



Safety Planning With Survivors of Non-Intimate Partner Sexual Assault: Ten (10) Tips for Advocates and Lawyers

The goal of safety planning is to help a survivor remain safe from the perpetrator and prevent future harm. Safety planning may also reduce sexual assault survivors' overall fear and help restore their sense of autonomy and control; this can both empower victims and aid their healing. Safety planning with victims of non-intimate partner sexual assault is different than safety planning with victims of domestic violence in a variety of ways. For example, the majority of jurisdictions do not yet have civil protection orders for victims of non-intimate partner sexual assault. The survivor may not know the perpetrator's name or address, or may know this but nothing more.

The survivor may feel completely unable to assess whether or to what extent the perpetrator poses a risk of future harm (which can make it difficult to meet the standard for a civil protection order, if one exists). Sex offenders often target victims who are vulnerable (whether because of age, state of intoxication, a disability, mental health issues, etc.) and these vulnerabilities can increase the likelihood of future victimization. Safety planning is not a one-time task, but an ongoing process based on the changing circumstances of a victim's life. The following are a few tips to consider when helping a survivor safety plan.

- 1. Acknowledge that victims already have innate survival skills.** When first discussing safety plans with victims, it can be helpful to point out that, by surviving what they have been through, they have already been successfully planning for their safety. The goal of this and future safety plan discussions is to formalize and strengthen what they've already been doing to keep safe.
- 2. Help survivors assess their immediate emotional and physical safety needs.** If the assault was recent, discuss any need for medical attention to address injuries and the risk of sexually transmitted infections and/or pregnancy.
- 3. Ask "What do you need to be and feel safe?"** Victims know their lives the best. Help the survivor identify what she or he knows about the perpetrator that will facilitate safety planning. Encourage survivors to trust their instincts regarding the perpetrator and their safety needs. (This can be difficult for survivors who may feel that they terribly misjudged someone they knew and/or trusted). Try to identify people that the victim can turn to for emotional support and for help ensuring their physical safety.

- 4. Ask about the survivor's daily routines.** What are the victim's typical daily routines? Assess how much the perpetrator knows about those routines and what changes might help keep the victim safer. Safety plans should be as specific as possible and should be practiced.
- 5. Assess whether it is necessary and/or possible to try and make the victim's home, work, and/or school addresses private.**
 - If the perpetrator does not currently know where the victim lives/works/goes to school, how could the perpetrator find out that information? Do a web search for the victim's name, address, etc., and see what comes up. Delete as much as possible.
 - Depending on victims' level of safety concerns, explore whether it would be safer for them to stay elsewhere short-term? Does the victim want help relocating? Or with an identity change?
 - In any and all paperwork, legal documents, and proceedings, make sure victims' home, work, and school addresses remain confidential if they so wish.
 - Does the victim want a third party to serve as the contact point for outside communications? Who can fill this role? Will it be your office or organization?
- 6. Determine what information the survivor wants to keep private for safety reasons, and who has it.** Does the perpetrator (or anyone who could provide information to the perpetrator) have access to the victim's personal information (e.g., address, family members' or friends' addresses, phone numbers, social security number, medical and mental health information)? Remember, if the perpetrator is the victim's employer, supervisor, teacher, landlord, etc., this information might be readily accessible in a school or job application, online, on an emergency contact form, etc. Take immediate steps to secure this information.
 - Make sure the victim's friends, family, acquaintances, school and/or work staff and colleagues know NOT to give out ANY of the victim's personal information to anyone, no matter how they identify themselves. Ask these people to alert the victim immediately if they are contacted for this information.
- 7. Assess who else can help promote victim safety.** For each place where the victim spends significant time (home, school, work, place of worship, the gym, etc.) identify who can help keep the victim safe.

- Work with survivors to develop concrete plans for what they'd do if they saw their perpetrator. For example: Who will they call? Where will they go? What will they say?
 - If the survivor has children, discuss whether the victim wants to share and practice the safety plan with them.
 - If the survivor has a civil protection order, is there anyone else who should have a copy? Is there anyone (e.g., co-workers, classmates, work or campus security, roommates, etc.) to whom the survivor would like to give the perpetrator's description, name, picture, etc.?
- 8. Weapons and Threat Assessment.** Does the perpetrator have weapons or access to weapons? Did the perpetrator threaten the victim with a weapon during the assault(s) or at any time before or after? Does the victim have a sense of how likely it is that the perpetrator might use a weapon to harm the victim post-assault?
- 9. Determine how much information is available about the victim online.** Assess the victim's web and social media presence—perpetrators often use this medium to harass and threaten victims. Discuss whether and how best to take steps to limit or block the perpetrator, and perpetrator's contacts, from accessing the victim via these media. Discuss how to preserve and document any online contact with the perpetrator regarding the assault.
- 10. No Contact Orders.** Depending on the jurisdiction, the victim's age, the circumstances of the assault, whether the victim reported it to law enforcement or other security officials, and other considerations, it may—or may not—be possible to secure a “no contact” order through the civil and/or criminal justice system. Discuss the victim's options, the privacy implications of pursuing one or more of these remedies, the terms and conditions of any such orders, when and how they expire, whether they may be renewed, and what happens if a case is dismissed.