



Safety Planning Protocol

This protocol covers the safety planning process that is to be conducted if the intake shows that there is a high risk of danger to the client. Any client with a high risk should have a trained staff member go through the safety planning process with them.

The objective of this safety planning process is to help clients understand what they can do in a dangerous situation to reduce the risk of harm to themselves and their family, including if they need to leave the situation quickly.

This process is not simple. All staff members who help with safety planning should be well-trained and have some monitoring of how they conduct safety planning.

If you are completing this safety plan with immigrants or refugees the following culturally competent documents located at www.nifvi.org are recommended: *Intimate Partner Violence Meets Immigrant and Refugee Issues*, *Strategies for Working with Immigrant DV Survivors*, *Interventions that Don't Involve Leaving and Immigration Relief for Battered Immigrants*. The five steps include:

STEP 1: The initial step is to solicit the client's participation in the process because clients have different reactions to this process. It is important to remember that immigrants and refugees may be quite reluctant to leave an abusive relationship due to the numerous barriers they encounter including but not limited to immigration status, language, religious practices and lack of knowledge of American systems.

At times when clients may not want to develop a safety plan, it is usually best if the staff person can ask the client to develop a safety plan because the staff person wants them to have one.

For instance, one could say "I know you might not think you are in any danger, but I'd feel better if we talked about possible plans to keep you and your children safe if something happens..."

STEP 2: The second step is to identify the signals of impending danger. When identifying signals to danger, it is important to specify the chain of events that typically lead to violence. For additional information about what this may look like locate the *Immigrant and Refugee Power and Control Wheel* located at www.nifvi.org.

For example, the battered client may know that her husband is most likely to abuse her when their children are acting out and being rambunctious in the home. She may know that these are particularly high-risk times.

STEP 3: It is helpful to review the lethality of possible actions the batterer or potential batterer has taken in the past. It is also important to consider the weapons at the person's disposal. Work through the questions on page one and two of the *Lethality Risk Assessment* (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2005) with the client. You may locate this document at www.nifvi.org. This will help clients understand the threats they and their family face and to see some of the risk factors they may have missed that point beyond injury to possible death.

STEP 4: Complete the Safety Plan - named the Personal Assessment Plan.

The purpose of the Personal Assessment Plan protocol is to guide a staff member through the process of creating a safety plan for a client. **NOTE:** The Personal Assessment Plan will be kept in the office by the

staff member and will not be given to the client for her own safety. The bulleted points are important information for the client to know at different time periods when she is thinking of leaving her abuser. Go through the questions under the “Examples” section in each of the five categories to help her think through various options and scenarios.

Recommended Procedures

- Discuss the plan in a private, safe area
- Ensure confidentiality - this is especially critical if you are working with the immigrant or refugee family as a whole. For more suggestions refer to the following document located at www.nifvi.org: *Policy for Agencies with Both Survivors and Perpetrators as Clients*.
- Respect the client’s decisions and answers to the questions
- Ensure understanding by having the client reiterate the safety plan - this is especially important if working with an interpreter. For suggestions on best practices when utilizing interpreters refer to www.nifvi.org.

Personal Assessment Plan Section 1: Personal Safety with an Abuser

This section focuses on when the client is still living with the abuser. When thinking about having to flee from home, it is important to decide how she could escape from the house. Make sure she thinks about places she can go in the home where there are doors or windows so that she will be able to get out of the house, which rooms have weapons (even kitchens can be dangerous because of knives, etc. that are accessible) and what way would be best for her to escape. After thinking about how she will leave the home, next think about where she will go and how she will get there. For example, she could go to a friend’s or relative’s house or a shelter, and if she has a car and will drive to a specific location or will have to take public transportation or get someone to drive her.

It may be helpful for her to think of a code word she can use with people that signals danger. Have her tell it to her children, and if they hear her say it, discuss what they should do (go to a neighbor’s house, call 911, leave the house, etc.) It may also be helpful to assist the client in developing a list of useful phone numbers, written in her own language. When working with immigrants and refugees it will be important to discuss their legal status and depending on state laws develop strategies for either calling the police or other resources if they are in need of emergency help. Also included in this section is a question that will prompt her to think of reasons she could give her abuser for leaving the house at different times during the day. These reasons could be helping an ailing parent, picking up a relative’s child from school, or running to grab more milk. Particular, individualized reasons may be discussed in your session.

Personal Assessment Plan Section 2: Getting Ready to Leave

This section prepares her for leaving her abuser and identifies the various things that she may need when she has left. It is important for her to keep evidence of the abuse and to think about where she will store the evidence safely. Evidence that she should collect may include threatening notes, emails, or voicemails, or taking pictures of bruises and cuts.

