



SAFETY PLANNING WITH INDIGENOUS WOMEN

— **SAFEGUARDING OUR WOMEN** —

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION4
• PROJECT DESCRIPTION	
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS5
ABOUT6
• ABORIGINAL SHELTERS OF ONTARIO	
• CHIEFS OF ONTARIO	
• FIRST NATION WOMEN'S CAUCUS	
INTRODUCTION TO SAFETY PLANNING8
• SAFETY PLANNING FOR INDIVIDUALS	
• SAFETY PLANNING SCENARIOS	
• KEEPING SAFETY PLANS SAFE	
• MAKING A SAFETY PLAN	

SCENARIOS11

- SCENARIO 1: DURING A VIOLENT INCIDENT
- SCENARIO 2: PREPARING TO LEAVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP AND/OR RESIDENCE SHARED WITH AN ABUSER
- SCENARIO 3: AT HOME/IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD, AWAY FROM AN ABUSER
- SCENARIO 4: AT WORK
- SCENARIO 5: IN PUBLIC
- SCENARIO 6: VEHICLE SAFETY

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS18

- OVERALL WELLNESS
- HARM REDUCTION
- TELEPHONE SAFETY
- INTERNET SAFETY
- CHILDREN AND DEPENDENTS
- PETS
- LEGAL AND POLICE SUPPORTS

BEST PRACTICES IN SAFETY PLANNING FOR ORGANIZATIONS24

- STAFFING
- COMMUNITY AWARENESS
- SAFETY PLANNING IN/BY SHELTERS
- ADDITIONAL ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

FAMILY VIOLENCE AND THE COMMUNITY26

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES27

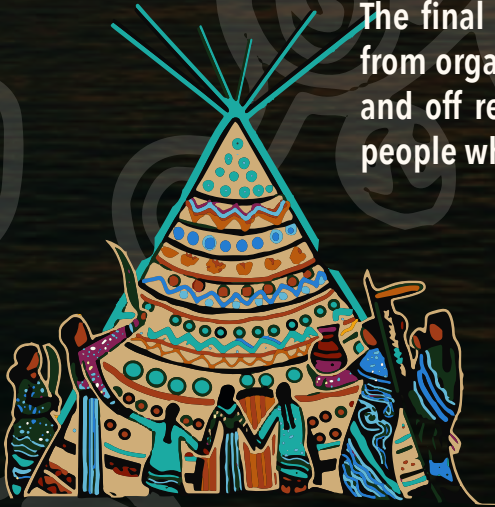
ADDENDUM28

Introduction

This document is the result of an ongoing collaboration between First Nation Women's Caucus (FNWC) and Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario (ASOO). These two groups are made up of individuals dedicated to eradicating violence in Indigenous communities.

FNWC and ASOO are united in their collective desires to remove the reality of social injustice that results in violence, abuse, and oppression and makes Indigenous women one of the most vulnerable groups of people in Canada.

The final product is a compilation of best practices in safety planning gathered from organizations that are leaders in the area of safety planning, our shelters on and off reserve. This booklet would not have been possible without the help of people who shared willingly to strengthen it as a tool.



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About ...

ABORIGINAL SHELTERS OF ONTARIO (ASOO)

The Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario (ASOO) is a unified organization of shelters that works tirelessly to examine and close gaps faced by Ontario family violence service providers. By allowing information sharing among Aboriginal shelters and linking shelter staff to additional services, the ASOO facilitates the exploration of innovative responses to violence against Aboriginal women.

CHIEFS OF ONTARIO (COO)

Chiefs of Ontario (COO) is a political forum and secretariat for collective decision-making, action, and advocacy for First Nations communities in Ontario. COO facilitates the discussion, planning, implementation, and evaluation of all local, regional, and national matters affecting the First Nations people of Ontario.



