



Domestic Violence Safety Planning

This fact sheet summarises the Ask LOIS webinar on this topic, presented by Priscilla McCorriston, Domestic Violence Specialist Social Worker on 6 August 2013. This webinar can be downloaded for free at www.asklois.org.au/webinars/past-webinars.

This fact sheet covers:

- What is a safety planning?
- Why is it important?
- What do we ask about?
- How do we safety plan with clients?

What is safety planning?

- *Safety planning* is a complex, context driven process aimed at decreasing the immediate and long-term risks to the safety of women and children
- Safety planning starts from the time domestic violence is identified and continues until there is no further contact with the abusive partner/parent (McCorriston, 2011)

Different safety plans are needed for different situations

For example:

- When living with perpetrator
- When planning to leave the relationship
- When separated and living separately
- What to do in work place situations
- What to do if in a public place
- How to deal with family gatherings/change-overs

What is your role in safety planning?

- To help your client to identify what she is already doing to reduce their risk and the risk faced by their children
- To help your client to identify strategic ways of thinking and acting to reduce their risk of violence and increase their safety and the safety of their children

What is the role of risk assessment?

- A thorough risk assessment is important first step in safety planning
- There is no point in undertaking risk assessment if safety planning does not occur
- *"Screening (risk assessment) and Safety Planning are for action not exclusion."* Winkworth and McArthur

Role of the worker in safety planning

- Position of the worker in safety planning work is one of advocate, but advocate **with** the client, not for the client
- The worker becomes a "partner in safety planning, serving as listener, guide, liaison, clarifier, information source and strategies." Davies, 1998



Principles of safety planning

- Build a partnership with the client
- Review current risk assessment
- Pay particular attention to:
 - Life threatening violence
 - Risks to children

Working with your client to safety plan

Work to improve the client's safety planning:

- Identify options and resources
- Analyse how each might affect the client's risk
- Develop and implement a revised plan
- Provide enhanced advocacy when needed

What we need to do to assist our clients

- Enhance advocacy (means doing more)
- Make more time
- Ensure more frequent contact
- Make more follow up calls
- Find immediate protection strategies
- Encourage systems to respond quickly
- Make warm referrals
- Make safety plans with children

(Adapted from Kelly, L., 1999 "Taking the easy options: risk factors and cycles of violence" Conference Proceedings Domestic Violence in the New Millennium.)

Helpful questions to start the process

1. Tell me what you are already doing to keep you and your children safe?
2. What are risky times when abuse/violence is likely to happen?
3. What is similar about these times or situations?
4. What are the triggers/indicators that you are at risk of further abuse/being assaulted?
5. What supports do you have at home or near by?
6. Who knows about the abuse?

Helpful questions: current safety concerns

1. What are the most pressing concerns about safety?
2. Is the client currently safe from their partner?
3. Where is the partner?
 - a. In the home
 - b. In the same area
 - c. Interstate
4. If there are children/vulnerable others and/or pets, are they safe?

Helpful questions: immediate safety

1. Will you be safe at home when you leave here today?
 - a. If not do you have a safe place to go?
2. In case of a future emergency
 - a. Where would you go, what would you do if home was not safe?
 - b. Do you have a code to tell your children/flatmate to go or to get help?
 - c. Are emergency numbers saved in your phone?



- d. Do you have access to emergency money
- e. Do you have essential items/documents packed away somewhere else?

Helpful questions: assessing for support

1. Who knows about the violence?
2. What are their beliefs about DV?
3. Who is supportive of the client?
4. Does client need assistance to connect with informal or public/professional support?
5. If your service is not a legal service, does the client have access to helpful legal advice? WLSNSW Advice lines: <http://www.womenslegalsw.asn.au/contact-us.html>
6. Has client had professional support in the past?
7. Is there support available hasn't been used yet?

Reviewing safety strategies together

1. What safety strategies has the client used in the past?
2. What has worked?
3. What hasn't worked?
4. What's worth trying again? (E.g AVOs, Family Law Orders)

Technology and safety planning

Ask your client to:

- Check mobile phone settings
- Create new passwords
- Consider getting a new mobile phone with pre-paid credit
- Create new email, facebook and instant messaging accounts

Impact of Family Law on safety planning

- If your client is in family law proceedings, consider:
 - Change-over times/locations
 - The need to comply with parenting orders
 - Keeping the client's address confidential
 - How to manage court orders that your client cannot relocate and must stay in close proximity to the perpetrator
 - Working with child/ren to manage living with the perpetrator:
 - To avoid conflict
 - To remove themselves for situations where they feel at risk
 - To access help and
 - To escape where necessary

Factors affecting effective use of safety planning

Client unable to engage clearly in her own safety planning because of:

- Severe level of abuse
- Strong attachment to perpetrator
- Physical or intellectual disability
- Mental health problems
- Drug and alcohol abuse

Factors supporting safety planning

- Access to informal and formal supports
- Access to information and services
- Active planning



- Mapping of tactics and their patterns
- Ongoing assistance with safety planning
- Acknowledging the losses
- Encouragement & support

Ensure links with other services

- Ensuring your client is wherever possible linked in with other services or formal supports where possible so that you are not left feeling that you are the only one helping her with her safety
- See the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre's Safety Planning Pamphlet:
www.domesticviolence.com.au/files/pdf/Safety-Plan.pdf

Assistance with risk assessment and safety planning

- If you feel you are not equipped enough to undertake a risk assessment or safety plan for your client, we suggest you contact a specialist domestic violence service on behalf of your client for further assistance
- For example, your local Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (WDVCAS)
- See <http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/what-we-do/community-partnerships/womens-domestic-violence-court-advocacy-program/womens-domestic-violence-court-advocacy-service-locations-in-nsw>

Resources

- Basic safety plans (English, Arabic, Dari, Burmese) by Southern Metropolitan Region
- Integrated Family Violence Executive – Available in Ask LOIS Resource library and links will be placed on our Past Webinars page – www.asklois.org.au/webinars/past-webinars
- Priscilla McCorriston (2012) 'Safety planning with women and children: challenges for practitioners in a pro-contact climate' http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Newsletter_47.pdf
- Australian Attorney General's Department, *AVERT Family Violence: Collaborative Responses in the Family Law System*. Australian Attorney General's Department Website <http://www.ag.gov.au/www.avertfamilyviolence.com.au>
- Family Court of Australia (2011) *Family Violence Best Practice Principle* http://www.familylawcourts.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/FLC/Home/Publications/Family+Law+Courts+publications/fv_best_practice_for_flc