



SAFETY PLANNING GUIDELINES

*ENCUENTRO LATINO NATIONAL INSTITUTE
ON FAMILY VIOLENCE*

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Encuentro
LATINO

National Institute on Family Violence





HISTORY OF ENCUESTRO LATINO

Encuentro Latino was founded in 2008 through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Encuentro Latino was initially a collaborative project of New Mexico State University's Family Violence Project and La Casa, Inc. (a domestic violence services provider located in Las Cruces, NM).

From 2008 to 2011, the goal of Encuentro Latino was to build the capacity of domestic violence providers to serve Latino families experiencing domestic violence. At the beginning of 2012, Encuentro Latino transitioned to serving as an online clearinghouse for information on domestic violence and Latinos. In 2014, Encuentro Latino was adopted as a project of the International Safe Shelter Foundation.

Originally located in Las Cruces, New Mexico, Encuentro Latino now exists virtually. Encuentro Latino is maintained by a group of volunteers.

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All links in this document are
active as of May 30, 2015.

SAFETY IS THE FIRST CONCERN WHEN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Safety plans help victims assess personal risks and make decisions about ways to keep themselves safe. For victims, safety planning can be empowering, giving them a sense of control over their situation. It is important to continue modifying and re-evaluating the plan as circumstances change over time.

If a victim discloses abuse on a telephone call, first ask if they are in need of medical care or law enforcement. If the victim is in immediate danger have them call 911.

Let the client know that you can help with completing a safety plan but also let them know that they do not have to complete the safety plan if they do not wish to.

Offer non-judgmental support to the client. Be aware that your body language, including facial expressions, may make a client feel uncomfortable, judged, or embarrassed.

Listen without interruption while the client is speaking.

Offer the client information and resources such as the local domestic violence shelter, but let the client make decisions for her or himself. Do not encourage the client to leave the relationship if he or she is not ready to do so.

The victim should not take the safety plan with them if the abusive partner may find it as this may put the victim in danger. The victim should be informed of this risk and be allowed to choose.

Do let the client know if you fear for their safety and remind them that the abuse is not their fault.

Victims share that a fear of not being believed is a barrier to seeking help. The truthfulness of a victim should not be questioned at the time of intake.

OVERVIEW OF SAFETY PLANNING

See following sections for more details on each step.

STEP 1: DANGER ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS (SEE PAGE 6)

These questions were designed to assess the amount of danger a victim may be facing. The more questions a client answers yes to, the greater the risk of danger. Point out to the client areas of safety concern that you see.

Sometimes victims minimize the risk they are in. If this is the case, it should be gently pointed out to the client. The client does not have to answer any of the questions if they choose not to.

STEP 2: SAFETY PLANNING TIPS (SEE PAGES 7 – 8)

This step includes suggestions for keeping safe depending on the stage of the relationship. The suggestions include safety tips while still in the relationship, when leaving the relationship, and after leaving.



STEP 3: SAFETY PLAN (SEE PAGES 9 – 10)

This form should be filled out by the client with the assistance of the advocate. Make sure that client is aware that if the abuser finds these documents or other information on domestic violence it can become a safety risk. Encourage the client to think of a safe place to keep the documents, if there is none then the client should not take them.

STEP 4: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

RESOURCES (SEE PAGE 10)

Offer information on domestic violence resources. Inform the client of the resources available (i.e. shelter, law enforcement, counseling, etc). Offer support to the client in contacting resources if appropriate.

STEP 1: DANGER ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Do you feel like you are in danger?
- Has your partner threatened to kill you, or displayed a gun or any other weapon in a menacing manner?
- Has your partner threatened suicide or homicide?
- Does your partner own a gun or have easy access to firearms?
- Has the violence become more severe over time?
- Has your partner forced you to have sex?
- Is your partner jealous, obsessive, or possessive?

Studies have shown that a victim's perception of danger is an important indicator of the level of risk.

In 70 to 90% of attempted or actual domestic violence homicides, the victim was stalked before the attempt.

- **Has your partner been stalking or spying on you?**
- Have you recently separated from your partner?
- Do you have concerns about your partner's current level of alcohol or drug use?
- Does your partner refuse to let you separate from him/her?
- Do you or your partner have mental health issues? (i.e. bipolar disorder, depression etc.)
- Has your partner ever taken you hostage?
- Has your partner ever been abusive toward children?
- Has your partner ever been abusive toward you while you were pregnant?

