Advanced Safety Planning from a Physical, Emotional and Psychological Perspective

2017

ARIZONA COALITION TO END SEXUAL & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
Safety Plan Goals for Survivor and Children

- Address immediate and long-term safety
- Enhance well-being
- Improve support
- Improve understanding and awareness
Safety Plan Components

- Address basic needs
  - Housing, food, transportation, medical attention
- Minimize risk and increase protection
- Identify support systems and how to access them
- Provide education about dynamics of abuse and risk factors
Safety Planning Strategies

- Immediate safety and crisis intervention
- Long-term safety
  - Holistic approach
  - Considerations beyond physical safety
- Assist with risk analysis
  - Survivor perception risks, staying vs. leaving
- A safety plan should be individualized
  - Based on culture, risk, circumstances
- On-Going – each time you meet with them
- Dynamic – What’s changed since the last time we met?
Rethinking Our Approach

Advocacy Beyond Leaving
Advocacy Approach

- Past:
  - Safety Plan focused on leaving
  - Some services included rules that reinforced this

- Unintended consequences of past focus:
  - Survivors experience or hear:
    - “Don’t contact us or don’t return for services”
    - Believe program can’t help them if they don’t leave
    - Feel pressured to leave and judgment if they choose not to
    - Denied services from some systems if don’t leave, if leave but return, or if continue to contact abuser
Reasons for On-going Contact with Perpetrator

- Contact is forced by abuser, children, judge, life circumstances
- Safety strategy – way to reduce abuser’s violence, stalking
- Abuser may be a resource for help in some way
- Survivor has doubts about leaving, misses the partner
Reasons for Contact

- Staying in relationship with abusive partner
- Considering reconciling
- Sharing custody, visitation exchanges, shared parenting plans
- On-going contact due to work, school, community activities
- Living in small or rural community where contact is still likely
Separation and level of contact

- Is SURVIVOR’s decision

- Advocacy and support services are not dependent upon:
  - Whether or not someone stays/continues contact
  - Whether or not someone is a “good victim”
  - Whether or not someone leaves shelter
  - Whether or not the abuse is reported
Advocacy Beyond Leaving

- Links back to core values and ethical standards
- Enables outreach to *all* victims/survivors, regardless of level of contact
- Encourages rapport and trust
- Provides for more effective safety planning and risk assessment
Do I Stay or Do I Go?

Safety Risks if I Stay:

- Loss of financial security
- Loss of friends and family
- Kept from work, school or social functions
- Isolation from others
- Emotional degradation or emotional pain
- Getting stalked or harassed
- Physical harm to self or children
- DCS (CPS) involvement/loss of custody of children
- Long-term physical or psychological problems

Safety Risks if I Leave:

- Loss of financial security
- Loss of friends and family
- Kept from work, school or social functions
- Isolation from others
- Emotional degradation or emotional pain
- Getting stalked or harassed
- Physical harm to self or children
- DCS (CPS) involvement/loss of custody of children
- Long-term physical or psychological problems
Lethality Assessment

- Jealousy/possessiveness
- Depression
- Repeated intervention by law enforcement
- Escalation of risk taking
- Threats to harm or kill or has killed an animal
- Threats or fantasies of homicide or suicide
- Possession of weapons
- Victim is leaving or has left the relationship
- History of aggressive behavior
- Hostage taking/prevents her and/or children from leaving
- Drug/alcohol use or abuse
- Violence in his family of origin
- Strangulation
- Escalation of violence
- Change in the method and/or frequency of the abuse
Risk Analysis

- Start with yes/no questions
  - Has the abuser become increasingly more violent, brutal, and/or dangerous?

- Ask follow-up questions
  - Can you describe the incident?

- Assign meaning
  - What do you think that change in behavior means?
Risk Analysis

- Respect survivor’s view of risks
- Evaluate batterer and life generated risks
- Explore survivor’s view of success
- Explore children’s safety and effects on risk
“The height of arrogance is to think we know.”

Dr. Christopher Blodgett, Director
Child and Family Research Unit
Washington State University
Responding to Risk

- Survivor experience in the relationship guides planning
- Help identify available and relevant options and resources
- Integrate parts of past plans into current plan
  - What have you tried? Did it work?
Assessing Needs – The Whole Picture

- Must approach safety planning holistically
  - Physical
  - Emotional
  - Psychological

- Violence is not separate from
  - Family Dynamics
  - Community
  - Poverty
  - Cultural issues
  - Employment and finances
  - Language
  - Immigration status
  - Spirituality
  - Substance Use
  - Mental Health Concerns
Exploring the 5 Domains of Well-Being

- Systems of Support
- Financial Status
- Cultural Dynamics
- Learned Coping Skills
- Geographic Location
Systems of Support

