

Safety Planning

Red Wind Consulting, Inc.

Safety planning is pivotal for survivors in a transitional housing program.

It helps them prepare for the likelihood of future violence and enables survivors to have options and protect themselves when emergency responders might be too far (Creating Sister Space, Red Wind Consulting). Survivors are the experts in their life. They know what options will work for them and what will not. The advocates role is to simply get them thinking about these options. Keep in mind that not all women are the same. What has worked for some will not always work for someone else. Empowering the survivor to develop their safety plan encourages them to critically think about what will keep them safe, in turn developing their skills to safety plan on their own.

Some things to consider when safety planning with a woman in a transitional program:

- Be sure to include children and pets into the safety planning
- Talk to them about getting a PO Box
- Encourage them to talk to their family, friends and neighbors so that if they see or hear something, they can call the police.
- Talk to them about taking different routes to work, school or to the grocery store.
- Talk to them about social media and computer safety
- Always lock doors
- Document any instances of threats or protection order violations
- Keep important documents such as driver's licenses, birth certificates for children and survivor, extra keys etc. in a safe place.
- Talk to their child's daycare/school so that they are aware and can protect children and privacy.

When talking with a survivor about safety planning, ask questions that get them to clearly think about what they know (Creating Sister Space, Red Wind Consulting, Inc.):

- When do you think you are in danger? Where is that?
- What would help you feel safer, both physically and emotionally?
- What have you done in the past to stay safe?

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Remember, there are some different needs when it comes to safety planning and domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking:

- Safety planning for instances of **domestic violence**, the focus needs to be about anticipating the abusers actions, looking at the dangers and recognizing abusers shift their tactics. It needs to be adaptable and include children and pets.
- For instances of **sexual assault**, safety planning needs to focus on providing community resources, normalizing potential responses and triggers, creating a sense of safety with in themselves and within their personal space as well as anticipating dangers that may result from the perpetrator.
- When safety planning for instances of **dating violence**, it is important to know that many tend to minimize this type of violence. It is important that support systems believe the victim and that they are informed about social media and social community safety. Perpetrators might use social media to vilify and further violate further victimize.
- **Stalking** is not always the result of an intimate relationship. The abuser may not have had a relationship but becomes obsessed/infatuated with the person being stalked. According to the Stalking Resource Center, the majority of stalking victims know the person they are being stalked by. According to Mullen, Mackenzie, Ogloff, Pathe, McEwan, and Purcell, "In most stalking situations, except where the target is a public figure, the presence of threats increases the risk of progression to violence." (2006) so it is critical to extensively safety plan with the program participant and to especially talk about the frequency of threats. Consider talking about alternative routes to places of work, school and stores; talk about getting a new phone but keeping her old phone to document threats and unwanted contact; keeping location of transitional housing address confidential and get a PO Box; inform neighbors and employer so that if they see or hear anything they report to the police and also to make sure they keep the victim's information confidential.
- Vulnerable populations and special populations might have additional safety plan needs. It is important that that is addressed in policy and procedure.