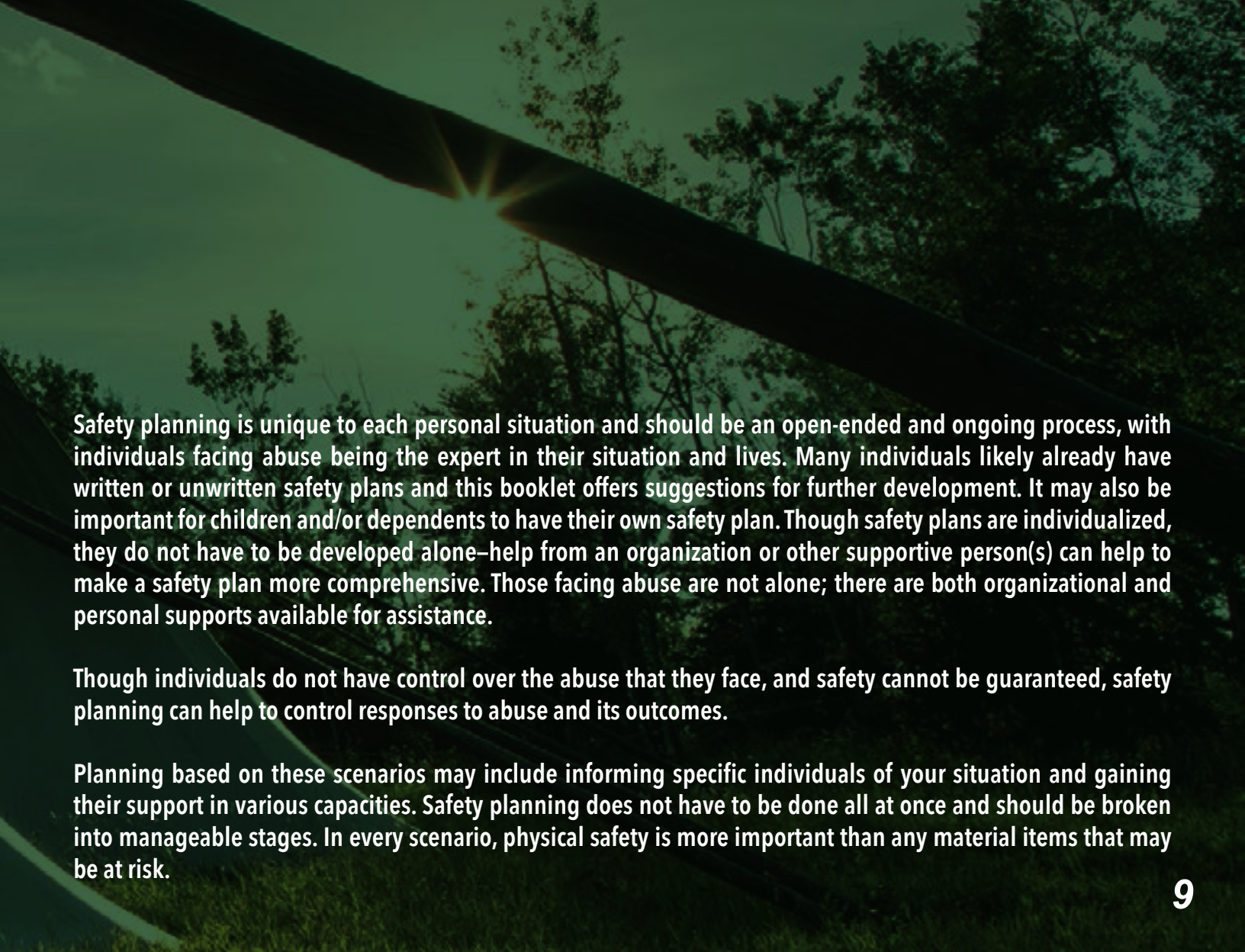
FIRST NATION WOMEN'S CAUCUS (FNWC)

Political Confederacy Motion #11/22, September 13, 2011 mandated the First Nation Women's Caucus (FNWC) to determine community-based approaches to end violence against Indigenous women. Resolutions #13/04 and #13/41 effectively formalize the ending violence movement at the political level. Resolution #13/04 simultaneously motioned for all Chiefs in Ontario to support ending violence and abuse in our communities and against our peoples through signing the declaration. As a result of these mandates, the First Nation Women's Caucus provides advice, guidance, and recommendations to the Political Confederacy and Chiefs of Ontario (COO) on ending violence against women, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and related COO campaigns.

Introduction to Safety Planning

Family violence can take many forms including physical, sexual, emotional (spiritual), and financial abuse or neglect that is carried out by any family member or an intimate partner. Familial relationships are considered violent if one, all, or any combination of these abuses are taking place. Family violence may be experienced by any individual in a familial or intimate relationship who is being controlled or harmed, regardless of age, sex, or gender. Specific crisis services are available for women, men, 2-Spirit, youth/teens, and seniors/elders who are experiencing family violence.

