Factsheet 5: Risk management conversation guide

This factsheet was informed by the Ending Violence Association of British Columbia and Community Coordination for Women's Safety Canada, and has been updated to reflect the risk evidence and approach in the RAMF.

Conversations about the victim-survivor's current situation and circumstances are the primary way to develop safety planning actions.

For example, a discussion about threats or harm to pets could include a discussion about a friend who could take the pets at short notice, that can then be included as an action in the safety plan.

This guide is not meant to be used as a checklist, and the list is not exhaustive. The conversation guide includes some suggestions for areas to discuss during risk management conversations.

Many of the possible actions are focussed on ensuring the victim-survivor understands the risks they may be facing, based on what we know about evidence-based risk factors.

Remember

Risk identification and safety planning may not be an exact science or a perfect solution; but working with a victim to undertake a thorough exploration of risk and a collaborative safety planning process can do much to empower their current safety strategies and keep their family – and children – moving forward in their lives (Ending Violence Association of BC, 2013).

The conversation guide at Table 1 covers the following non-exhaustive risk areas a worker may explore with a victim, when discussing safety.

- Current safety strategies
- Escalating violence (frequency or severity)
- Children and/or pets
- System responses (police reporting, protection orders)
- The person using violence (understanding their context)
- Victim perception of violence, fear and safety

Table 1. Conversation guide about risk management with a victim-survivor.

Risk area	Possible actions
The victim's current safety strategies	• Discuss any safety strategies the victim-survivor already has in place. • Explore any other steps might they be able to take to enhance their safety. • Discuss the known risks that can arise during separation or when leaving a relationship. • Identify supports and resources that might be able to support the victim-survivor to build on current safety strategies. • Explore any patterns the victim-survivor has observed about the person using violence, what strategies are in place and what additional strategies could be developed.
Escalating violence	• Consider whether the victim-survivor can recognise when the violence is escalating. For example, changes in the behaviour of the person using violence, increase substance use, or heightened controlling behaviours. • Support the victim-survivor to recognise patterns in the use of violence that might help to recognise when further violence or escalation might occur. • If appropriate, discuss the increased risks of ongoing or escalating violence associated with certain types of violence such as strangling, choking, sexual coercion or abuse.
Victim perception of violence, fear and safety	• If the victim-survivor minimises the violence and risk, sensitively discuss the seriousness of certain identified risk factors, and that it is sometimes normal and inevitable to habituate to the serious harms you have identified with them. • If the victim-survivor has indicated that they believe violence might continue or escalate, discuss their concerns and explore what they believe the person using violence might be capable of. • If the victim-survivor fears for the safety of children, pets or other people, ensure to unpack this with them and include them in safety planning.
Children and pets	• Discuss the increased risk that can occur during pregnancy or after childbirth. • Discuss that threatening, stalking or harassing the children can be part of a pattern of abuse and that any threats to harm or kidnap the children should be taken seriously. • Consider whether schools or childcare services need information about the situation, including copies of any court orders and discussing appropriate planning if the person using violence arrives to pick up or see the children. • Ensure the victim-survivor understands any organisational and statutory reporting obligations, including if there are serious concerns for a child's safety or wellbeing. • Discuss any threats, harm or risk to pets and identify options for keeping them safer or getting them out quickly if necessary.
Technology	• Where technology-facilitated abuse, stalking or monitoring is a concern, it is important to discuss some level of technology audit. • Consider whether an e-safety review may assist in identifying and reducing risks. Use the e-Safety Checklist in the RAMF to explore potential technology risks.

Risk area	Possible actions
Person using violence (circumstances)	• Explore any obsessive, jealous and controlling behaviour by the person using violence and discuss how these behaviours may affect the future likelihood of violence. • If the person using violence has made threats to immigration status, discuss options for securing important documents, including placing copies of her immigration papers in a safe and secure place. • Consider whether other significant life circumstances, such as unemployment, housing instability or financial pressure may indicate a greater risk of further violence. • Discuss how any factors in the person's life that may inform risk management, such as substance use or mental health concerns. Emphasise that while they do not cause DFV, they can indicate periods of greater risk. • Explore with the victim whether the person using violence has a history of DFV or other history of violence towards others. This may help identify patterns in the PUV's behaviour. These factors can prompt a discussion about whether the victim-survivor feels responsible for the living situation, financial circumstances or wellbeing of the person using violence and whether feelings of responsibility or guilt are influencing decisions about remaining in, returning to or leaving the relationship. Acknowledge these feelings while reinforcing that the person using violence is responsible for their own living situation and behaviours.
Supporting system response risk management	• Discuss with the victim their preferences about reporting the violence to police or seeking a protection order – this will inform risk management considerations based on the victim's views and wishes. • If the victim wishes to report to police or seek a protection order, consider your organisations role in providing support and discussing appropriate referrals to other services as needed. • Discuss any court or police orders that are currently in place and consider how to ensure copies are in accessible and secure locations. For example, carrying copies of the orders or sharing copies with safe people. • Consider whether it is safe for the victim-survivor to document threats and incidents of violence and discuss how to securely store the notes. This includes keeping harassing texts, emails and voicemail messages. This conversation may identify records that they already have, particularly where things have been said to them in writing.
Remaining in the relationship or family	• Carefully and sensitively explore the victim-survivor's barriers to police reporting, seeking legal assistance or leaving the relationship. Use a non-judgemental approach to acknowledge their experience and provide reassurances where possible. • Provide information on police, legal and service processes such as police and protection orders and crisis services and where appropriate, offer to accompany the victim-survivor to police or medical support. • Respect and support the victim-survivor's choices while continuing to explore their options, needs, fears and any risks. Remember that separation and system involvement are extremely high-risk times for people experiencing DFV, and remaining in the relationship can be a safety strategy.

Risk area	Possible actions
Intersections with the victim's identity and communities	Risk management must be informed by the victim's unique intersections of identity and experience. Please refer to the ACT RAMF for further information on priority cohort risk management considerations. Recognise that a victim-survivor's social locations will affect their risk and safety planning needs. Explore the communities and social locations they identify with, to help inform specific risk management considerations.
Level of current support, including employment	• Fully explore supports currently available to the victim-survivor, or those that they are already engaged with. • Explore how the victim-survivor could strengthen support networks and if there are any additional services that could enhance safety. • If appropriate make a referral to a counsellor or service with expertise in working with victim-survivors of DFV. • Consider whether the victim-survivor's workplace may need to be informed. The workplace may also have workplace safety measures or supports available. Conversely, the victim-survivor may need support around workplace rights and employment, because of the impacts of violence.
Availability and accessibility of services	• Explore services and supports the victim-survivor might require and discuss access to and availability of these. • Discuss options for future housing options and financial assistance, including lodging applications and accessing grants. • Discuss information sharing across services to improve coordination and where appropriate, obtain consent to share information. • Work with the victim-survivor to identify and access required services and supports. The amount of assistance required may vary. For example, providing some victim-survivors with contact information may be enough support while others may need assistance to support initial or ongoing contact with services.

Please note

There may be additional things to consider when undertaking risk management conversations with a victim-survivor of DFV. This conversation guide is not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, it provides examples of issues that may be relevant when completing a safety plan with a victim-survivor.

Workers who require further support with conversations on risk management or completing safety planning should consider seeking advice from specialist services such as **DVCS** or **1800 RESPECT**.