

Fact sheet 7: Risk management conversation guide

Conversations about the 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 is not meant to be used as a checklist, nor is the list exhaustive; the conversation guide is simply some suggestions for areas to discuss during risk management conversations. Many of the possible actions are centred around ensuring the woman understands the risks she may be facing, derived from what we know about evidence-based risk factors. Remember that:

Risk identification and safety planning may not be an exact science or a perfect solution; but working with a woman to undertake a thorough exploration of her risk and a collaborative safety planning process can do much to empower her to keep herself and her children safe and to move forward in their lives.¹⁶⁴

Most of the content in the conversation guide can be attributed to the Ending Violence Association of British Columbia and Community Coordination for Women's Safety Canada.

Risk area	Possible actions for you to suggest or help her to take
Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss any safety strategies she already has in place. • What other steps might she be able to take? • You might need to discuss the known risks for women at the time of leaving. • Discuss any ways she thinks you might be able to support her to build on her current safety strategies.
Escalating violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You might suggest that the woman uses a calendar to better track incidents of violence to enable her to see if they are escalating in frequency or severity. • Discuss whether she can recognise when the violence is escalating — for example, the perpetrator drinking more, complaining more. Recognising patterns might help her recognise when a violent episode is going to occur.
Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the reality that if she is pregnant or has just given birth it is a time of high risk. • Let her know 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. • Discuss the possibility of needing to notify school or day care about the situation including giving them a copy of any family violence orders – discuss supporting her to ensure that the school or day care know what to do if the perpetrator arrives to pick up or see the children. • Clarify that she understands your agency's position on notification to child protection if you come to believe the children need protection.

¹⁶⁴ Ending Violence Association of BC (2013) *Safety planning across culture and community: a guide for front line violence against women responders*, p. 55.

Risk area	Possible actions for you to suggest or help her to take
Perpetrator — relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss with her the increased risks of ongoing and/or escalating violence associated with kinds of violence such as strangling, choking, sexual coercion or abuse. • If she has not been recording/diarying threats and incidents of violence discuss with her the possibility of doing that and where to keep the notes. • Discuss with her the value in reporting to police and or in obtaining a protection order. • Discuss the dangers of obsessive, jealous and controlling behaviour on future likelihood of violence. • Again, remind her that taking notes about incidents and behaviours may be useful — including keeping harassing texts, emails and phone messages. • Discuss with her whether she needs to tell her employer or co-worker/s. • Pets — discuss any threats he has made to pets and options for keeping them safe and/or getting them out quickly if necessary. • Immigration status — if he has threatened her immigration status, discuss placing copies of her immigration papers in a safe and secure place.
Protection orders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If there are orders in place suggest that she carries a copy of the order and/or places copies of the order with safe people. • If there are no orders in place, discuss and explain the value of an order and the support available to help her obtain one.
Perpetrator — other factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss that a previous history of domestic violence is quite strongly associated with future domestic violence. • Discuss that a previous history of violence to people other than partner is also associated with greater likelihood of domestic violence. • While drugs and alcohol and/or mental health issues do not cause domestic violence, they can indicate periods of greater risk. Discuss what she has observed, what strategies are in place and what additional strategies you might be able to develop. • Unemployment — may indicate a greater risk of committing further violence. • Financial pressures — can also indicate greater risk. <p>These factors can prompt a discussion about whether she is feeling responsible for his living situation and whether this or guilt may constitute a pressure to stay with him or return to him. Of course, acknowledge the feelings and reassure her she is not responsible for his living situation.</p>

Risk area	Possible actions for you to suggest or help her to take
Victim safety features	<p>The woman's social locations will affect her risk and safety planning needs. You need to try to find what communities and social locations she identifies with. Some of the things you might need to consider and discuss include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have understandable concerns about child notification and removal that should be discussed. • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced a history of colonisation that can make them distrustful of government and community services. • Discuss that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women want a specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service while others prefer a non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service. • Concerns for a member of the LGBTIQ+ community may include that the partner may access LGBTIQ+ services or fears that the partner may 'out' them to friends or family. • Is her wider family/community supportive of her or does she feel pressure to stay with the perpetrator? • Are there any vulnerabilities that arise because of her age or physical ability? • Are there steps she may not have already taken to mitigate the risks caused by poverty? • Potential risk and impact of homelessness.
Her perceptions of the violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the victim minimises the violence and risk, you might need to discuss the nature and dynamics of domestic violence. You may suggest some reading materials that she can either read at your service (if it is unsafe to take the materials home) or take them with her. You might also talk about the experiences of other women who have been in similar circumstances. • If she has indicated she thinks violence might continue and/or escalate, discuss with her what she thinks he might be capable of. • If she fears for the safety of other people be sure to include them in her safety planning. • If appropriate make a referral to a counsellor or service with expertise in working with victims of domestic violence.

Risk area	Possible actions for you to suggest or help her to take
Reluctance to leave or involve authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carefully and sensitively (particularly non-judgementally) explore her reasons for not wanting to report to police or seek to leave the situation. Provide reassurances about these reasons where possible. Offer to accompany her to police or medical support, explain processes such as protection orders and crisis services. Support her choices and at the same time continue to gently explore her options, her needs, her fears and the risk and encourage her to report or seek help to keep herself safe (see Key component 3: Risk assessment if you believe children are at risk). • Where relevant, provide information such as the Women’s Legal Centre Family Violence Order guide.
Level of current support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully explore who and what supports she currently has in place and whether these could offer more support if she asked. Explore how she might go about that.
Availability and accessibility of services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore with the victim the services she might require and then discuss access to and availability of these. • Consider alternative housing options for the future including lodging a public/social housing application form or rental bond loan, Safer Families Grants, and so on. • Discuss sharing information across services to improve coordination and obtain written permission to share information where appropriate. • If it all possible, offer to act as a case manager to help coordinate services and ensure they are working together. • Once the range of services required has been discussed, work with her to access the services she needs. For some women, just providing them the numbers may be enough support. Other women may need you to call for them and then hand them the phone. Others might just need a list of services and a plan for contacting them.
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to undertake some level of audit of phones and computers if stalking is a possibility. • See ACT Women’s Legal Centre Technology safety page > for more information.

There may be a number of other things to consider in your discussions with a victim of domestic and family violence. This table is just meant as a guide to some of the things you may need to know to complete a safety plan with the victim. Specialist services such as DVCS or 1800 RESPECT can provide you with advice if you feel unsure about your skills at safety planning or are concerned for the victim.

See Practice guide 3: Safety plan.