A safety plan is a realistic and individualized plan that outlines practices to increase safety while in an abusive, possibly abusive, or potentially abusive relationship, when planning to end that relationship, or after leaving that relationship. When safety planning, individuals should consider mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual wellness. A safety plan may include outlining familial, organizational, and community supports that are available. Having a safety plan in place before it is needed will increase the ability of individuals to keep themselves and their dependents protected from harm.



Safety planning is unique to each personal situation and should be an open-ended and ongoing process, with individuals facing abuse being the expert in their situation and lives. Many individuals likely already have written or unwritten safety plans and this booklet offers suggestions for further development. It may also be important for children and/or dependents to have their own safety plan. Though safety plans are individualized, they do not have to be developed alone—help from an organization or other supportive person(s) can help to make a safety plan more comprehensive. Those facing abuse are not alone; there are both organizational and personal supports available for assistance.

Though individuals do not have control over the abuse that they face, and safety cannot be guaranteed, safety planning can help to control responses to abuse and its outcomes.

Planning based on these scenarios may include informing specific individuals of your situation and gaining their support in various capacities. Safety planning does not have to be done all at once and should be broken into manageable stages. In every scenario, physical safety is more important than any material items that may be at risk.

KEEPING SAFETY PLANS SAFE

A safety plan typically involves recording information and gathering items that, if found, may make an abuser suspicious and angered. Documents (and/or photocopies) such as identification and medical records or lists of important contact numbers that are part of a safety plan can be placed in packaging that an abuser may not typically open such as a makeup case or tampon box, be kept with a trusted family, friend, or lawyer, or placed in a safety deposit box. Your safety plan will need to be updated as often as your circumstances change. A safety plan may be a simple plan to exit an emergency situation as safely as possible and involve memorizing options, rather than having anything physical that may be suspicious to an abuser.

MAKING A SAFETY PLAN

Know the approximate location and the contact information of your closest or most fitting family violence shelter; most have 24/7 crisis lines that you can reach for support, even if you are not prepared to leave your residence and relationship. You can learn information about the services offered such as outreach, community workers, and transportation assistance in case of crisis. There are many resources available to assist with financial, legal, housing, and child welfare concerns—shelters will be able to connect you with the proper organizations. Most Indigenous shelters offer opportunities to (re)connect with traditional teachings and healing for individuals who choose to participate in cultural practices.

MY BRIEF SAFETY PLAN

A safe place I could go to for a few hours is: _____

A safe place I could go for a few days is: _____

A Shelter I could seek help from is: _____

Their 24-hour crisis phone number is: _____

Scenario One:

DURING A VIOLENT INCIDENT

In a crisis situation, an individual is less likely to be able to think and react rationally. By planning ahead and creating an emergency escape plan, a crisis situation can be exited quickly without the need to gather important items or records. For an emergency escape plan, know the safest space in which you may be able to be in more control of an abusive interaction (one with multiple exits and fewest unsafe objects). Keep pathways to exits clear.

Copies of the following documents of all family members should be made and kept in a safe place:

- Identification such as status cards, birth certificates, and passports
- School and vaccination records
- Driver's license, vehicle registration, and proof of insurance
- Health cards, social insurance cards, and health insurance cards
- Medical records
- Legal documents such as divorce papers, custody agreements, court orders, restraining orders, marriage certificates, affidavits, child welfare documents, police report reference numbers, and probation orders
- Lease or rental agreements, property deeds, mortgage records, and insurance documents
- Banking and credit cards (and any passwords needed for online or teller access)
- Address book and/or contacts from cell phone
- Recent photo of abuser
- Any additional cards used on a regular basis

These documents may be photocopied and safely stored or digitally photographed and uploaded to an online storage account or emailed/sent to a trusted support. The hard copies may be stored for quick access if safe to do so.

Items that should be kept together and easily accessible include:

- Cards that are used regularly
- Medications and/or prescriptions for yourself and any dependents
- Keys for vehicle, residence, and work
- Cellular phone
- Any amount of cash you are able to set aside (for transportation)
- Any essentials for yourself and your dependents
- Any small item(s) of emotional value

Make every effort to bring your dependents with you when leaving as a court order may be necessary to remove them from the residence at a later time. You may consider making a list of items to come back for later, which can be arranged with the local police unit.