- **Has your partner ever attempted to choke you?**
- Has your partner ever been abusive toward animals or pets?
- Have you or your partner ever experienced abuse in your family of origin?
- Does your partner view violence as an appropriate response when upset?
- Is your partner violent outside of the home?

Prior choking¹ attempts were reported in almost half of attempted intimate partner homicides.

¹While choking is more accurately called strangulation, choking is the more commonly used term.

STEP 2: SAFETY PLANNING TIPS

SAFETY PLANNING WHILE IN THE RELATIONSHIP:

- Plan an escape route in your home.
- During an incident, avoid rooms that contain weapons or have no exits.
- Memorize important phone numbers.
- Set up a code word or phrase with friends or family so that they know you are in danger or need help.
- Identify individuals who you can trust to help you in an emergency.
- Stay in a room with a phone. Call 911 if possible.
- Try to keep your cell phone with you at all times.
- Obtain copies of important documents such as legal or government documents (i.e. divorce/custody paperwork, bank statements, birth certificates, social security cards, immigration papers, house deeds, drivers license).
- Obtain copies of keys to the house and any storage units or safety deposit boxes.
- Be careful that your partner does not become aware of these activities.
- Teach your children how to call for help during an emergency.

Identify the rooms in your home where you would face the highest level of danger during an explosive incident – i.e. the kitchen has knives, bathrooms can be slippery.

The most dangerous time for a victim is when attempting to leave the abusive relationship.

SAFETY PLANNING WHEN PREPARING TO LEAVE THE RELATIONSHIP:

- Do not tell your partner that you plan on leaving.
- Get a new phone if possible, as a cell phone can be used as a tracking device. Also, calls may be monitored.
- If you can, set aside money. Set aside small amounts at a time.
- Leave with a trusted friend or family member, or call law enforcement.
- Have a bag packed with items you would like to take with you. It is best to leave the bag with a trusted friend or family member, so that you are not placing yourself in additional danger if your partner finds your bag.

- Identify a safe place to stay such as with a friend, family member, or local domestic violence shelter.
- Review your escape route and safety plan as often as possible so that it stays fresh in your memory.
- Keep in mind that your partner may have access to your email account. If possible use a public computer when looking up domestic violence resources or places that you are thinking of leaving to, when attempting to purchase airline or bus tickets, or when taking other actions that may increase your risk.
- Call a domestic violence hotline to find out about resources in your area.

SAFETY PLANNING AFTER YOU HAVE LEFT THE RELATIONSHIP:

- Get legal advice and seek a restraining order if necessary.
- If you get a restraining order, carry it with you at all times.
- Keep in mind that while a restraining order may serve to discourage abuse and results in a legal consequence for the abuser if it is violated, it does not offer any physical protection from violence.

While restraining orders (also called protection orders) provide legal consequences for abusers if violated, they do not offer victims any protection in the moment against a physical assault.

- If you remain in the same residence make sure to change locks and security codes, install additional outside lighting, etc.
- Continue to review your safety plan and practice it with your children.
- Change your phone number if necessary. Do not answer any phone calls from any private or unknown phone numbers (save any texts or voicemails from the abuser but do not reply).
- Talk to landlords and neighbors, and ask them to call the police if they see the abuser at your home or if they suspect you are in danger.
- Provide your children's schools or daycare providers with any restraining order information.
- Avoid spots where you might run in to the abuser.
- Use a post office box for mail instead of a physical mailing address.

- Reschedule any appointments that the offender is aware of.
- Change routes to get to work and the children's school.

SAFETY PLANNING WITH UNDOCUMENTED CLIENTS:

- Understand that some undocumented clients will be uncomfortable with calling law enforcement.
- Develop relationships with law enforcement in your area to determine if they have a practice of referring undocumented victims to Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE).
- Work with law enforcement to increase their awareness of the provisions of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) as well as on increasing their responsiveness to undocumented victims of domestic violence (for more information on VAWA see “VAWA: Provisions for Immigration Relief” at <http://latinodv.org/handouts.php>).
- Inform your client about the immigration relief provisions in VAWA and how VAWA can help them (visit www.asistahelp.org for more info).
- Warn your client that the abuser may inform Border Patrol or ICE (*la migra* in Spanish) that your client will be present at scheduled court hearings or school meetings.
- Correct any misperceptions the client may have about the U.S. legal system, including how legal matters such as divorce settlements and child custody cases are typically determined. Some misperceptions may have been intentionally planted by the abuser.
- Help the victim be aware of resources that may be available in the area, as the client may have had little contact with social service providers or even awareness of the types of resources available.
- A client with children born in the U.S. will have access to more resources, as the children may qualify for Medicaid, housing assistance, and TANF.
- Clients from other countries may not be aware that domestic violence shelters exist or understand the role of shelters in assisting victims.
- The client may also have strong reservations, based on cultural beliefs or misperceptions, about going to a shelter.

