

Safety Planning Hints for Human Service Providers

Important for all victims

- Work collaboratively with clients on safety planning; don't come on like an expert.
- Work on safety plans during periods of relative calm, not just when there is a crisis.
- Evaluate the safety of all referrals and interventions you contemplate making for safety.
- Help clients assess the safety implications of interventions by others (e.g., the courts may impose a mutual order of protection; therapist may suggest couple counseling).
- Plan with clients how your own interventions can be handled most safely.
- Try to help clients:
 - ✓ See individual incidents as part of a larger pattern of abusive behavior that abusers seldom stop just because they promise to.
 - ✓ Focus on long term, not just the current crisis.
 - ✓ Identify high-risk situations and make specific plans for each one. (For instance, ask whether their partner owns guns or other weapons and has shown a willingness to use them against people, which greatly increases the risk.)
 - ✓ Identify signals of impending danger. Try to specify the chain of cues as far ahead of the actual violence as possible, to increase their chances of escaping the situation safely.
 - ✓ Identify behaviors that can help them avoid violence and reduce injury.
- Rehearse plans verbally, imagine how plans could backfire (escalation of violence, increased danger, legal ramifications), and make contingency plans.
- Revisit safety plans periodically and help assess how well they are working. Be alert for any indication that a plan has backfired.
- Ask about children's safety whenever domestic violence is identified, and always consider the children's safety when making safety plans

Especially important for LGBTQ+ victims.

- Pay particular attention to the abuser's use of LGBTQ+-specific tactics.
- Remember that the children themselves may not talk to anyone about their concerns. They may fear outing their parents or having others assume they themselves are also LGBTQ+. They may also fear that whoever they talk to will misunderstand the situation or use their parents' sexual orientation or gender identity to break up the family.
- Identify community resources that can help, and help assess the safety of using those resources.
- Help assess the potential risks (their partner's likely response) and benefits (ability to help them be safe) of contacting authorities.
 - ✓ Don't assume that calling police or getting a Restraining Order is the best idea.
- Help assess the potential risks (homophobia/transphobia) and benefits (supportive services) of seeking help from service providers.
 - ✓ Don't assume that LGBTQ+ victims *should* seek shelter, or will be welcome there.
- Help clients assess the potential costs (silencing and victim-blaming) and benefits (potential support) of disclosing abuse in their LGBTQ+ community.
 - ✓ Don't assume that telling LGBTQ+ friends about the abuse is a good idea.
- Maintain a clear stance that being abused is not their fault.

Should I suggest couple counseling?

No. Your goal should be safety for the client, not fixing the relationship.

- Couple counseling is an ineffective response to domestic violence, and it can be dangerous. Victims have been assaulted for what they say in sessions.
- Some counselors don't recognize when the abuser is trying to gain control and may unintentionally reinforce the abuser's tactics or blame the victim for causing or provoking the abuse.
- Friends, family and other providers may urge your client to try couple counseling. Don't add to that pressure. If the client is thinking about couple counseling, ask what they need to help make it safe for them.

What if a victim doesn't want services?

- Respect your client's sense of timing, which may not be the same as yours. Victims decide to seek services or leave their abusive partner according to their own sense of what is safe and helpful at a given time.
 - ✓ In between acute violent episodes, some victims persuade themselves that it won't happen again and minimize ongoing danger signals. Others focus on managing their partner day-to-day. Both of these safety strategies make long-term safety planning more difficult. Working with a domestic violence advocate can be helpful. Talk about safety during periods of relative calm, not just during a crisis, and try to help clients focus on the long term.
 - ✓ Their partner may be keeping them from seeking help by convincing them that shelters only serve heterosexual women, or that no one will believe them. These claims don't have to be true to be effective!
- Remain available as a source of support and referrals.
 - ✓ Some clients may prefer to contact an LGBTQ+ organization for help. Such groups may not have adequate ability to help with domestic violence, but they may be able to offer crucial support.
- Working with victims can take a toll on you, especially if you are afraid for their safety and worry that they are making bad choices. If you feel frustrated, helpless or angry with a client, find support from a co-worker or supervisor. Call the Catalyst hotline for support. Don't expect your client to take care of you.



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