During an abusive occurrence:

- Recall your emergency escape plan(s) and decide what steps you can safely follow/what exits or escape routes are available to you
- Get into the safest position/space you can (quick escape or closest to phone)
- If you have a children or dependents signal them with the code word you determine ahead of time
- Assess the situation and decide on how best to calm your abuser while remaining safe, OR make as much noise as you can to alert someone of the abusive occurrence (the best approach will differ based on the situation and relationship)
- Know that it might be best to appease or give an abuser what they want temporarily in order to remain safe and reduce possible harms
- Call the police and inform them that you have been assaulted by a man or woman (not partner) and leave the phone off the hook even after you have finished speaking

Scenario Two:

PREPARING TO LEAVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP AND/OR RESIDENCE SHARED WITH AN ABUSIVE PARTNER

If residing with an abuser, consider making the following arrangements while avoiding letting the abuser know you are preparing to leave:

- Know that physical safety is more important than any items you may want to bring with you
- Create an emergency escape plan and memorize it
- Compose a list of important telephone numbers for contacts such as the police, the most appropriate shelter, a crisis line, and trusted supports
- Line up a trusted support or shelter that you can go to and safely stay with
- Keep a bag or suitcase packed or ready to pack for yourself and your dependent(s)
- Try to set aside some money and leave it with a trusted support
- Leave extra clothing and small important items with a trusted support
- Open a bank account and/or safety deposit box and have all documentation directed to you (or arrange to have mail sent to a trusted support)
- Consider what transportation options are available to get you to a safe place (e.g. taxi fare, bus routes, trusted support)

Scenario Three:

AT HOME/IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD, AWAY FROM AN ABUSER

If residing separately from an abuser consider taking precautions such as:

- Securing the exterior of your residence by: changing locks if an abuser may have a key; ensuring that windows, doors (install a peephole), balconies, garages, and mailboxes have locks; and installing exterior lighting (or speaking to a landlord about doing so)
- Securing the interior of your residence by: ensuring there is a functioning smoke detector and fire extinguisher for each floor; establishing a safe exit strategy even for upper floors; and ensuring unobstructed sightlines in hallways and through doorways
- Adding any additional security features that you are able to such as a security system, bars for windows, and reinforced doors (a landlord and/or Victim Services may be able to assist with this)
- Not including your name in any apartment directory
- Keeping a copy of your restraining order with you at all times
- If comfortable, informing trusted neighbours of your situation and asking them to call the police if they hear anything suspicious or concerning (let them know if there is a restraining order involved and provide a description of the abuser and their vehicle)
- Consider changing your routine with regards to where and when you purchase groceries, drugs, conduct banking, or see any health care providers (doctor, dentist, counsellor, methadone, etc.)

Scenario Four:

AT WORK

Because work typically requires a routine that an abuser knows you will follow, take precautions such as:

- If comfortable, informing your employer, trustworthy colleagues, and security personnel of your situation and if there is a restraining order (provide a description of the abuser and their vehicle)
- If the abuser is jealous of your co-worker(s) and could do harm to them, you are obligated to inform your employer
- Knowing that under Bill 168 your employer is obligated to assist you and your co-workers with remaining safe while at work; your employer must develop a work place safety plan with you and possibly your co-worker(s)
- Being aware of Domestic or Sexual Violence Leave available in Ontario (five paid days and five unpaid days after thirteen consecutive weeks of employment under the Employment Standards Act (or as amended))
- Changing your routine if possible: do errands before and/or after work, take a different route, and/or change where you park—stay where it is populated and public
- Pre-planning where you could stop for help (or call 911) if needed on the way home from work
- Having your work calls screened and having any suspicious or inappropriate calls documented
- Informing a trusted support when you leave for and from work, your expected travel time, your route, how you will be traveling (car, public transportation, walking), and when you have arrived safely at work and home
- If walking to work using a route that is as public as possible
- If you suspect that you are being followed, get to a well-lit and/or highly public space, a trusted support, or police station

Scenario Five:

IN PUBLIC

If you see an abuser while out in public:

- Try to get to a well-lit and/or populated space such as a store
- You may need to appease an abuser temporarily, but do not go to an isolated space with them
- If concerned for your safety, try to draw attention to yourself and let somebody know that you are in need of assistance
- Have someone walk you to and from public transportation, your vehicle, or your home
- Sit near the front/driver if taking public transportation
- Note the location of emergency alarms when taking public transportation

Scenario Six:

VEHICLE SAFETY

- If a non-emergency response vehicle tries to pull you over, do not stop in a low-traffic area; proceed to a public space or police station, or call for help
- Carry your keys in your hand when walking to and from your vehicle
- Use remote entry if possible
- Use a buddy system to get to and from your vehicle
- Park in an open and public place and change the location as often as possible
- Ensure that nobody is hiding around your vehicle as you approach it or inside of it before entering
- Check the inside (interior and under the hood) and outside (including underneath) of your vehicle for tampering (such as an added GPS tracker or leaking fluids) and that brakes are working
- If your vehicle has a theft tracking or locator device (e.g. OnStar), notify the police to not disclose any information or have this feature disabled
- Reverse into parking spots to ensure that a quick exit is possible

Additional Considerations

OVERALL WELLNESS

- Engage with others in your community through:
 - Joining a counselling or support group
 - Becoming involved with community activities and/or group exercise program
- Take care of your well-being by:
 - Gathering items to create a sacred bundle for healing
 - Furthering any professional goals such as advancing education or obtaining a job
 - Regularly doing a creative hobby that you enjoy and makes you feel good (crafting, journaling, reading, meditating, gardening, singing, etc.)
 - Devoting time to people who are positive forces of support and doing enjoyable and constructive activities with them
 - Keeping self-care in mind always by getting enough sleep, nutrition, and exercise – avoid overeating and excessive substance use
 - Taking care of your emotional needs by preparing for interactions with lawyers, police, government workers, court officials, or an abuser, and not overbooking your days with stressful appointments
 - Having an advocate attend your appointments
 - Expressing any negative feelings constructively
 - Considering taking up or continuing to practice meditation and/or daily personal affirmations

HARM REDUCTION

- Consider reducing or ending any substance use
- Change your drug supplier if they are connected with an abuser OR keep the same supplier if trusted
- Adjust substance use habits and/or methadone routine an abuser may know
- Work towards understanding any possible connections between substance use and possible patterns of abuse (coping with or triggering events)

TELEPHONE SAFETY

- 911 can be called without cell phone minutes; if calling emergency services from a cell phone provide your location immediately as it may be difficult for the operator to track
- Familiarize yourself with the safety features of your cell phone; many have an "Emergency" or "SOS" setting for quickly notifying emergency services or trusted contacts in case of emergency– this function typically does not require data

- Restrict access to or erase stored incoming and outgoing numbers and messages in your landline call display or cell phone history
- Ensure that none of your phone numbers (landline and/or cellphone) are publicly listed
- Ask for a line block from your telephone company or block your number each time you make an outgoing call (*67)
- Adjust cell phone settings to block your number every time you make a call
- Program important numbers into your phone
- Keep a hard copy of your contact list and/or digitally back it up on another device (computer, online, in email) and/or leave a hard copy with a trusted support
- Do not allow an abuser to have access to your cell phone, SIM card(s), or passwords; if this occurs have your cell phone checked for spyware or key logging applications that may be used to track your usage and/or location (this process varies by phone and instructions can be found online)
- Monitor your phone bill for any unusual activity that may indicate your cell phone has been cloned

INTERNET SAFETY

- Erase select browser history or use “private windows” or public computers for internet browsing that may trigger an abuser (erasing all internet history may make an abuser more suspicious)
- If you suspect an abuser may be tracking your computer usage through key logging software, use another computer (public or trusted support) for activities that may trigger abuse
- Change any passwords that an abuser may know or easily guess
- Familiarize yourself with a free, secure online storage option for important documents, such as Dropbox, Google Drive, iCloud, Microsoft OneDrive, etc. (share contents with only trusted supports)
- Use a phone application to document abuse– ensure this is inaccessible to an abuser
- Be cautious of who has your email address
- Block an abuser’s email address
- Be cautious of how you use social media:
 - Disable any “locations” settings that may indicate where you are at any time
 - Ensure your privacy settings make any profiles, posts, tweets, photos, etc. inaccessible without your permission
 - Limit who you allow access to your profile or accounts (those who may share information with an abuser)
 - Regulate your posts and how they may be interpreted by an abuser or any mutual acquaintances
 - Consider minimizing your online presence

