

## 4.B. Staying Safe. How Do We Stay Safe?

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## B.1. What Is *Staying Safe*?

### *Staying Safe: Key Questions*

- What are risks and dangers right now?
- Risks to whom?
- What level of risk? High, Medium, Low, None, Emergency?
- What are the risks and dangers if we take no action?
- What are the risks and dangers if we take action?
- Who needs safety and protection?
- What plans can we make to provide safety and protection?

### *What Is It?*

*Staying Safe* includes concerns, plans and actions all meant to minimize the current, potential and future levels of harm or increase the level of safety. As you take action to address, reduce, end or prevent violence, a primary concern is staying safe.

In this Toolkit, *Staying Safe* has 3 parts:

1. *Risk Assessment* to *identify* the level of danger, potential danger or harm;
2. *Safety Planning* to *plan steps and roles* to minimize this danger or harm;
3. *Safety Actions* to *take steps* to minimize this danger or harm.

### *Why Is It Important?*

*Staying Safe* is a centerpiece for most violence interventions. This model is unique in that it understands that taking action to address violence is often risky, in and of itself. This Toolkit provides many ways to ask you to consider how taking action (or not taking action) can result in harm. It also asks you to consider how an action you take may not bring harm to yourself, but could bring harm to others. The possibility of getting in the way of danger and risking retaliation to yourself and the survivor or victim (if you are not the survivor or victim) are considerations that are important every step of the way. Retaliation that might involve other loved ones such as children or other family and friends

can be a real danger. And, in some situations, taking action can set off levels of harm and endangerment to the person doing harm (from themselves or from others) that should also be taken into consideration.

In this model, we know that gaining long-term safety and other goals we seek can sometimes involve short-term risks. We urge you to think carefully and thoroughly about all possible risks and dangers and safety planning and action to counteract these risks and dangers no matter what actions – large and small – you decide to take.

### *Safety Takes Many Forms*

In the Toolkit, Section 2.2. *Interpersonal Violence: Basics Everyone Should Know*, we saw how violence can take many forms and hurt many people.

Safety may also take many forms:

- Emotional
  - Basic feelings of worth and integrity
  - Ability to make basic life decisions
- Physical
  - Safety from physical harm and neglect or threats of physical harm; having basic needs of home, food, shelter and clothing
- Sexual
  - Freedom from unwanted sexual looks, gestures, or touch;
  - Safety from exposure to unwanted sexualized environment including language, pictures, audio, visuals
  - Safety from pressure to be involved in unwanted sexual activity
  - For children, protection from any type of sexual look, gesture, touch or exposure
- Economic or financial
  - Safety that we will have basic needs of home, food, shelter, and clothing
  - Safety that we will have a decent job or source of livable income
- Spiritual
  - Safety to hold and express our spiritual beliefs
- Other
  - Other forms of safety such as safety for immigrants from detention and deportation, safety from homophobia, safety from political persecution, and more

### *Staying Safe Can Involve Both Planning and Action*

People often think about making safety plans – for example, who to call in case of emergency or what to pack in case you need to get away. But sometimes safety requires taking higher levels of action and possible risk – for example, removing guns or other weapons to reduce the level of danger; calling friends for a meeting to figure out who can take care of children or pets in case someone has to get away; getting friends or family to keep watch at the home; or helping someone move to a safer home.

This section offers some basic information and tools for you to understand the risks as you move to action (or if you choose not to act) and to prepare for safety.

#### *Using Tools in This Section*

Safety is never a guarantee, but this section offers tools to help increase safety or reduce risk and harm.

Tool B1. *Risk Assessment Chart* looks specifically at risks and dangers if one takes no action and if one takes action.

The following safety-related tools look more at how you can plan and prepare for safety. Tool B2. *Safety Plan and Action Worksheet* and Tool B3. *Safety Plan and Action Chart* provide guides to custom-made safety plans and actions depending upon your particular risks and dangers and the resources you have available to help you stay safe.

Tools also include a more conventional Tool B4. *Escape Safety Checklist* for those who need to prepare for situations in which escape is necessary.

Finally, Tool B5. *Meeting Person Who Did Harm Safety Worksheet* helps with safety planning for those of you who may consider meeting directly with the person doing harm.

## B.2. Staying Safe Across the 4 Phases

In Section 3.6, *Interventions Over Time: 4 Phases*, the Toolkit introduced the idea of 4 possible phases of interventions: 1) Getting Started, 2) Planning/Preparation, 3) Taking Action, and 4) Following Up.

Figuring out how to stay safe may look different at various phases or levels of crisis.

### *Phase 1: Getting Started*

As you get started, you or someone you know may already be in a dangerous and harmful situation. You may need to think about very basic safety needs such as telling trusted people about the situation of violence. Taking care of medical or mental health needs may come first. For some, escaping from the situation of harm may become a priority.

### *Phase 2: Planning/Preparation*

If you are entering a phase of planning and preparation, safety concerns may be different. For example, figuring out trusted allies and how to keep information safe among them might become a key issue. Finding helpful allies who can also support the person doing harm to take responsibility might be important at an early planning stage.

### *Phase 3: Taking Action*

As you get ready to take action, big actions or small, you may face new risks and dangers. Taking action may increase risks for those involved in the intervention or may trigger reactions that could further jeopardize safety. It may be important to use tools to assess risks and plan for safety that focuses just on the next step to be taken.

Risk assessment and safety planning may focus around next steps – with each action requiring its own risk and safety consideration.

### *Phase 4: Following-Up*

As you move through the planning and action steps of intervention or perhaps as you reach its conclusion, you may be able to create systems to establish longer-term safety. You may be able to focus on maintaining and sustaining systems of safety or taking lessons learned to create wider community safety zones.

### *Related Tools:*

Tools to look closer at people who can help out with safety are in Section 4.C. *Mapping Allies and Barriers* and Section 4.G. *Working Together*.