- Family
- Friends

Community Support
- Faith Community
- Work
- Neighbors
- Services
Financial Status

- Employed
- Savings
- Receiving assistance – public or private
- Ability to work
- Resourceful
- Ability to manage resources
Cultural Dynamics

- Community Dynamics
- Minority/marginalized community
- Oppression within/without the culture
- Culturally informed/influenced belief system regarding Domestic Violence, family, relationships
Learned Coping Skills

- How have they survived in this relationship
- What has worked, not worked
- Substance use
- Work
- Family/friends
- Manipulation by compliance, etc.
Survivors use many skills to cope with violence. Everything a victim has done to this point has been to survive.

A survivor’s coping skills may not be easy to recognize or understand.
Survival Skills and Coping Mechanisms

- Protecting, defending or explaining the perpetrator
- Recanting, denying, changing mind, reluctance/refusing to cooperate
- Extreme privacy through withholding or protecting critical information
- Making custody the primary issue when applying for protection orders
- Not showing up for interviews or court
Survival and Coping

- Rationalizing the violence
- Becoming aggressive toward the batterer
- Anger or belligerence toward police or service workers
- Drinking and using drugs to numb the pain
- Becoming apathetic, normalizing the violence
Geographic Location

- Community location, size
- Access to transportation
- Access to services and support
- Available opportunities for employment
- Affordable housing
Exploring Options

- Each person has unique experiences
- Each person will make individual choices based on experiences
- Be thorough when exploring all possible outcomes
- Respect the survivor’s decisions
  - Survivor choices may be different from what we would choose
  - Our job is to support the survivor’s choices, regardless of our personal feelings
  - Don’t pass judgment or moralize with clients
  - Do offer options, not advice
Safety in Various Circumstances

- In the home, with perpetrator
- During a violent incident
- If preparing to leave
- In the home, w/o perpetrator
- If there is a Protection Order
- On the job or in public
- After sexual assault
Safety in the Home (with perpetrator)

- If safe, talk to neighbors and create a plan for when help is needed.
- Create a codeword to use with family, friends, neighbors, advocate to signal increased danger and a need for help.
- Practice how to leave quickly and safely.
- Keep emergency phones hidden in the house.
- Keep a spare set of keys hidden.
- Set aside “emergency funds” and extra copies of paperwork.
☑ Safety in the Home (with perpetrator)

- Maintain as much contact with support people as possible
- Keep back-up copies of important pictures, documents, etc with a trusted person
- Keep a log/”diary of abuse” with a safe person
- Involve children in the safety plan if appropriate
  - Create a code word
  - Talk to children about signs of violence and how/when to get help
  - Identify safe places within the home
Safety During a Violent Incident

All previous, plus +++

- Know safest areas in the house
- Call 911/police or others to intervene
- Comply with perpetrator, if necessary
Safety if Preparing to Leave

- Set aside money, if possible

- Gather necessary items and set aside in a safe place
  - Money
  - Important documents (e.g. ID, SS card, birth certificates)
  - Clothing
  - Medical needs
  - Children’s blanket/special toy
Safety if Preparing to Leave

- Utilize family and friends for support and shelter
- Evaluate to determine best time to leave
- May or may not choose to involve children in the plan
Safety in own Home (without perpetrator)

- Change or add locks
- Talk with neighbors, if safe
- Talk with landlord, if safe
- Involve children in the safety plan
  - Identify safe people
  - Determine when and if children will answer the door or phone and to whom
Safety with a Protection Order

- Keep extra copies in accessible places (e.g. car, work)
- Determine who should have copies (e.g. employer, daycare, school)
- Identify best options if order is violated (e.g. call police)
- Recognize the limitations of a P.O.
Safety on the Job and in Public

- Talk with coworkers or supervisors, if safe
- Utilize applicable workplace policies and resources
  - Flexible schedule
  - Screening calls
  - Security
- Change patterns
- Use “buddy system”
Safety after Sexual Assault

Intimate-partner sexual violence
• All of the above plus all of the below

Non-intimate partner sexual violence
• Reporting vs. not reporting
• Physical/health safety
• Emotional safety
• What to do in the case of continued contact
☑ Emotional Safety

- Loneliness
- Drugs/Alcohol
- Self-Harm
- Anger/Rage
- Pressure from or Concerns for children
- Depression/Mania
Safety Planning: Other Considerations

- Shared custody/visitation
- Victims in rural areas
- Victims with disabilities
- Race/ethnicity
- Immigrant victims
- LGBT victims
- Older victims of violence
- Teen victims
- Mental health concerns
- Substance use and abuse
Other Considerations: Shared Custody/Visitation

