

# WHAT IS A SAFETY PLAN?

## Guide for Community Organizations

### A Transformation Hub Booklet



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## Who is this Booklet for?

This booklet was designed for use by community groups and organizations in Montreal, Quebec. Anyone who is interested in introductory-level information about safety planning or who wants to support someone experiencing gender and sexuality-based violence (GBV) can use this booklet. The guide is written as an introduction for service providers.

Use this guide to help you develop tools for supporting people within your community who experience GBV to determine their own pathways for reducing violence and securing their emotional and physical safety. You can also use this guide to help empower your communities to recognize the signs and causes of violence and to create non-violent alternatives.

## What this booklet is not

This booklet does not outline how to be a frontline service provider for GBV, you should always refer someone experiencing GBV to a professional who specializes in this area of support. We include a few examples for further reading that you might find helpful if you're interested in more detailed safety planning. Likewise, we don't recommend using this booklet as a final answer for how to respond to gender and sexuality-based violence. Context matters, so follow the needs and priorities of the people you're working with.

**Important Note:** Safety planning is normally performed by a trained professional specializing in supporting people experiencing gender and sexuality-based violence or GBV. We outline what a safety plan is and offer some suggestions, tools, resources, and links to help you feel better equipped to support a person experiencing GBV in the short term who may not have access to a professional support right away but has immediate safety needs.

## What is a Safety Plan?

*“Safety planning is the process of identifying risks, mapping out resources, and assessing options in order to increase safety for people surviving abuse.*

*Safety planning... typically involves gathering important documents, stowing away cash, and finding a safe place to go. While these things are all helpful, mainstream safety planning... primarily involves calling 9-1-1. This model assumes that law enforcement can arrive at any scene, assess the level of danger, accurately identify the survivor (who is often visibly upset and emotionally escalated) versus the abuser (who is often calm when the police arrive), and offer immediate protection and resources... Imagining that police will secure safety from domestic violence helps to create situations in which survivors are not adequately informed or prepared for subsequent legal issues, including potential arrest, loss of child custody, criminalization, or even incarceration and deportation.” (Shim 2022)*

A safety plan is a tool to help a person experiencing violence map out the situations that increase their risk around violence and develop planned pathways for securing more safety.

# Steps for Building a Safety Plan

Identify the risks, obstacles, opportunities, and strategies that a person can use given the circumstances they are facing. Ask questions to help guide them through their own planning. Safety plans need to be adaptable and change given different circumstances. Equipping someone you are supporting with the tools and skills to develop their own safety plan will be more effective than drafting a safety plan for them.

## Questions to ask

- Where do you feel safe? Are there specific physical locations, or people who make you feel safe? (e.g. a neighbour, another family member, a friend, a shelter)
- What are the signs or signals that tell you that you're unsafe? Is there an early sign that you've recognized? (e.g. someone comes home drunk, their partner starts insulting them or increasing criticism, they find their phone messages or email have been read)
- What strategies have worked for you in the past to get out, get away, or reduce the risk of harm? What different strategies would you be interested in trying that you haven't tried before, and what help do you need to test these out? (e.g. role playing scenarios, incorporating more by-standers or secure locations).
- What barriers are there for you to seek safety when things are getting worse? What are the physical barriers (e.g. access to a car, no inside locks on doors at home, possibility of being tracked)? What are the emotional barriers (e.g. you feel like you can't leave or things will get worse, the person has threatened to hurt themselves or others if you leave)?

## Building the Plan

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- Fill out a safety plan using the [RISA tool](#) (available in 13 languages) or write/draw it out on a piece of paper.
- **Identify Risks:** risks of violence; signs that violence is escalating; indicators that the person can use to recognize when a good time to leave is before things get worse.
- **Plan Exits:** plan who to call (as by-standers or supports who know what is happening); plan routes to get to safe locations (e.g. a friend's house, a family member, a shelter), storing numbers for safe contacts (e.g. using a fake name), storing an emergency bag with medications, money, IDs, copies of any important documents, and a change of clothes in a safe location (e.g. a friend's house).
- **Plan Responses:** outline what strategies have worked for the person in the past, develop concrete strategies with the person that they can actually use (i.e. they think the strategy could work) and help them practice; identify next steps after the risk of violence has calmed down or reduced.
- **Build Capacity:** for a person who is in crisis, increasing their capacity to make decisions for themselves, build new or stronger safe relationships, and building community can help support a person increase their safety in the short and long term. Breaking isolation is an important step for people who feel alone and isolated in a GSBV situation. Identify what support they need (e.g. counseling or therapy, medical support, social welfare support) and steps they can take to access these supports.
- **Reducing barriers:** Help the person you are supporting identify organizations and groups that might provide additional support, including potential shelters and support lines. You can also help by identifying barriers to accessing these services and steps that can reduce these barriers (e.g. downloading language-translation apps on your phone if the person doesn't speak English or French)

### **For more information on safety planning, check out these resources:**

Use the Risk Identification and Safety Assessment Tool (available in 13 languages):  
<https://www.riseaboverisk.ca/>

Check out this toolkit for survivors and supporters of intimate partner violence (available in English and Spanish):

<https://www.communityjusticeexchange.org/en/resources-all/safety-planning-and-intimate-partner-violence-a-toolkit-for-survivors-and-supporters>

# Where to Access Services and Support

To access a searchable list of current organizations and groups based in the Greater Montreal Area, you can search based on geographic area or service sector: [LINK](#)

We recommend becoming familiar with organizations that serve the needs of your community and keeping contact information for these organizations and groups on hand to help support someone with developing their safety plan, including housing support, shelters, gender-based violence services, employment, 2SLGBTQI+ support, etc.

## RESOURCE MAP

### Community-Based Services

Using information on local resources and services that are available, build a resource map for the person you are supporting based on their needs. Consider potential barriers to their accessing these services before adding to the list (e.g. trans inclusive, language barriers, etc.)


## Resources

- Creative Interventions. (2012). Creative Interventions Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence. *Creative Interventions*. <https://www.creative-interventions.org/toolkit/>
- Rise Above Risk: A Risk Identification & Safety Assessment Portal. *The Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic*. <https://www.riseaboverisk.ca/>
- Shim, Hyejin. 2022. Safety Planning and Intimate Partner Violence: A Toolkit for Survivors and Supporters. *Community Justice Exchange*. <https://www.communityjusticeexchange.org/en/resources-all/safety-planning-and-intimate-partner-violence-a-toolkit-for-survivors-and-supporters>