Tools to help you look at whether and how safety is a goal are in Section 4.D. *Goal Setting*.

Tools to look at risks and safety when preparing to take action steps are in Section 4.H. *Keeping on Track*.

## B.3. Staying Safe Tips

### **1. Read *Some Basics Everyone Should Know*.**

Interpersonal violence is complicated. Although we may hear more about domestic violence or sexual assault these days, many misunderstandings still exist and many misconceptions about what it is and how to approach it. Read Section 2. *Some Basics Everyone Should Know*. Pay special attention to Section 2.2. *Interpersonal Violence: Some Basics Everyone Should Know* in order to have a clearer picture of what is going on. The Section 2.3. *Violence Intervention: Some Important Lessons* also shares important basics about interventions based upon the experiences of Creative Interventions.

Share this information with others who may be involved in a situation of violence and may need some resources to help them know what to do.

### **2. Take into account the possibility that risks can increase as you take action to end violence.**

Our model of community action recognizes that taking action to create safety can sometimes mean taking additional risks, at least in the short run. What is important is for everyone to understand what risks you are taking, who might be endangered and what precautions may ensure greater safety or minimize harm.

Interpersonal violence is often about maintaining control over others. When people take action to end violence or gain safety, violence or threats of violence can increase. In some situations, threats get more serious. Levels of violence may escalate beyond levels experienced in the past. People doing harm may also threaten to harm themselves including suicide.

Risk assessment should take into account possible reactions from the person doing harm. This could include acts of retaliation which could be provoked when the person doing harm senses loss of control, exposure through public disclosure or other negative consequences resulting from the intervention. Safety planning and safety actions need to take into account these increases in risk.

### **3. Think about safety for everyone.**

Safety may involve many different people – the safety of the survivor (or primary victim or target of violence), safety of others close by (children, friends, family, workplace, or community), safety for people carrying out an intervention, and safety for the people who caused or are doing harm. When possible, aim for a course of action that ensures the safety for all involved.

### **4. Involve other trusted people in staying safe.**

Because intervention actions are often taken under conditions of danger, any move to take the next step should involve at least one other person and hopefully more trusted people to help with planning, support and follow-up.

Other trusted people could help in some of the following ways:

- By acting as a sounding board
- Go through a safety plan together
- Go together with someone who is taking an action, waiting in the car or around the corner until you know someone is safe
- Being on the other end of a cell phone to receive a call that everything went okay
- Watching someone's children to make sure they are safe
- Distracting or confronting someone who may be a danger
- Even if someone is going to take some action alone, it can be helpful to have a back-up or use a buddy system – with someone who knows what they are going to do, when, and can be in communication with them either by going with them, standing close by or at least be in communication via phone or text.

## **5. Make safety checks a regular part of your plan.**

The levels of risks and dangers can change constantly. Make sure you make risk assessment and safety plans a regular part of your intervention – and, if necessary, a regular part of your daily lives.

A situation can change due to a number of factors:

*People have started to know about the violence* and may say things or do things that cause a change – for example, they may treat the person doing harm differently

*People have gathered to take action.* The simple fact that people are starting to gather together and take action steps may change the situation

The *survivor or victim of violence may feel more empowered* to act assertively or in other ways that could shift the dynamics of power; this can cause positive change as power starts to shift; this can also increase danger if the person or people doing harm react negatively to this change

The *survivor or victim of violence may leave or attempt to leave* the person doing harm or the situation in which harm is happening – thereby making a

change; again, this can be a positive change. This can also increase danger as the person or people doing harm react negatively to this change

## **6. Remember the signs of increased risk.**

The risk of harm and level of harm is generally greatly increased if:

- 1) Weapons are involved – guns, knives, machetes, and others that can cause great harm;
- 2) Someone has a history of committing acts of violence; and
- 3) Someone is also threatening suicide. As mentioned above, risks can also increase as the person doing harm senses a loss of control. Violence or threats of violence can escalate in these situations.

You may need to take extra steps to assess risks and take steps to increase safety if you are facing higher levels of risk or harm.

## **7. Separate safety from other feelings of discomfort.**

For some of us, the word “unsafe” has become equivalent with “uncomfortable,” “anxious,” “nervous.” The English language and other languages have limitations in distinguishing between these different forms of safety. Lack of safety or exposure to risks and harm are negative. However, other forms of discomfort such as anxiety, vulnerability, nervousness, embarrassment or shame may be a necessary but difficult step towards creating safety in the long term.

Exposing someone to situations that are out of their comfort zone, that may challenge their thoughts and actions that may make them feel insecure because such thoughts or actions are unfamiliar are not necessarily threats to safety, although they may make someone feel unsafe.

For example, someone who is asked to take accountability may experience this as making them feel vulnerable and, therefore, unsafe. A survivor or victim who is nervous about talking about and sharing their experience of abuse with allies may feel a sense of embarrassment or shame that makes them feel unsafe. Community allies who recognize the need to involve themselves in addressing harm that they had previously ignored may feel feelings of nervousness and uncertainty that feel unsafe.

This Toolkit asks us to take risks to create safety. This may mean discomfort as a means towards the goals of long-term safety.

## **8. Remember and prioritize the safety of children and youth**

Remember the sensitivity and vulnerability of children and youth to violence. If actions are taking place, they are affected by them. Actions taken for safety may be experienced as scary and threatening to young people. Careful attention may

be made to think about including them in on a plan before it happens – or perhaps protecting them from that plan. Their level of maturity and ability to keep information confidential may be taken into account when considering their involvement.

Regardless of the involvement of children and youth in safety or intervention plans, special attention needs to be paid to the emotional, sexual and physical safety of children. You may consider how they can be cared for and kept safe away from the situation of harm or situations of intervention. You may consider how people they trust can spend time with them to let them express their feelings of confusion or fear, assure them that they will remain cared for and make sure they are able to continue in activities important to their well-being: time to play, attendance at school, time to do homework, regular meals, and regular sleep.

