

Safety Planning Aid: Supporting Older Women Experiencing Violence



Who:

This guide is meant for service providers across all sectors working with older women experiencing or suspected of experiencing violence, including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and economic abuse.

What:

This guide offers prompts for service providers to use in conversation with the survivor. It is adaptable, flexible, and survivor-centred.

How:

Use the prompts under each section to identify support needs and brainstorm actions to improve the safety of the survivor.

Jot down key discussion points, next steps, and areas for follow-up under the notes column.

Where

There are three sections in this guide:

1. General safety prompts
2. Health, mobility and mental health prompts
3. Financial and legal safety prompts

Reminder!

Safety planning is an ongoing process based on a trusting relationship. It is not a brief intervention or checklist.

The purpose of this guide is to work with an older woman who is a survivor of violence to:

- Identify their strengths,
- Address risk factors and barriers,
- Define and prioritize safety needs, and
- Explore different ways of meeting those needs.

GENERAL SAFETY

PURPOSE: These prompts focus on establishing basic safety protocols. Physical, cognitive, financial, and legal support needs will be explored further in the aid.

AIM: Use these prompts to support an older survivor of violence define her/their safety needs and reflect on her/their options for safety in a trauma-informed approach.

Tip!

If your client tells you they do not want a safety plan, it could be that they are not ready to have a conversation at that point in time.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Gently remind them of the purpose of a safety plan and that you are here for support. You can also refer them to any of the helplines found at the end of this guide who offer safety planning and counselling to older women living with violence in Ontario.

Prompts

<p>Starting a conversation on safety planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At this moment, do you have a safety plan?• Would you like to work together to develop a safety plan?	<p>Your notes</p>
<p>Setting up a trauma-informed environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What would be helpful for me to know so that we can work together effectively?• What would make you feel comfortable?• Is there anything we should avoid? For example, sensitive topics, specific sounds, or smells that are triggering, specific physical environments like a closed room, etc.	<p>Your notes</p>

Identifying support needs

- What do you need help with at this very moment? For example:
 - Housing
 - Finances
 - Access to food
 - Legal & police issues
 - Physical & mental health
 - Social or spiritual well-being
 - Transportation
 - Mobility
 - Employment or education training
 - Personal or housekeeping needs
 - Other

Your notes

Identifying a network of supports

- Who do you trust to help you if you need support? This could be:
 - Friends
 - Family members
 - Neighbours
 - Co-workers
 - Service providers
 - First responders
 - Community organizations

Your notes

Setting up a network of supports

- Do you have the contact information of trusted individuals or professionals safely hidden away? For example, phone numbers are written down and hidden in a purse.
- Are any of your trusted individuals aware of your current situation?
- Have you discussed with them a secret signal or a code in case you want help? For example, a code word to be sent through text or flashing porch light as a signal.

Your notes

Planning for emergencies

- If you need to leave, do you have a plan? For example, do you know how to get in touch with victims' services or an age-friendly shelter?
- Have you discussed with a trusted individual the possibility of staying with them?

Your notes

Keeping safety planning private

- Do you know how to keep your safety planning confidential in case the perpetrator monitors your devices?

For example, clearing internet search history, using incognito mode when internet browsing, purchasing a pre-paid telephone card, etc.

Your notes

Organizing personal identification documents

- Do you have access to personal identification documents?
- Can you make a copy of these documents and keep them hidden?
- If you can't hold onto these documents yourself, can you give copies to a trusted individual?

Personal identification documents include passport, permanent residence card, birth certificate, health card, and driver's license.

Your notes

Add your own prompts here

HEALTH, MOBILITY & MENTAL HEALTH

PURPOSE: These prompts take into consideration the implications of the survivor’s physical or mobility limitations for safety planning.

AIM: Use the prompts to assess the survivor’s physical or cognitive capacity to care for themselves, and to identify supports for improving their mental or physical well-being. The goal is to ensure the older survivor is supported even if they choose to stay or leave the abusive situation, or if there are changes to the situation such as new control tactics or the removal of the perpetrator.

Prompts

Assessing mobility needs	Your notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you require personal support for daily living activities like cooking, bathing, dressing?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If yes, who currently provides support to you? For example, a personal support worker, the perpetrator, adult children?• Do you require assistive devices? For example: cane, walker, wheelchair, prescription glasses?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are you able to access replacements if these are destroyed by the perpetrator?• Are there physical barriers in the environment that would prevent a safe exit? For example: stairs or other fall hazards, cluttered floor space.• Can you access public transportation or wheel-trans?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If not, do you have a trusted individual who is able to drive you?	

Addressing health needs

- Do you have a written list of your medication, conditions and the health professionals that are currently providing care to you?
- Are you able to maintain access to your prescriptions and ongoing health care? For example, does a trusted individual drive you to your appointments?

Your notes

Addressing mental health needs

- Do you require mental health supports? For example: counselling, psychiatrist/psychologist, support groups, etc.

Your notes

Building community connections

- Are you currently involved in any social or recreational activities?
- Do you have access to spiritual support? For example: faith organizations, religious or spiritual communities, land-based activities.
- Do you want to maintain a relationship with your adult children or grandchildren?

Your notes

Add your own prompts here

FINANCIAL & LEGAL SAFETY

PURPOSE: These prompts examine financial and legal issues for the survivor that may be exploited by perpetrators to exert control or continue the abuse.

AIM: Use these prompts to assess the risk of economic abuse for the survivor, and to facilitate her/their financial and legal autonomy and security.

Prompts

<p>Addressing legal matters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are there any outstanding legal matters? For example: divorce, property ownership, etc.• Is there a substitute decision-maker or legal guardian?• Does your perpetrator have Power of Attorney over property or personal care?• Do you have access to up-to-date legal documents?• Do you need to make changes to any legal documents?• Would you like professional legal advice around any legal concerns?	<p>Your notes</p>
<p>Building economic security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you need help accessing Old Age Security or pension?• Do you need help closing a joint bank account, setting up a personal bank account, or applying for a credit card?• Do you need help with financial planning?	<p>Your notes</p>

Supporting employment or education training

- Are you currently employed?
- Does the perpetrator sabotage or interfere with your current employment or education, or with employment opportunities?
- Are you interested in programs or services providing employment training?

Your notes

Add your own prompts here

HELPLINES

Connect with any of these services in Ontario for crisis support, emotional counselling, or referral information.



Senior's Safety Line **1-866-299-1011**

Free 24-hour crisis and support line for older adults in Ontario who have experienced any type of abuse.



Assaulted Women's Helpline **1-866-863-0511** **(TTY: 1-866-863-7868)**

Free 24-hour helpline for all women in Ontario that have experienced or think they may have experienced any form of abuse.



Fem'aide **1-877-336-2433** **(TTY: 1-866-860-7082)**

Free 24-hour crisis and support line for Francophone women in Ontario experiencing abuse.



Talk 4 Healing **1-855-554-HEAL (4325)**

Free 24-hour and culturally safe helpline for Indigenous women living in Ontario with services in English and Indigenous languages including Ojibway, Oji-Cree and Cree.



Victim Support Line **1-888-579-2888**

Free 24-hour multi-lingual helpline for victims of crime and their families.