

# Safety Planning Considerations for High Danger Victims

## Special Considerations

### Prioritizing Risk:

*What are you most concerned about right now?*

### Ensuring Immediate Safety:

*Do you have some place safe to stay for the next 24 hours?*

### Technology Safety

Victims who are referred through the LAP will be different than clients who decided to contact the program on their own. High-Danger victims are at heightened risk of being killed and, consequently, their situation may be more serious or urgent. Their barriers to safety are also more complex than those of the “typical” client your program sees.

In addition, you will be speaking with High-Danger clients in the wake of a potentially traumatic incident, and should limit calls to 10 minutes out of respect for the officer(s) standing by, as well as the victim's ability to retain information in a crisis. Therefore, it is important to quickly work with the victim to come up with a 24-hour safety plan that factors in the victim's particular circumstances.

This document is intended to help hotline advocates' conversations with High-Danger victims identified through the LAP. It is by no means comprehensive; advocates should rely on their training and experience working with victims of intimate partner violence to create *unique* safety plans in partnership with victims.



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# Prioritizing Risks:

## *What are you most concerned about right now?*

One of the first questions hotline advocates are encouraged to ask in order to tailor a safety plan unique to the victim's situation is:

### **What are you most concerned about right now?**

Even if the victim is talking to you shortly after being physically assaulted by her/his abuser, she/he might be more worried about how she/he is going to pay the electric bill if the abusive partner doesn't find a job soon, or how the abusive partner destroyed a family heirloom in the most recent fight.

Because the victim sees these concerns as more important than a conversation around breaking free from an abusive relationship, she/he will probably be disinterested in any safety plan that does not take into account her/his situation. The question, "What are you most concerned about right now?" allows the victim to share insights into risks that can fall into two categories.

### **Batterer-generated risks**

Batterer-generated risks are risks caused by the abusive and controlling tactics of the victim's intimate partner. These may include:

- **Physical injury**  
Physical abuse, illness as a result of traumatic stress, self-harm
- **Psychological harm**  
Mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, suicidal ideation
- **Child-related risks**  
Threats of child kidnapping, run-ins with child protective services, behavioral issues as a result of witnessing violence
- **Financial risks**  
Threats to financial security and independence, abuser prohibiting or jeopardizing employment
- **Risks to family and friends**  
Loss of relationship
- **Arrest and legal status**  
Threats to immigration or legal status if abuse is disclosed

**Leaving a relationship does not mean that batterer-generated risks disappear, especially for High-Danger victims. For some victims, leaving could trigger new risks, or increase existing ones.**

# Prioritizing Risks:

## What are you most concerned about right now?

### Life-generated risks

Life-generated risks are risks or circumstances that any person, abused or not, might face. For victims of intimate partner violence, life-generated risks must be taken into consideration when safety planning.

#### Finances

E.g., "I work, but just as a waitress. I make minimum wage, and all the cash I bring in goes toward groceries and school supplies for the kids. We get health insurance through his work. I have a child with some major medical issues, so if we didn't have that insurance, my baby would be in trouble."

#### Home location

E.g., "I'd like to take out a protective order against her, it'd give me some peace of mind, but then I'd have to go to court. I live in a really rural part of my county, and don't have a car. A buddy of mine drives me to work most days. I don't think I could ask him to take me all the way to the courthouse."

#### Physical and mental health

E.g., "I'm disabled, and while my partner is emotionally and physically abusive, he also pays for all my medical bills, transports me to all my appointments, and has outfitted our house to be handicapped-friendly. I want the abuse to stop, but I can't leave; he takes care of me!"

#### Discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc.

E.g., "My husband always tells me I can't tell anyone about 'our business'... that it'd just give his company 'an excuse to fire a black man from a good job,' and that 'prisons are already too full of African American men.'" jeopardizing employment

**High-Danger victims, in particular, might be entangled in particularly complicated situations. If a victim is in an earlier Stage of Change, as many High-Danger victims are, her/his concerns might fall more in the category of life-generated risks, as the victim may not be aware or ready to acknowledge yet that her/his partner is jeopardizing the victim's safety or well-being.**

The information in this section was drawn from several sources:

- Davies, Jill. *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 1998.
- Davies, Jill. "When battered women stay... Advocacy beyond leaving." Harrisburg, PA: National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 2008.
- Hamby, Sherry. May 13, 2014. "Holistic safety planning: Using an alternative risk assessment framework." *Battered Women's Justice Project*.

# Immediate Safety:

## Do you have some place safe to stay for the next 24 hours?

After gauging the victim's primary concern *in the moment*, the second question a hotline advocate can ask to more effectively safety-plan with the victim is:

### Do you have some place safe to stay for the next 24 hours?

Batterer- and life-generated risks cannot be completely solved in a 10-minute phone call, and would require longer-term engagement with the victim. As a hotline advocate, your goals are to:

1. Make sure the victim has a 24-hour safety plan, given the victim's immediate concerns, and
2. Make sure the victim is aware of services your program provides that could help mitigate batterer- and life-generated risks to victim safety and well-being.

Using the **Safety Planning Checklist** as a guide, craft a safety plan with the victim that addresses the sub-categories of batterer- and life-generated risks, and factors in the victim's preferences for safety for the next 24 hours. Be sure to explain your program's services in light of the victim's immediate, self-identified concerns.

As many of the victims with whom you speak will be in the earlier Stages of Change, they may not want to come in for emergency shelter, or may not want, or be ready, to leave their abuser. In cases like this, it is important to remember that "leaving" may not always be the safest—nor the most desirable—strategy for a victim. **Victims know their abusers best, and should be encouraged to trust their instincts around how the abuser would react to certain protective actions.**

The **Safety Planning Checklist** has suggestions regarding how advocates can support and affirm High-Danger victims who want to stay with their partners.

#### Tips for working with victims who want to stay (text box)

- Affirm the victim's reasons for wanting to stay in her/his relationship
- Applaud the victim's creative efforts to keep her/himself and her/his family safe
- Encourage the victim to call the 24-hour hotline with questions, concerns, or more advanced safety planning



Assess and Connect

# Technology Safety

Modern technology gives even the least tech-savvy abusers the ability to monitor, harass, and intimidate victims. Abusers of High-Danger victims, in general, may be more controlling, which highlights the need to educate High-Danger victims about the ways in which their abusers might be violating their privacy without their knowledge or consent.

As the High-Danger hotline call should only last 10 minutes, you will not have time to relay much technical information on technology safety. The **Safety Planning Checklist** contains some safety planning suggestions for victims who express concern about the abuser tracking her/his whereabouts.

**Technology safety is particularly relevant in planning the 24-48-hour follow-up call, and in encouraging the victim to come in for services. Before ending the LAP hotline call, advocates should verify a safe number and time of day to call the victim, and clarify whether it is okay to leave a message.**

Some brief questions that hotline advocates and law enforcement alike can ask victims to help them gauge the likelihood that their abuser is monitoring their calls include:

- “Does the abuser know things about your communications and plans with friends or family that you did not share with him/her?”
- “Does the abuser know more about your whereabouts—where you went to the grocery store, when you left work—than he/she would be able to tell by what you’ve told him/her?”
- “Does he/she have access to your phone, and is it possible he downloaded an app to be able to monitor your calls and text messages?”
- “Does he show up at places where you are without your having told him that’s where you’ll be?”
- Simply, “Do you think there is a possibility that a follow-up call to [the phone number provided] could be monitored?”