Be aware of mandated reporting laws in your state. Know that school staff, social workers, people who work regularly with youth and children, medical staff and sometimes religious leaders are required to report to authorities if they suspect physical or sexual abuse or neglect.

If children are kept safe away from parents or guardians, make sure you know the laws in terms of removal of children, escape from violence, or what is considered kidnapping. Make sure you know what school rules are in terms of who can take children from school premises. You can contact local anti-violence programs like domestic violence hotlines and shelters and sexual assault counseling centers, police or lawyers who are familiar with issues of violence, children and custody to find out. It may be possible to call without using the actual names of anybody involved to get this information without endangering yourself or these children.

Although this Toolkit is geared more for adults, youth may also be using this for violence intervention. If you are a young person reading this section, then this information is still for you.

## B.4. *Staying Safe* Special Considerations.

The process of *Staying Safe* may be different depending upon your relationship to violence and to the people most closely involved in violence. This Toolkit promotes a process that brings together different viewpoints to create a better picture of what is really going on. This can and should happen regularly throughout the intervention.

We believe that bringing people together in a coordinated way can build “safety in numbers.” That means that people acting together to address or end harm can create a safety net. This Toolkit promotes safety for everyone involved in violence including the survivor or victim, the community allies and the person or people who have caused harm. It also recognizes that different people in different positions may face different types of safety concerns. It uses the special roles, relationships and skills of many people to create a wider safety net.

### *Survivor or Victim*

The survivor or victim is often the person who best understands the dynamics and impact of violence. That person is also likely to be the person most affected by violence. Especially when we are thinking about interpersonal violence, the nature of harm can be subtle or hidden. It may have developed over a period of time, beginning with small abuses that end up becoming a pattern of abuse. It may have been one particularly violent incident that gives the message that this can always happen again.

Likewise, the survivor or victim may have developed a keen sense of how best to stay safe under unsafe conditions. This sense can even appear to others as a strange or unwise way to keep safe. For example, survivors or victims in situations of violence are known to provoke violence as a way to control a situation that will happen regardless. People involved in a regular pattern of violence can begin to sense when tension is building. Survivors or victims of violence can sometimes react to this tension by doing something to bring on violence. For example, someone may even provoke a fight or challenge someone to, “come here and hit me” because they know that they will eventually be hit anyways. Having some control over when it happens can seem irrational to others who are not living under this fear, but can make sense in a world in which one has so little control.

This Toolkit recognizes that people who have had to live for a long time under unsafe conditions may have learned to deny or minimize the seriousness of violence for various reasons. Violence may have become a normal condition. Minimizing violence may become a coping mechanism. For others, it may seem like no other choice or escape exists – thereby making violence something to tolerate.

The primary survivors or victims of violence have already had their safety violated. As people begin to hear about the violence and get involved, the survivors or victims may risk the judgment and blame of others as they hear the story. Many people do not understand the basics about violence and instead fall easily into victim blaming. Victim blaming can create a situation of even more danger and vulnerability. Survivors or victims who have sought safety through friends, or programs or the police may also fear retaliation for telling others. They may have been told that they will be hurt even more if they try to seek help.

***If you are the survivor or victim,*** your direct experience with violence may make safety your first concern. As mentioned above, you may have different feelings and relationships to the idea of safety. Desire for safety may have caused you to turn to this Toolkit. Fear for your safety may also make you afraid to take action. It is also common for people to deny or minimize danger as a way to cope with an overwhelming sense of fear.

Feeling mixed and confused is normal. It is normal to wish the worst for someone who has hurt you. It is also normal to want them to be protected, especially if they are someone you have cared about. It is normal to forget about and excuse the ways that they have hurt you in one moment and think only about these things in another.

These concerns can lead to double-edged criticisms by others. You might be accused of not caring about yourself (your children, your family or others in harm's way). You might also be accused of being selfish and not caring about the person doing harm. This can be a very difficult situation.

Use of this Toolkit offers you an opportunity to think more clearly about what safety means to you and what kinds of safety you seek. It urges you to be as realistic as possible about the dangers you face and the potential dangers that you and others face as you take action. It encourages you to think realistically about risks and to make plans that take these risks into account. It reminds you that other people close to you or who get involved may also be taking risks.

The Toolkit can also help others do a better job of supporting you. You may find that during an intervention, your safety seems to become less important as people focus their energy on the person or people who have done harm. You may need to call more attention to your safety or pick out a couple of trusted people who can help you brainstorm and plan your safety and help you get others to keep their attention to safety concerns. Use these tools to get clear and to protect yourself and others as you take action.

### *Community Ally*

Community allies may already be experiencing harm or threats to harm. As community allies step in to get involved in an intervention, they may expose

themselves to more risk. They may be thinking about survivor or victim safety and also have to consider their risks, safety plans and safety actions.

***If you are a community ally***, you may already be aware that your involvement carries risks. You may be worried about a number of things. How can you make sure your actions do not lead to retaliatory violence against the survivor or victim? How can you make sure that your actions do not reveal confidential information in such a way to increase danger for the survivor or victim or others? Can you become the target of retaliation? Can you be threatened in order to reveal more information such as the whereabouts of the survivor or victim, the location of children, plans for intervention and so on?

Depending on the situation of violence and the plan for intervention, safety concerns may be relatively low. But in highly lethal situations or in situations in which the community ally is physically, emotionally or financially dependent upon the person doing harm, these threats can be high.

Be aware of your own risks and safety needs. Be honest with yourself and others about your own willingness to take these risks. Think about your own bottom-lines or boundaries regarding how much risk you are willing to take on or how much you are able to do. Let others know your limitations, and think about the best roles that you can take given these limitations.

Remember also that “safety is in numbers.” Work with others to create safety plans that can rely on greater numbers of people taking advantage of their various roles, locations and skills to create a wider safety net. Use these tools to protect yourself and others as you take action.