CHILDREN AND DEPENDENTS

- Decide on a safe or code word so that children know to call for help and/or leave
- Select a safe room with a lock and phone for children to go to during an abusive occurrence OR determine an exit route and safe place to go (family, neighbour, etc.)
- Teach children how to use a telephone to call for help (police or support) away from an abuser (in a safe room, at a neighbour's home, or the nearest pay phone) and to not hang up even after they are done speaking
- Teach children what information they may need to provide to an operator (full name, address, and phone number and what is occurring/what kind of help is needed)
- Establish a safe meeting place and route with children should they leave the house during an abusive occurrence
- Make sure all childcare providers know if an abuser is not allowed to visit with or have children in their custody (neighbours, babysitters, daycare, school, etc.); provide this in writing if safe to do so
- Consider using a comfort item, such as a stuffed "protection bear" to hold safety planning items or documents for children—this item could be the code for an abusive occurrence known to trusted supports they may go to
- Create a code for children to not enter the house in case of an abusive occurrence, such as leaving a certain light on, putting an item on the porch, or having an item in view through a window

- Safety planning for children should be based on age and maturity and may consider:
 - Things they can do when they feel afraid
 - People they can turn to for help
 - Places they can go to in order to feel safe

PETS

Pets may be used to undertake family violence through threats or actual acts of harm being carried out against them as a form of control and emotional abuse. Concern for pet safety may make it more likely that an individual will endure family violence or return to a potentially violent situation.

- Have a safe place to bring your pet(s) when leaving your residence (your local Humane Society may have a program in place if you do not have a trusted support who is able to care for them)
- If safe to do so, visit your pet for emotional healing when possible
- Do not return to a potentially dangerous situation to retrieve or visit a pet without police support

LEGAL AND POLICE SUPPORTS

- Have an advocate attend meetings with you
- Notify authorities if an abuser breaches any legal orders
- Seek out a Legal Aid office for assistance with legal needs
- Find help with restraining or court orders by having support persons complete affidavits (document violent occurrences/circumstances under oath to be used in court)
- Arrange for a police escort if you need to re-enter your home to retrieve items
- Contact your local Victim Services organization for information, referrals, and advocacy

HOW AND WHEN TO SAFETY PLAN

Reach out to a family violence shelter for assistance with safety planning. Support workers and/or counsellors will be able help individuals think through the issues that are in need of consideration. Additionally, trusted supports may have suggestions of options and supports that are more personal to an individual.

A safety plan will look different for each individual, but should involve thinking through and possibly recording some of the information noted, as well as organizing appropriate documentation—note the locations and contact information of supports and where different items and documents are left in case of leaving your residence.

Learn from past occurrences to remain safe and constantly update your safety plan.

Notes



Best Practices in Safety Planning for Organizations

STAFFING

- A "Family Violence Prevention Worker" (or equivalent) can be a designated role/position within the shelter for the purpose of safety planning and community engagement

COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Presentations or Attendance:

- At health fairs in the service community
- Within communities served
- At conferences and schools
- In collaboration with other service providers
- Distribute kits that contain:
 - Shelter contact information
 - Calling/phone card, basic hygiene items
 - Template of information/items needed if leaving for a safe location (identification, phone numbers, medications, photo of abuser etc.)
 - Folder in which to place necessary documents
 - Contact for local animal rescue

Publicity:

- FaceBook page offering information for individuals looking for support
- Twitter feed providing updates and links to resources
- Instagram account showing resources and/or inspirational pictures
- Radio and/or newspaper advertisements

SAFETY PLANNING IN/BY SHELTERS

- Develop and implement safety planning policies
- Ongoing safety planning training for new staff (may be scenario-based)
- Offer safety planning assistance through a 24/7 crisis line
- Short-term safety planning for outings
- In-group safety planning
- Safety planning with a worker/counsellor
- Mandatory participation in safety planning (noted in client file)

- Include de-escalation, self-regulation, or conflict resolution training as a component of safety planning
- Offer services such as use of mailing address or on-site services (health care, methadone, etc.) to support individual safety plans
- Implement a 'pet safekeeping' program (on-site, animal shelter-based, or foster-based)

Shelter intake:

- Risk assessment form
- Photo of abuser if possible
- Information-sharing with appropriate police force
- Photo of individuals coming into shelter

Shelter exit:

- Ensure those leaving shelter have a safety plan appropriate for their situation

(See Addendum for sample policy areas and statements)

ADDITIONAL ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

- Symbolically significant worksheet for safety and wellness
- Safety planning packages or digital applications for devices that include:
 - Safety plan template and tips
 - Internet privacy advice
 - Information on family violence: cycle of violence, consent, and understanding abuse, including culturally specific causes (such as the ramifications of residential schools and non-indigenous child protective services)
 - Wellness strategies
 - Spiritual affirmations
 - Contact information for emergency services

It is especially important for organizations to emphasize and uphold their promises of confidentiality, particularly in smaller communities. Further, safety planning should honour the individual's state of mind and abilities as those in crisis require sensitivity, patience, and understanding.