SAFETY PLANNING WITH CLIENTS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LEP):

- Do not rely on family members to interpret. Family members may minimize the abuse or not recognize certain actions as abusive. They may also have difficulty in interpreting some concepts.
- Using children as interpreters is unsuitable and should be avoided.
- If you refer the client make sure that the organization has bilingual staff or utilizes interpreters.

- For detailed information on hiring bilingual workers, see the handout “Best Practices for Hiring Bilingual Domestic Violence Workers” at <http://latinodv.org/handouts.php>.
- For information on the requirements that organizations that receive any federal funding have to provide language access for clients, see “Language Access and Domestic Violence” at <http://latinodv.org/handouts.php>.
- Monolingual Spanish-speaking clients will find the brochure “Sus Derechos” (“Your Rights (English Translation)”) to be helpful (<http://latinodv.org/handouts.php>).

SAFETY PLANNING WITH RURAL CLIENTS:

Emergency responders may have more difficulty finding homes in rural areas:

- If possible, make sure the address is clearly visible from the street.
- Give the 911 operator landmarks and distinguishing features of the house if necessary (i.e. blue metal roof, Chevy truck out front, etc.).

Emergency response may be delayed, unavailable, or not requested:

- Victims in rural areas sometimes state that they do not call the police because they would “be dead before the police got there.”
- Victims may also be reluctant to contact police or other support services due to concerns over lack of privacy in small communities.
- Very few emergency responders may be tasked with covering a large area.

Therefore, victims should plan ahead of time for how to handle abusive situations if they are unable or unwilling to call law enforcement:

- The victim may choose to identify methods of calming the abuser. This is not ideal solution, however, it can be an effective response over the short-term if it helps avoid abuse.

If lack of transportation is an issue:

- A code word used in a phone conversation can indicate to a friend to come by the house.
- Most shelters will have some method for clients to be transported to the shelter.

Rural communities have their own culture:

- Rural persons tend to be self-reliant and may be uncomfortable relying on others for help.
- Rural persons may be more likely to own guns. The presence of guns in the house increases the risk for victims.
- Resources for clients in rural areas may be limited.
- As a result of isolation, they may not be aware of those resources that are available, including those in nearby urban areas.

About half of rural persons own guns, compared to around a quarter of urbanites.

<http://www.pewresearch.org/>

STEP 3: SAFETY PLAN

This safety plan is intended as a guide to assist me in increasing my safety.

Names and phone numbers of trusted family or friends who I can call if I need help:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

If I have to leave my home I will go to:

1. _____ OR _____

I have planned my escape route and have reviewed it with my children as appropriate.

In case I have to leave quickly, I have a bag packed with clothes and other items and have left it with _____.

People I should notify about having permission to pick up my children (I will provide them with a copy of my restraining order if I have one):

Children's school(s): _____

Children's teacher(s): _____

Children's day care provider: _____

Other: _____

Others I should notify about my current situation and ask that they call police if they see my partner approach me:

My supervisor and HR department: _____

Neighbors: _____

Family members: _____

Friends: _____

Other: _____

I WILL KEEP THIS PLAN IN A SAFE PLACE AWAY FROM MY PARTNER AND I WILL REVIEW IT EVERY _____ DAYS.

Important items or paperwork I should take with me if possible:

- Child custody/divorce paperwork
- Credit card/bank statements
- House deed
- Driver's license/I.D.
- A picture of my partner to help identify him/her
- Birth certificates and social security cards
- Insurance paperwork
- School and vaccination paperwork
- Copies of keys
- Immigration paperwork
- Medications
- Money
- Copy of restraining order
- Other, please list _____

- ☐ If appropriate (i.e. if I was a victim of a crime or if my spouse is a U.S. Citizen or legal resident and I am in the U.S. without documentation), I will talk to an immigration attorney about the immigration remedies available under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).

STEP 4: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESOURCESI can call the following phone numbers for help with domestic violence:

- * National Domestic Violence Hotline:

1-800-799-SAFE

or

1-800-787-3224 (TTY)

- * Find a shelter at: <https://www.domesticshelters.org/>

- * Local domestic violence hotline: _____

- * Other: _____