### *Person Doing Harm*

When people take action to end violence, the safety of the person doing harm may be one of the lowest on the list of concerns. This Toolkit encourages us to think about the safety concerns of everyone. When we think about the safety of the person doing harm, this does not mean that we avoid consequences or actions that may seem negative or threatening to that person. Naming violence, asking someone to stop their violence and demanding that people take responsibility or accountability for this harm may appear threatening to that person. It may ask them to be in a position that calls attention to things that have hurt other people and may feel shameful. It may lead others to threaten or even to harm that person when they find out what they have done.

This Toolkit asks us to consider offering an intervention process that also respects the integrity of the person doing harm and that provides enough safety for that person to go through the process of taking accountability with dignity if he or she chooses to take the responsible path. Experiencing negative feelings can be a central part of the process but for some, this may even feel like a threat to safety.

This is different from intervention processes that deliberately use humiliation or forms of violence to “get even.” Attempts to “get even” are not recommended in this Toolkit. However, intervention processes that result in someone feeling shame because they did something wrong, because they face the judgment of other people or because they have to step down from positions of power are often necessary steps in someone taking responsibility for their actions.

If you are a community ally, think about how standard interventions to violence such as calling the police could also threaten safety and work against the aims of intervention. Think about ways in which you can provide alternatives to support accountability without subjecting someone to the harms of arrest and imprisonment or actions that might invite other systems such as immigration control.

If you are a community ally with special ties to the survivor or victim of violence, to particular allies or to the person or people doing harm, then you can use your connections and relationships to support them in special ways. You can use your compassion and understanding to bring them out of isolation and into a more connected and collective experience of violence of intervention. Your care and support may help create a path from shame and anger towards responsibility.

***If you are the person doing harm or who has been accused of doing harm***, use this as an opportunity to experience the shame of doing harm, the judgment of others who may be hurt, disgusted or horrified by your actions, and the possible consequences you are asked to take. Understand how your attitudes or actions, even if unintentional, threatened the safety of others.

Find friends, allies or other supporters to help you through the painful process of admitting or reflecting on actions that led you to this process. Remember that the role of allies is not to excuse you but to support you, perhaps in ways that may be challenging. Even if you do not agree with everything, see if you can shift your perspective. See if you can carry out some of the actions of accountability and make it through uncomfortable negative feelings, a sense of vulnerability and, perhaps, what may feel like your own lack of safety. See if these actions can actually lead to a greater sense of humanity.

Ask others working with you to support you through this process. Taking responsibility to try on new attitudes and actions can be uncomfortable and may feel very threatening. Taking responsibility can also lead to new healthy relationships with yourself and with others.

For tools that can help you take responsibility and make important changes in your life, see Section 4.F. *Taking Accountability*.

## B.5. Staying Safe Facilitator Notes

Risk assessment, safety planning and safety actions are very sensitive to changing conditions. They might require constant assessment and reassessment. They may be very specific to a single step or action to be taken.

Because of this, facilitators may need to take both a broad role in looking at overall risks and safety planning and check to see if safety plans are in place as things change and as people take new actions.

If you are a facilitator or are willing to help out by providing a role in helping another person or a group to work through this Toolkit, then these notes are to help you.

### **1. Encourage and support people to learn fundamental information first if they have not already.**

This Toolkit is long and can be overwhelming. Some important parts of this Toolkit are Section 2. *Some Basics Everyone Should Know*. An especially important section can be Section 2.2. *Interpersonal Violence: Some Basics Everyone Should Know* that discusses much more about the dynamics of violence and common misunderstandings that people have.

It can be useful for you to be familiar with the different sections of this Toolkit and to read more carefully through these sections. Also encourage people to read these sections. If reading is not the best option or they cannot read English or the language that this Toolkit is in, you can help by reading this and other sections to them in a language they understand or use other formats to pass on this information.

### **2. Make sure that people take the time to think seriously about risks and safety planning.**

This Toolkit highlights safety as a primary concern when taking action to address, reduce, end or prevent violence. It is common to underestimate safety. It is common not to think through many of the things that could go wrong and come up with some safeguards just in case.

### **3. Bring people together to form a safety plan.**

Safety is best found in numbers. Even if someone is going to take some action alone, it can be helpful for them to have a back-up or buddy system – someone who knows what they are going to do, when, and can be in communication with them either by going with them, standing close by or at least being in communication via phone or text.

**4. Make sure that risk assessment safety planning is a regular part of the intervention.**

Risks and, therefore, safety plans can often change as the situation changes and as actions are taken.

Make safety planning a regular way for everyone to lower risk.

## B.6. Real Life Stories and Examples

### **Story B. *Confronting the Person Who Raped Me***

A young immigrant woman came to an immigrant rights organization seeking assistance. She had gone to a party with her former employer, the owner of a bar. That evening, he attempted to rape her. She was able to struggle and get away. However, the experience was clearly traumatizing. Outraged, the woman had decided that she wanted to confront this man. She talked to the advocate about her plan to enter the bar and directly confront him, convinced that her sense of violation could only be met by this bold move.

The advocate, moved by the courage of this woman, responded by offering to go into the bar with her, a strategy ultimately challenged by the advocate's team of co-workers. This offer went beyond the usual practices of this organization and much beyond what most anti-violence organizations would recommend. Interested in the further exploration of this woman's request, this organization wondered whether this was the right opportunity for trying out a community-based intervention. The other options didn't seem to fit. She had already gone to the police who told her she did not have a case. And she did not have money or speak English. Who would she go to for "therapy" except the organization? Besides, it seemed like she was seeking her own pathway to healing which for her meant facing him head-on.

The advocate decided not to go with her and confront this man. But she did decide to act as a supporter or facilitator to see if she could provide a supportive anchor for this woman to carry out this plan of action. Self-determination became the guiding value for the organization's workers. Safety was also foremost in their minds. How could they prioritize safety without taking away this woman's self-determination?