Family Violence & the Community

- Know the signs of an abusive relationship for yourself and others
- Take responsibility for the safety of others
- If you recognize signs of abuse:
 - Seek out help for yourself, express any concerns, and offer support for others
 - Do not normalize or dismiss family violence
- Encourage and support healthy relationships for all individuals
- Support and empower young people in knowing what is safe and healthy in relationships:
 - Positive relationships make you feel good about yourself
 - Your relationships should involve mutual trust and respect
 - You should want to spend time with a partner (but not always have to be with them)
 - Abuse (physical, mental, emotional) is never excusable
 - There should be no shame in experiencing abuse or in seeking out help
- Volunteer with and/or support your local Victim Services organization
- Be involved in your community and advocate for non-violence
- Invite family violence prevention workers to present at schools and community events

Additional Resources

BRIEF SAFETY PLANNING TEMPLATE:

Native Women's Association of Canada "You Are Not Alone--Safety Plan."

Available at: <https://bit.ly/2XyVtuZ> OR <https://www.nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018-Yana-Safety-Plan-English-Final-1.pdf>

TOOLKIT FOR INDIVIDUALS ESCAPING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

You Are Not Alone: A Toolkit for Aboriginal Women Escaping Domestic Violence.

Available at: <https://bit.ly/2NF3OZw> OR <https://www.nwac.ca/home/policy-areas/violence-prevention-and-safety/you-are-not-alone/>

SAFETY PLANNING TOOLKIT FOR ORGANIZATIONS:

The Redwood Shelter "Her Toolkit: Comprehensive Safety Assessment and Personalized Risk Management Tools for Women Experiencing Violence."

Available at: <https://bit.ly/2lRokCX> OR <https://pathssk.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/05-c-TIC-Redwood-Her-Toolkit.pdf>

WORKBOOKS FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED OR WITNESSED VIOLENCE:

Native Women's Association of Canada Project PEACE Workbooks (Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, Men, Boys).

Available at: <https://bit.ly/2GRqalb> OR <https://www.nwac.ca/home/policy-areas/violence-prevention-and-safety/project-peace/>

Addendum

SAFETY PLANNING POLICY FOR ORGANIZATIONS:

Safety Planning can be included in policy as a program objective. A sample policy statement is:

[Shelter Name] has the following program objectives [among others]:

1. To provide crisis phone support, including assistance with safety planning, providing information on rights, options and available services, referrals and system navigation
2. To support safety planning for individuals and their dependents who are experiencing or are at risk of experiencing or have been or are being affected by violence and/or abuse

Safety Planning can be included in policy as a part of intake and assessment. A sample policy statement is:

Not necessarily within the first 24 hours, the intake process will also involve:

- An initial assessment of an individual's and dependents' experience(s) of violence and/or abuse, including an assessment of ongoing risk
- Safety planning

Safety Planning may include considering the Spiritual, Mental, Physical, and Emotional safety of others in shelter. A sample policy statement is:

The organization engages in regular emotional wellness safety planning with individuals to determine:

- What an individual's triggers are
- How the individual behaves when they are triggered
- What they need to do to manage their emotions
- What the shelter can do to support them

Safety Planning at organizations may include children. A sample policy statement is:

Age appropriate risk assessment and safety planning is done with all children [OR all children over a stated age] to ensure they have their own plan for staying safe

Policy statement on what is meant by Safety Planning:

Safety planning will focus on the individual's safety needs in different situations, including but not limited to while they are staying at the shelter, after they leave the shelter, if they return to their abuser and for family court

Contributed by Pamela Cross

SAFETY PLAN

Use the image to record actions you can take towards being safe.



mind.

What can you do to protect yourself and stay in a positive state?

body.

What do you need to do to stay physically safe?

spirit.

What can you grasp hold of to give yourself spiritual strength?

WELLNESS PLAN

Use the image to record actions you can take towards being well.

mind.

What are you interested in (re)igniting or learning in your life right now?

body.

What can you do to strengthen your body for the future (exercise regime, wholesome diet, elimination of substances)?

spirit.

What will help you (re)connect to spirit (beliefs, practices, land)? How can you continue to honour this?





**Chiefs of
Ontario**