you can make decisions about what you want to share with me based on these limitations. Do you have any questions?"

[Is a safety plan needed? Assess with and ask the survivor, if she agrees:]

- Do you know the perpetrator? Yes, No, Unsure
- If yes, is the abuse or threat of the abuse ongoing? Yes, No, Unsure
- Does the perpetrator have access to you, including ease of access to your home, or being in your social circles? Yes, No, Unsure

If YES to any question above, please continue with the safety plan used for GBV case management, identifying existing resources.

Safety Plan Questions	
Safety Plan Questions	Sample format for responses
What phone numbers do you need to memorize in case of emergency? (i.e.: someone she trusts, emergency response, shelter provider)	I have memorized:
Whom do you trust if you need help? (Neighbors, friends, family, female leaders and how people can keep her safe. People survivor wouldn't be embarrassed or ashamed to contact for help.)	Who?
Are there neighbors who you could help if you are in an emergency situation?	Who?
Is there a signal you could create to alert your neighbors that you need help? (i.e.: Discuss signal with the neighbor and upon seeing/hearing signal, neighbors plan a group visit. Establish code word to call for help).	What is the signal?
Are there places you can go in case of an emergency (relative, neighbor, or leader)?	I can go to:
If the violence begins, can you move into a room where you could escape or others could hear you? Or that might be safer? (i.e.: kitchens have knives, kerosene, etc.)	If the violence starts and I can't leave the house I will try to move to:
Are there weapons in the house? Where? (Guide fights away from weapons if possible)	I can try to avoid weapons by:
Can you keep a bag hidden (at home or at a friends or neighbors) for emergencies	I will keep the bag:

filled with a change of clothes, some money, emergency snacks/drink, keys, and copies of important information/documents in case you need to leave quickly? <i>(explain consequences if bag at home and found)</i> If yes, what items would be useful and important to you?	I will keep copies of documents:
What important documents do you have for you <i>(and your children)</i> and may need copies? <i>(ID, proof of status, medical or school records; consider keeping copies with friends).</i>	I need:
How will you involve your children in planning for safety? <i>(Children should know not to try and stop the fighting and that the fighting is not their fault. The children should know how and who to call in case of an emergency. The survivor should alert school and daycare(r) who is allowed to pick the child up. If the survivor goes somewhere for safety, the children should know to keep their new location a secret.)</i>	I will involve my children by:

Here, you can explore potential safety strategies and discuss what would happen is she needed to/decided to leave.

If you decide to leave, you should know that the leaving time and directly afterward could be a dangerous time for you. The violence and abuse you are experiencing is not your fault. With your consent, shall we think together about what leaving options may look like in order to increase your safety?

In case the survivor is considering leaving a violent setting or ready to leave

If you are in danger and need to leave, is there a safe place to go? <i>(think around short term, medium term, long term. If a friend's house, will the perpetrator look for her there – safety around this and if friend will inform him)</i>	I can go:
What belongings do you need to bring?	If I leave, I will bring easily:
If you need to leave, how will you do it? <i>(if drive, then keep gas in car and copy of keys in secret location;</i>	I can:

<i>transportation plan – public, friends, neighbors)</i>	
If you need to leave, what is the plan for your children? <i>(If possible, bring children so perpetrator does not use the children to threaten her)</i>	For my children, I will...:
Who else might be in danger if you leave? <i>(Help her to prioritize her safety)</i>	
Does the country have protection orders that disallow the perpetrator from coming near you? Do you feel safe to file for a protection order?	Do I want to file for protection orders?
Anything else I would like to do that may increase my safety?	

For Technical Supervisors

It is imperative to support the case workers and hold weekly meetings to check in with them. Know and evaluate the GBV referral pathway, feasibility, and resources available in case the client needs to move locations. Also, know the resources in surrounding areas. Remember that when a survivor decides to leave, the case worker may also receive threats or be in danger if the abuser suspects the organization helped her leave (this is assuming actors are following good practice and not identifying their services as GBV, which would directly harm the case worker and survivor).

Considerations for Child/Girl Survivors

Informed assent is the expressed willingness to participate in services. For younger children who are by definition too young to give informed consent, but old enough to understand and agree to participate in services, the child's "informed assent" is sought. Informed assent is the expressed willingness of the child to participate in services and this includes GBV case management and the safety planning step of GBV case management.



¹ IPV can be referred to as 'domestic violence' and this is used in many countries to refer to IPV but the term 'domestic violence' can also encompass child or elder abuse, or abuse by any member of a household.

² World Health Organization (2011)

http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO_RHR_12.36_eng.pdf?sequence=1