

SAFETY PLANNING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPOSED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

This is a draft child's domestic violence safety plan that may be adapted by domestic abuse programs. It includes some basic elements of protection planning for children and youth who are exposed to domestic violence, along with some sections that involve coordinating with mothers. This version may be too long for some children, but it also omits other important elements that some families may want to include. Some examples are planning for safety at school, childcare or visitation exchanges, and safety procedures in case of fire or in the presence of weapons. Protection planning can vary among children and families in length and content according to their needs, abilities, and the types of risk they face. It can also be informal and doesn't have to happen all at once. Some domestic abuse programs create safety planning games or build fun activities into the process. Domestic violence advocates may use this draft to create their own family safety planning form, which may be further adapted to meet the needs of individual families.

It is important to vary protection planning according to the age and skills of each child. With kids' safety plans, less is more. A small number of precautions that can be remembered and carried out in an emergency can be more useful than an extensive plan. With very small children, their safety plan may consist of knowing who to listen to and follow in a crisis. Many children and youth advocates find that teens from violent homes are more resistant safety planning than younger children. Protection planning with teens works best when they are treated as the experts on their own situation and are allowed to decide what the advocate's role will be. Discussions should avoid negative talk about the abusive parent. Children should be told that safety plans are important because the batterer's behavior may be dangerous, not because he is a bad person.

Some domestic violence programs also build a personal strengths section into their safety planning with children and youth. An advocate and/or the child's safe parent can help the child create a list of his personal strengths and things that he does well. A list like this can be reassuring to a child during a crisis. This list, along with critical information from his safety plan, can be transferred to a pocket-sized card, and laminated if possible, for the child to carry with him.

Even if family safety planning is not done, it is important to share a child's individual safety plan with her safe parent to prevent unintended risks to family safety. For example, a child may choose as one of her "safe people" someone who is an ally of the abuser, or place a call to 911 that may actually jeopardize family safety. Conversely, if a mother devises an emergency plan that depends on cooperation from her children, it will be much more successful and less frightening for the children if they know about it in advance. Children and youth

from violent homes and their battered mothers need to understand each other's safety plans and coordinate their efforts to keep safe.

The phrases about feeling safe and talking to someone we trust that appear at the end of this plan are adapted from the Protective Behaviors program.

Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence
www.wcadv.org

MY SAFETY PLAN

Feeling safe means:

- I know that someone will take care of me.
- I know what is expected of me.
- I have an idea about what will probably happen next.
- I am not worried that I or someone else will get hurt.
- I don't feel scared.
- I feel ok.

Safe people I can talk to when I don't feel safe:

- | | |
|----------|--------------|
| 1. _____ | Phone: _____ |
| 2. _____ | Phone: _____ |
| 3. _____ | Phone: _____ |
| 4. _____ | Phone: _____ |
| 5. _____ | Phone: _____ |

When there is trouble, I can call someone. Places where there are telephones in my home:

Where can I go when I don't feel safe at home?

- A safe place has more than one way out.
- A safe place does not have things that can be used as weapons.

Safe places in my home are:

Safe places near my home are:

How will I get out of the house if there is danger?

Our family uses a code word when it's time to call for help. Our family code word is _____.

Will I be responsible for helping any brothers or sisters if there is danger? _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, what will I do?

Will any brothers or sisters be responsible for helping me if there is danger? _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, what should I do?

I should NOT try to stop a fight because _____

When I am afraid of getting hurt, I can call 911.

When I call 911, I will:

- **Describe what is happening.**
 - **Tell my address. My address is _____**

 - **Tell my phone number. My phone number is _____**
 - **Stay on the phone to answer questions.**
- I know how to call 911.**

Here are some other plans our family uses to stay safe:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

If we have to leave home quickly, here are the things I want to take with me:

1. _____
2. _____
1. _____
2. _____

Here are some things about me that I am proud of or things that I can do well:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

REMEMBER:

- We all have the right to feel safe all the time.
- Others have the right to feel safe with us.
- We can talk about anything with someone we trust, no matter how awful or small.
- When adults fight, kids are not at fault.
- Kids should not try to stop fights between adults.