The staff team discussed what a facilitated community-based intervention would look like in this situation. How could the advocate ask exploratory questions without trying to convince this woman not to go or to scare her off? The advocate met again with this young woman. This time she helped her explore her goals in confronting this man. Could her goals be met in other ways? Did she think about safety? It became clear that this woman's goal was direct confrontation even after all of the questions. But she was also open to discussing safety plans and to role play this action. She appreciated the support to figure this out.

The advocate role-played possible scenarios based upon her knowledge of the dynamics of sexual assault. She presented possible dangers as well as responses of victim-blaming, denial, threats and violence. She helped the woman explore who else among her friends and family might be willing to help. The role play brought up many situations which this woman had not considered. She recognized that marching into the bar on her own or with others was too

dangerous. She had not thought of the possibility of his denial or his manipulation that it was her fault or her imagination. After going through the role play, she realized that these were all possibilities and appreciated the opportunity to go through the process. She took this as useful information that helped her clarify a safer plan which still met her goals.

Since the advocate was also interested in helping this woman explore what other allies she had, she asked more about this. Although the advocate had at first been convinced to march alongside her, she thought more about this. It was dangerous. She did not “know” this man, his possible reactions, or how her presence could make the situation more dangerous. Supporting this woman to center this “intervention” within her own community made more sense. They are her first-line supporters. They know her and the situation in which she worked. And the advocate was willing to help think through their possible roles and safety as well as hers.

The woman could not identify anybody within her community to help out when this plan was first discussed. But the question seemed to make an impression. By the time she decided to go and confront the man, she had talked to a friend who agreed to stay close to her phone in case any crisis occurred.

After thinking through and role-playing the safety plan, she called her former employer to meet her at a restaurant. He agreed. When she went to prepare for the meeting, she talked to the waiter at the restaurant and asked him to keep a close watch on the situation in case anything happened. These were two allies, the friend and the waiter, that she organized to help support her safety.

The woman ended up meeting with her former employer, confronting him by naming his action and her outrage. Within a short time, he admitted his guilt and apologized without further incident. She called the organization following this confrontation with great appreciation, relief and a sense of closure.

This story illustrates the basic principles of the model of community-based intervention, the critical role of helping the survivor identify her own goals and a plan of action to meet these goals. It also highlights the importance of exploring a collective response and the opportunity it opens for a different set of options resulting from the involvement of other people. It also offers one example of engagement with the person doing harm and the transformative power of this possibility for the survivor. We can imagine that the “healing” powers of this action were deeper and more powerful than anything the police or professionals could provide.

Story adapted from Kim, M. “Alternative Interventions to Intimate Violence: Defining Political and Pragmatic Challenges.” Pp. 193 – 217 in Ptacek, J. (Ed.), *Feminism and Restorative Justice*, (NY: Oxford Press, 2010).

## [7. Tools cover page](#)

## *Staying Safe Tool B1: Risk Assessment Chart*

### *Risk Assessment: What Is It?*

A risk assessment is a kind of measurement of harm, violence or danger. It takes into account what has been done in the past, what is happening now, and what could happen in the future.

Risk assessment also has to take into account changing conditions. This can include any increases in risk as people start to find out that violence has been happening or people start to find out that an intervention is being carried out. These new changes can set into motion a whole series of responses. It is important to think through all possible scenarios.

It is also important to think of the risks of harm to all people involved: the survivor or victim of violence; people close by such as family, friends, and, especially, children; and the person or people doing harm.

### *What Can Increase Risk?*

The risk of harm is generally greatly increased if:

- 1) weapons are involved – guns, knives, machetes, and others that can cause great harm;
- 2) someone has a history of committing acts of violence; and
- 3) someone is also threatening suicide.

Risk can also increase when people begin to confront violence. Some people leaving violent relationships have found that the level of violence or threats can actually increase during the time they are trying to get away or regain control of their lives. This does not mean that one should not leave or confront an abusive relationship. It does mean that someone may need to take extra steps to be aware of dangers and take extra action to provide safety. Safety planning and safety actions prepare people to increase safety, but it does not guarantee it.

## *Staying Safe* Tool B1. Risk Assessment Chart(cont.)

1. Consider the full range of harms already being faced. Look at the Harms Chart filled out from the section *Getting Clear: Naming the Harm Chart*.
2. Review the *Naming the Harm Chart* to see what is still a risk now and what may be a risk later.
3. Fill in the chart below following questions to assess risk:

### *Column 1: Risk, Danger or Harm*

In the first column, you can name the risk, danger or harm in your own words. The following is a list that may also be useful to think of categories of harm. You can use specific words to describe the particular risk in your situation.

- Physical or threatened harm to the body or to one's life
- Physical or threatened harm to others such as children, family, friends, neighbors, co-workers
- Physical or threatened harm to self; threats of suicide
- Physical threat through use of weapon
- Physical and emotional threat through stalking or harassment using phone, text, email
- Emotional or verbal harm such as loss of reputation; "outing" or sharing unwanted information or lies to friends, family or community; isolation
- Emotional or verbal harm such as threats to harm relationships with family, friends or children
- Emotional or verbal harm through insults, threats, humiliation
- Sexual harm including rape, molestation, forced sexual acts, exposure to pornography and so on
- Financial harm through destroying property or taking away property
- Financial harm through loss of job
- Financial harm through taking money from bank account
- Financial harm through refusing to repay loans or debt or through reckless use of credit cards or gambling

- Other harms such as threats to report to immigration enforcement
- Other

*Column 2: Who or what is causing the harm*

In the second column, you can name the person or situation that may be causing the harm. Harm may be directly threatened by a person. Or the threat may come from a situation such as insecure employment, being an undocumented immigrant or something linked to a larger system of inequality.

*Column 3: Target of risk, danger or harm*

In the third column, you can name the person or thing that is the target of risk, danger or harm. It may be the direct survivor or victim; it may be others including friends, family, or community; the threat may be to your home or to a job or to one's immigration status. The threat may be to a pet. The threat may be to those who are about to take action.