- Create a plan with the children for when they are outside of the home
  - Identify support people
  - Teach children how to reach safe people in the case of an emergency
  - Identify a code word

- Share with childcare and schools who is allowed to pick up and visit children, and when

- Arrange for a third-party to drop-off, pick-up and/or supervise children for visitation

- Identify a third party (not the child) to assist with necessary communication about the children

- Keep a log regarding visitation issues and significant events involving the children
☑ Other Considerations: Victims in Rural Areas

- Resources are limited
- May live in isolated area with few or no neighbors
- Response time may be greater
- Limited job and housing options
- Transportation may be an issue
- Size of community may affect confidentiality, privacy and frequency of contact with perpetrator
Other Considerations: Victims with Disabilities

- Victims may hesitate to access services due to perceived stigma or fear of discrimination.
- Real or perceived lack of accessibility may be a barrier to service.
- Disability could affect ability to relate situation and concerns.
- Perpetrator may be primary care giver, financial provider, legal guardian, power of attorney, or payee.
❑ Other Considerations: Race/Ethnicity

❑ Historical abuse and distrust of professionals/LE/systems

❑ Real or perceived discrimination by providers/LE/systems

❑ Reluctance to involve others outside of the family or community

❑ Reluctance to “bring shame” to the family or community

❑ Fear isolation or separation from the community

❑ Fear of discrimination toward perpetrator
Other Considerations: Immigrant Victims

All previous plus:

- Possible language barriers
- Lack of understanding about legal options
- Increased lack of understanding about systems
- Concerns about deportation
- VAWA options
☑ Other Considerations: LGBT Victims

- Real or perceived discrimination or lack of accessibility may be a barrier to service
- Real or perceived discrimination or abuse by LE leads to mistrust and reluctance to report
- Isolation or separation from the LGBT community
- Fear of being “outed” by partner or others
  - Loss of employment, housing, informal support
- Increased feelings of isolation if small or no LGBT community
- Myths about LGBT relationships
Other Considerations: Older Victims

- Ageism
- May be less likely to self-identify
- May have more traditional ideas about gender
- Less community response to batterers
- May have more transportation needs
- May have medical or mobility issues
- May be dependent on perpetrator for basic care
Other Considerations: Teen Victims

- Ageism
- May be less likely to self-identify
- Less independence and flexibility in living situation
- Fear of isolation from friends/peers/social groups
- May have more continued contact with perpetrator
- May be more trusting of peers than adults and may hesitate to utilize “authority” for support
Other Considerations: Mental Health Concerns

- Feeling overwhelmed by options and decisions
- Traumatic stress symptoms
  - Nightmares
  - Intrusive thoughts
  - Hyperarousal/hypervigilance
  - Sleep disturbance
- Anxiety disorders
- Depression
- Dissociation
- Self-harm
- Suicidal ideation or intent
Other Considerations: Substance Use and Abuse

- Intoxication will affect ability to adequately assess safety and implement safety plan
- Use/possession of substances may deter victim from accessing services
- Some services unavailable or less accessible if victim uses substances
- Stress of situation may cause relapse/increase in use
- Support network may contribute to survivor use
- Perpetrator may sabotage recovery efforts, or separating from perpetrator may mean isolation from recovery support
- Perpetrator may be supplier or know supplier
- Considering perpetrator use
  - May influence survivor decisions
  - May or may not affect level of violence and lethality threat
Final Considerations: Technology
Technology and Safety: Phones

- Where did victim’s phone come from
- Pre-paid phones
- GPS enabled phones
- Cordless phones

- VoIP
  - 911 may not work
  - Easy to spoof
  - If lose power, no phone service
Technology and Safety: Computers

- Computer Use
  - Is the perpetrator using the same computer
  - Every move made on a computer can be tracked
    - Every file created, accessed or deleted can leave footprints

- Cache and Internet history
  - Myth that it can be totally erased
  - Clearing it may be dangerous

- Information and searches
  - Good and bad information accessible

- On-line Services
  - Counseling options, FB, emails, texts
    - Safety options
    - Benefits and drawbacks
Key Points to Remember

- Options are more complex than staying or leaving
- Remaining in the relationship does not mean acceptance of the violence
- Leaving does not necessarily mean that the violence will end or that other risks will be reduced
- There is no “cookie cutter” approach
- Consider safety planning more broadly to include sexual assault and stalking
- Safety plans constantly change and evolve
Safety Planning Resources

- dangerassessment.org
- National Domestic Violence Hotline
  1 (800) 799- SAFE (7233)
  thehotline.org
“We shall draw from the heart of suffering itself the means of inspiration and survival.”

-Winston Churchill

Questions?