

**SAFETY PLANNING**  
**AWAKE 1995**  
Children's Hospital Boston

When Filing a Report of Suspected Child Abuse

Have a conversation with Mom (or another safe caregiver) prior to filing to discern:

- How will the batterer react?
- Have there been any reports previously?
- If yes, how did the batterer react?
- Have there been threats towards the partner or children if abuse is disclosed?
- How should the batterer be informed?
- What immediate safety planning is needed for the partner and children?
- Is there a need for provider safety planning as well?
- Should you consult with the Child Protection Agency to enlist their assistance in formulating a plan which will best protect the children and the non-abusing partner prior to following?

## Things to Consider when Assessing Risk

### Batterer's behavior:

- Suicide threats or attempts
- Homicidal threats or fantasies
- Possession of or access to weapons
- Substance use
- Stalking behaviors
- Sexual assault
- Violence out of the home
- Terrorizing or sadistic behavior
- Abuse of the children
- Any recent escalation in the violence

### Context:

- Any recent loss (job, family member, divorce)
- Recent separation
- Recent purchase of a weapon
- Victim's exposure to his secret or illegal activities
- Pregnancy
- Woman's use of substances
- Woman's suicidal/homicidal feelings
- Failed attempts at safety

### Risk to Children:

- Ever hit or touched them in a way that made them uncomfortable
- Ever threatened to harm or kill them
- Ever driven recklessly or under the influence with them in the car
- Ever threatened Mom would never see them again
- Ever been caught in the middle or intervened to protect Mom
- Have any behavior problems or behaviors that remind Mom of the batterer
- Physical punishment by Mom to get them to do what she wants them to do

### When Living with the Batterer

- Is it safe for you to call her?
- At what number?
- Best days or times of day/evening?
  
- Who else knows about the abuse?
- Is there someone else she feels it is safe to tell?
  
- Who is available to her if she decides to leave?
  
- How is that person accessed in an emergency?
- Is there a plan for transport?
  
- Does she have/has she packed important papers (birth certificates, social security cards, health insurance cards, immigration papers, bank books, driver's license, etc.)?
- Other things of importance which should be packed include: prescribed medications, favorite toy/blanket, etc. for children, copies of house and car keys, and money.

An "emergency bag" should be packed and placed in a safe and easily-accessible location (with friends, relatives, neighbors, or in a hidden location within the home).

#### Plan for emergencies:

- Avoid bathroom and kitchen areas
- Have a code word for children when escalation is apparent
- Have an emergency plan to get out

After Separation with No Change in Address

- Change all door locks.
- Install window locks.
- P.O. Box rather than home mail delivery.
- Change phone number and make it unlisted.
- Alter daily routing.
- Have an emergency safety plan.
- Inform school officials.
- If working, alert workplace.
- Keep a copy of the protective order with you, at the children's school, and at work.
- Keep emergency numbers (police, battered women's hotlines, etc.) readily accessible.
- Locate and involve yourself and children with supportive intervention services.

### For Providers or Helping Individuals

If you have worked with or assisted a battered woman, your careful assessment of her risk will help you to determine if you may also incur some level of jeopardy. Generally, the primary victims of a batterer's violence are their partners and often their children. However, it is best for providers to consider possible safety issues and take steps which offer maximum protection based on information gathered when talking with the victim. If there is a perceived potential risk to the provider, the following should be considered:

- Don't walk to your car alone.
- Take a different route home.
- Alter your arrival/departure time.
- Have someone pick you up/drop you off.
- Take your ID badge/nametag off.
- Take your name off your door.
- Have an unlisted telephone number.
- Don't meet alone with potentially dangerous clients or partners of clients; or leave your door open when meeting with them and inform someone of your meeting, the potential danger, and when you expect to finish.
- Inform colleagues.
- Use security when available.
- Take time away if warranted and possible.

### For Providers in the Home Care Field

- Assess for possible abuse issues privately.
- Know and make available to women the numbers of local resources.
- Set a standard of practice which includes ongoing “private” time with every woman during each visit.
- Never drive directly to your own home after home care visits when you suspect abuse.
- Have an unlisted home phone number.
- Inform others in your agency of the abuse, the day/time of each of your visits, and your expected return time.
- When entering the home, never assume you are alone with the patient.
- Develop code words/signals, etc. with women prior to initiating home visits when the presence of domestic violence is known.
- Don’t confront the batterer regarding the violent behavior without careful planning and additional staff present.
- Don’t attempt to discuss or intervene regarding the domestic violence using a “couples” model approach.
- Never disclose what the woman has told you without her permission.
- State your concern and follow-up at each subsequent contact.
- Don’t attempt to rescue.
- Don’t form expectations regarding the woman’s actions following disclosure.