*Column 4: What is the level of danger*

There are many ways that you might want to name levels of danger. For example, the Forest Service uses a system of:



This Toolkit suggests:

- Emergency
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- No risk now
- More information needed

You can use colors or names or symbols that suit you. The important things to think about is when it is so high that quick action is necessary (Emergency) when the danger really has disappeared for some reason (None right now) or when more information is needed (More information needed).

*Risk Assessment Chart (General)*

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
Risk, Danger or Harm	Who or what is cause	Target of risk, danger or harm	What is the level of danger

## *Staying Safe Tool B2: Safety Plan and Action Worksheet*

### *What Are Safety Plans? Safety Actions?*

Once the level of harm and potential risks are considered, you and your allies or team will want to think about safety plans in case of emergency and safety actions to try to gain safety now and in the future.

### *Safety Plans*

Safety plans are often considered for “what if” situations. It requires thinking through who one can call in an emergency, signals to others that one needs help, safekeeping of items needed if one needs to escape, plans to pick up children and keep them safe.

### *Safety Actions*

Safety actions may need to take place immediately in order to be safe, reach safety, or get people immediately out of harm’s way. Safety actions are particularly necessary in situations of crisis and high danger. This does not always mean danger in terms of physical harm but also danger of emotional, sexual, financial harm. It may include taking action to remove weapons or taking action to move children to a safer place. It may mean distracting someone who is dangerous in order to de-escalate situations of violence or get them away while more plans for safety are being made. It may also mean calling friends and family to begin to involve them in providing a safety network.

### *Gathering Together to Make a Safety Network*

Because Safety Plans and Actions are often taken under conditions of danger, any move to take a Safety Action should involve at least one other person and preferably more trusted people to give back-up planning, support and follow-up.

Therefore, Safety Plans and Actions are best done with a group of community allies whose roles may include:

1. Brainstorming risks, safety plans and actions
2. Brainstorming who best can play various roles in creating safety
3. Getting more information on who can help or what dangers might be
4. Playing an active role in the safety plan or action
5. Being a back-up person

### *How to Use the Safety Plan and Action Worksheet*

1. Get together with another person or team to come up with this Safety Plan and Action Worksheet.

2. Make *Risk Assessment Chart* or look at *Risk Assessment Chart* if already made. Make sure it based on up-to-date information. (See Section *Keeping Safe. Risk Assessment Chart*)

3. Think about how each risk can match up to a Safety Plan to address that risk. You may need to start with the highest emergency risks (Emergency and Very High) before being able to address the risks with lower levels of danger.

4. For each risk or set of risks that go together, think about a Safety Plan:

a. What do we need to do to be safe (or to reduce the risk)?

Categories of what you can do for safety can include the following:

- Prepare for escape
- Tell trusted people about the situation
- Ask trusted people to take certain roles such as: (See Section 4.C. *Mapping Allies and Barriers* for more roles)
  - Keep a watch for danger (may be something that is in a position to check and see)
  - Emergency person to call
  - Help to brainstorm in times of confusion or crisis
  - Be there to remember plans and details
  - Check in on a regular basis through stopping by, calls, emails, texts
  - Share a “special message” so that they can get emergency help when that “special message” is given
  - Offer physical protection
  - Offer emotional or spiritual support
  - Be around to act as a “witness” to harm
  - Distract or reason with person or people doing harm

- Confront person or people doing harm to prevent further harm
- Go get and take care of children or other dependents if needed
- Go get and take care of pets if needed
- Offer home, workplace, church or other location as a safe place
- Offer to keep emergency items in a safe place
- Find out about and contact appropriate resources which could include violence intervention program/organization; counselor; knowledgeable family members or friends; internet; lawyer or legal services; workplace; union; school; and so on.
- Prepare or gather things that you need to take some kind of action
- Get locks or change locks as needed
- Keep certain things in protected areas – friend's home, safety deposit box, workplace

**b. Safe ways to contact people**

- Think about confidentiality and making sure that information does not become public because people share computers, voice mail, and can read other people's text messages

**c. Safe transportation if needed**

- Safe routes to take if needed
- Safe forms of transportation
- Safe place to park car
- Back-up transportation if needed
- Pick up of other allies, family, or friends if needed

**d. Safe place to meet if needed**

- Think about confidentiality and making sure that people are safe to talk

- If you are contacting the person doing harm or someone who is potentially harmful, think about meeting in a public space where there are people around

e. Safe places to escape to or hide if needed

- Depending on the situation, people may need safe places to hide or public places where they might be safer

f. Communication plan detailing:

- Signs or signals that things are okay – or not okay
- Follow-up communication that things are or went okay – or not okay
- Follow-up communication for next steps
- Agreement on who can know what – and who cannot

5. Think about what requires immediate action. This Toolkit refers to these as **Safety Actions**. These may need to be taken to ensure minimal, bottom-line levels of safety. Safety Actions may come up in a situation of emergency, high risk. On the other hand, it may come up because there is an opportunity or opening to take action more easily now than later.