Another important aspect of this section is thinking through whom she can go to for help. It is helpful if there are people in her life that she can disclose the abuse to and who can offer her support. Also, you may ask if there is someone who could keep her children for a short time to ensure their safety. Having her contact a domestic violence shelter and get additional information may help her define her plans and give her some extra support that she will need when she is preparing to leave and when she has left. It is important to prepare refugee and immigrant clients for challenges they may face in shelter, ie: inability to cook and prepare their own food. It is important to prepare clients to be their own advocate and

educate them on their legal right to an interpreter though Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, if a shelter receives federal funds.

Necessary items for her to take with her are included in this section, and there is a long list of things she may want to take with her that will make her transition easier. The more items she manages to take with her on this list, the better. Although it may be difficult to make copies of all the items or to take certain things with her, the more she is able to have in her possession the more prepared her and her children will be. It is important for immigrant and refugee clients to take legal documents with them as it is often a long and expensive process to get these replaced.

Personal Assessment Plan Section 3: The Day You Leave

This section goes over how she will leave and what she will do to stay safe. In your session you can go through various time periods and discuss with her the best possible time for escape. It may be best to have her go at a time when he is not expecting it, so when things in their relationship are calm or when he is in a good mood. It may also be helpful to create a false trail for the abuser to initially follow. For example, she could inform family and friends of a false trail of where she will be staying. Again, it is important to prepare immigrants and refugees for the positive attributes of shelter or other temporary placements and also the various barriers they may encounter when seeking shelter services or placements to help reduce the discomfort of being in a new environment.

Personal Assessment Plan Section 4: General Guidelines for Leaving an Abusive Relationship

This section reiterates the important things that she should remember when she is leaving. It is important that she has a plan of escape set up so that she will be able to follow through with it when she is nervous or scared. Having a predetermined destination makes it easier for her to focus on where she is going and helps solidify her course of action. Having necessary items such as clothes, keys, and copies of documents at someone's house is helpful so that she can retrieve these items when it is convenient or safe for her to do so. Also, it is essential that she has a list of contacts and phone numbers with her so that she can reach someone if there is an emergency. In an aggravated state it may be easy to forget numbers she has memorized, and having a list of people, places, and phone numbers will help her greatly in the event that she is in shock or in distress. When completing the task of writing lists of people, places and numbers encourage the immigrant or refugee to write these themselves to they understand who it is and utilize the information.

Personal Assessment Plan Section 5: After Leaving the Abusive Relationship

This section goes through the things that she should do after she leaves her abuser. Anything that she can do to increase her safety should be discussed. This includes increasing the security around the area she lives by installing more lights or installing a security system and filing for a order of protection. When working with immigrants who are undocumented, you should first refer them to an immigration lawyer before suggesting an order of protection. For more information locate the following document at www.nifvi.org: *Immigration Relief for Battered Immigrants*.

It is important to explain what a protection order entails and that many people have these. Reiterating that police are here to help will be incredibly important when meeting with immigrants and refugees. After she would receive a protection order it is important for her to know how to register it in the area she lives and have her distribute it around her community. She should carry a copy of it with her at all

times. Make sure she is aware that a protection order includes her address. Discuss this with her to make sure she will feel safe.

Also, discuss the other ways that she could increase her safety, like changing her schedule so that her abuser will not know where she is at certain times (if she goes to the grocery store every Wednesday, the abuser might try to find her there, or if she goes a specific way to work every day the abuser may wait at a location they know she'll pass by). This could also include changing appointments that he knows about, and informing the school or the children's caretaker of the situation so that they will not allow the children to leave with the abuser. You could also discuss the possibility of getting a post office box and having mail sent to it to increase her anonymity.

Step 5: Once the signals, Lethality Risk Assessment, and the possible elements of the safety plan have been identified, an untitled index card should be prepared for the client to take with them.

NOTE. This process can endanger, as well as help, the client. Any changes in the client's behavior could increase the suspicions of the perpetrator and increase the danger to the client. This is especially true for immigrant and refugee clients as literacy is a common barrier and this may not even be a helpful resource for them.

Counsel the client that before she makes any changes it would be best to talk through or at least think through how to do so without causing suspicion. The card should have very generic information, using misleading titles (i.e. Beauty Supply followed by a phone number instead of a DV hotline.) This must be individualized. For example, if the client goes to the hair weaver each month, the number could be labeled "Hair", etc. Use initials or code words she can remember. Use mnemonics rather than full words. Other ideas include making the card look like a recipe with hidden codes and numbers in it, making them look like directions, or making it look like a shopping list.

Some of the things that could be included may be a DV hotline number, PO (to remember to get a protection order), BCC (make sure to use the BCC function for emails) and items to take during an escape, such as keys, clothes, bills, and a list of potential job skills they could use for a resume. This process may take some time. **Choose safety over convenience.**