Examples of situations in which you may want to take a Safety Action include:

- Someone needs to escape from immediate risk of significant harm including injury, entrapment, physical or sexual assault, kidnapping, arrest, deportation, death
- Children or youth need to be removed from risk of significant harm of any sort
- Weapons need to be removed in order to decrease high level of danger
- Emergency health or mental health concerns require immediate action
- Someone causing harm needs to be immediately removed from a situation, asked to stay away, distracted from entering a situation, locked out, banned (at least temporarily), physically restrained (if this is necessary to keep them from causing harm)

**Caution:** While this Toolkit encourages transparent and honest communication and action, this will not always be possible, especially at early stages of intervention, and before support towards the higher goals of violence intervention can be agreed upon. Distraction, hiding information and outright

**dishonesty are at times necessary particularly in situations of high danger. Safety Plans and Actions may need to take into account attempts to trick someone or may require some level of force in order to carry out this action.**

**This may at times mean a level of dishonesty and/or some level of threats, force or restraint upon the person doing harm.**

**This Toolkit recognizes that pragmatic and practical action can aim at the highest values but may need to balance safety first. As interventions are able to include all aspects of support and cooperation including from the person or people doing harm, it may be able to bring in higher levels of transparency and honesty. This honesty could include open discussions about why earlier Safety Actions were carried out in less than honest ways.**

### *Safety Plan and Action Worksheet*

**This safety plan is for the following situation:**

**This safety plan covers the time period:**

**The safety plan is as follows. This may include:**

- **What are the risks and the dangers? Or what can go wrong?**
- **Who do we need to look out for? Who or what can cause risks and dangers – people, situations or systems?**
- **Who can get hurt? How?**
- **What can we do to stay safe?**
- **Who is responsible for what part of the safety plan?**
- **Do we have all the bases covered? Do we need to bring in more people?**
- **Is there an emergency back-up plan? What is it? How will we know we should go into emergency mode? Is there a signal or code?**

**The follow-up plan is as follows. This may include:**

- How did it go?
- What did we learn?
- How does this affect our safety plan? Our overall intervention?
- Are there any changes to be made? What are they?
- Who needs to communicate and to whom?
- What are we going to communicate?
- Who can know?
- Who should not know?
- What are the next steps?

## *Staying Safe Tool B3. Safety Plan and Action Chart*

If it is helpful to have the Safety Plan and Action information in chart form, you can use this tool.

This safety plan is for the following situation:

This safety plan covers the time period:

### *Column 1: Risk, Danger or Harm*

In the first column, you can name the risk, danger or harm in your own words. Because this *Safety Plan and Action Worksheet* is aimed at narrow and specific situations, you may find that it is better to be quite detailed about the risk and/or the person who might be at risk (column 3).

### *Column 2: Who or what is cause*

In the second column, you can name the person or situation that may be causing the harm. Harm may be directly threatened by a person or a potential system.

### *Column 3: Target of risk, danger or harm*

In the third column, you can name the person or thing that is the target of risk, danger or harm. Think of anyone involved who could be harmed.

### *Column 4: Who is looking out for safety*

Think about who can be responsible for watching over or dealing with a particular risk. It may mean that if the risk is to a certain person, then it is this person's job to make sure that the person in question is safe. For example, many people may be in danger in a situation of domestic violence. A child may require the special attention of someone who makes sure that his or her needs do not drop out of the picture as people deal with a larger situation of violence. If someone's particular task is to focus on that child, then it may be easier to assure that he or she does not get left out or ignored, especially in times of crisis.

*Column 5: What safety action and under what circumstances*

This may take the form of small actions such as:

- Check to see if a particular risky or dangerous person is arriving
- Make sure children are in a safe place
- Keep a particular risky or dangerous person distracted
- Stay in the car, keeping watch nearby
- Make sure to offer a particular person emotional support during and/or after a Safety Action is taken

*Safety Plan*

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
Risk, Danger or Harm	Who or what is cause	Target of risk, danger or harm	Who is looking out for safety	What safety action and under what circumstances

Is there an emergency back-up plan? What is it? How will we know we should go into emergency mode? Is there a signal or code?

The follow-up plan is as follows. This may include:

- Who needs to communicate and to whom?
- What are we going to communicate?

- Who can know?
- Who should not know?
- What are the next steps?

## *Staying Safe* Tool B4. Escape to Safety Checklist

Some people may be in a situation where they need to think about escaping. For many domestic violence programs, the safety plan equals an escape plan.

While this Toolkit conceives of safety as something more than an escape plan, there are times when people may need to think about escape.

If you have children and are thinking of leaving your partner, consider how to take children with you. Once you leave, it can be difficult to regain custody if your children are left with your partner.

We are including an example of an "escape to safety" plan for those may be in this situation. This was adapted from the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) website at [http://www.ncadv.org/protectyourself/SafetyPlan\\_130.html](http://www.ncadv.org/protectyourself/SafetyPlan_130.html).

### **If you are still in the relationship:**

- Think of a safe place to go if an argument occurs - avoid rooms with no exits (bathroom), or rooms with weapons (kitchen)
- Think about and make a list of safe people to contact
- Keep change with you at all times
- Memorize all important numbers
- Establish a "code word" or "sign" so that family, friends, teachers or co-workers know when to call for help
- Think about what you will say to your partner if he/she becomes violent

Remember, you have the right to live without fear and violence.

### **If you have left the relationship:**

- Change your phone number
- Screen calls
- Save and document all contacts, messages, injuries or other incidents involving the person doing harm
- Change locks, if the person doing harm has a key
- Let neighbors know about your safety needs; see if they will look out for risky or dangerous people or act as a place for you to seek emergency help

- Avoid staying alone
- Plan how to get away if confronted by an abusive partner
- If you have to meet your partner, do it in a public place
- Vary your routine
- Notify school, work or other contacts of places you go to regularly
- Call a shelter for battered women
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

If you leave the relationship or are thinking of leaving, you should take important papers and documents with you to enable you to apply for benefits or take legal action. If you are planning to leave or think that you may need to, keep these items in a place that is easy to grab if you are running or keep originals or copies with a safe friend, co-worker or neighbor.

Important papers and items you should take include:

- Driver's license or other identification for you and your children
- Social security cards and birth certificates for you and your children
- Marriage license
- Birth certificates for yourself and your children
- Passport for you and your children
- Immigration papers for you and your children
- Leases or deeds in your name or both yours and your partner's names
- Medication
- Your checkbook
- Your charge/credit cards
- Bank statements and charge account statements
- Insurance policies

- Proof of income for you and your spouse or domestic partner (pay stubs or W-2's; past taxes)
- Documentation of past incidents of abuse (photos, police reports, medical records, etc.)
- Set of keys to the house and car
- Title to your vehicle
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## *Staying Safe* Tool B.5. Meeting with Person Doing Harm Safety Worksheet

Many domestic violence or sexual assault programs recommend that people never meet with the person doing harm, assuming that physical separation is the only safe option and that calling the police or having contact through an attorney are the only ways to have contact. They also warn others not to have contact with the person doing harm.

This may not be realistic or desired for many people in situations of violence. This Toolkit explores the possibility of contacting, communicating with and possibly working together with the person or people doing harm towards a resolution in which harm can be addressed, reduced or ended and future harm can be prevented.

The survivor or victim may still have some kind of relationship with the person or people doing harm. They may even be living together. Even if the survivor or victim and the person doing harm are no longer in contact, other people may be involved in this intervention and may be dealing with the person doing harm.

Depending upon the situation, such meetings can carry risks such as:

- Danger of physical or sexual violence
- Danger of emotional and verbal abuse
- Threats of various forms of violence
- Intimidation and use of fear to get the survivor or victim to come back or stop any kind of intervention
- Manipulation (intended or unintended) to get the person to go along with the desires of the person or people doing harm
- Manipulation (intended or unintended) to get the person to doubt their own beliefs
- Lies that make the person doing harm appear innocent – or make the survivor or victim or other community members look like they are to blame

If someone (survivor or victim, community ally) decides to meet with the person or people doing harm with knowledge of these risks, then some ways to stay safer include the following:

- Go through the *Risk Assessment* and *Safety Plan and Action* sections above with at least two or more people.

- Be very clear with yourself about the reason for the meeting, the expectations of outcomes, and the possibility of reaching these outcomes – think about all of the ways that this could go wrong and be clear about how you will feel or what you will gain or lose in case things go wrong.
- Understand that risk can increase when people doing harm sense a loss of control. Dangers can escalate beyond what you might have thought was possible.
- Understand that promises to be cooperative, to have one last visit, to give back belongings and so on can be insincere ways to regain control or hurt someone.
- Meet in a public place where other people are around whenever possible
- If for some reason the meeting needs to take place in a more private space, then go with another person or have someone waiting nearby and maintain contact with the safe person. Make sure that the door or other escapes are kept within your eyesight.
- Have some kind of code or special message for the person waiting and a back-up plan if you do not come out by a certain time.
- Role play with or think about all of the possibilities with at least one other person and have that person play all possible options including the worst case scenario of what could happen – prepare for the expected and the unexpected.
- Know that you can always change your mind and not meet.
- Think about ways you can communicate through safer means such as email, letter, safe friends or family, attorney or mediator rather than a face-to-face meeting.

*Meeting with Person Doing Harm Safety Worksheet*

If more than one person is meeting, substitute “we” for “I” and make sure that everyone going to the meeting is in agreement about the following.

1. I am meeting with \_\_\_\_\_ under the following circumstances:

2. I am meeting for the following reasons or to get the following results:

3. I plan to get these results through the following words or actions (make sure that each expected reason or result in #2 is matched with appropriate words or actions):

4. I will not say or do the following things because that will get in the way of my safety and/or getting my goals:

5. The safest place and time (including length of time) for us to meet is:

6. The safest way to contact \_\_\_\_\_ is (include who will contact, form of contact, words that will be used and not used):

7. Other safety concerns to think about (such as time of day, whether that person is sober or drug-free, whether that person is likely to have a weapon, whether that person may be with someone else who can be a danger, whether that person will be with children) are:

8. Other people that would be good to have along for reasons of safety are (include their role and their level of participation – observe and witness only; speak only to certain points; or take the most active role)

9. Other people that should know or be aware that this meeting is happening are:

10. Other people who should not know that this meeting is happening are:

11. Things that \_\_\_\_\_ may think that they could gain from this meeting are the following (these may be things that have no relation to your own reasons):

**12. When I say or do the things that I plan in Question #3, the possible reactions include:**

**(Role play each statement if possible. Think of or get other people to think of all of the possible things that the person doing harm might say or do – including worst case scenarios. Knowledgeable people may be others who know a lot about violence or people who know the person doing harm well including his or her faults. Be prepared. Think of how you will respond. Think of what you will say and not say. Make sure that everyone that will be going to the meeting is in agreement.)**

**13. After this meeting is over, people could be affected in the possible ways (Think about whether or not someone else's confidence might be broken, whether there could be retaliation against yourself or other people after the meeting is over, what kind of responses \_\_\_\_\_ could have, what kind of other reactions might follow and whether there are supports in place):**

**14. Follow-up communication and support for each affected person can happen in the following ways:**

**15. During the meeting, I will stick with the following words and actions (best to keep to 1 or 2 main points).**

**16. During the meeting, I will not say or do the following no matter what.**

**17. Emergency situations may include the following:**

**18. I have a plan to respond to each emergency in the following ways:**

**19. I need more information on the following in order to make this a safe and effective meeting.**

20. My next steps in preparation for the meeting are the following (include plans to contact other people or resources, adequate support for after the meeting and more information needed).

21. I have gone through this worksheet and have:

- Read through Section 2. *Some Basics Everyone Should Know* section
- Read through the entire Section 4.B. *Staying Safe* section
- Answered every question in this worksheet thoroughly with the help of at least one other appropriate person
- Followed through with all preparations (See Question 20)
- Thought of all possible responses that \_\_\_\_\_ could have
- Thought of my possible responses carefully
- Shared this worksheet with everyone else who will go and made sure that they agree – if they are expected to talk and act during the meeting, then they have also actively answered all questions in this worksheet
- Considered emergency worst-case scenarios and have an emergency plan for each
- Feel confident that this meeting is worth having and safety risks are worth taking

**Have someone I can trust to check in with and get support from before and after the meeting takes place**

**If you were not able to check all of these boxes, then we urge you to reconsider this meeting and take more time to see if you can get a greater level of safety before moving on.**