

# Guide 2

## Risk Assessment & Safety Planning Quick Guide



Iùl 2

Measadh Cunnairt &  
Grad-iùl do Phlanadh  
Sàbhailteachd

# Introduction

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Certain forms of Violence Against Women have high repeat victimisation rates. After a woman has disclosed abuse to you, it is vital to ask her about how safe she feels she is now.

It is important to recognise that it is common for survivors of abuse or trauma to feel unsafe and that their sense of safety in the world is likely to have been impacted by the abuse or violence. However, workers need to be aware when women are feeling unsafe due to continued risk of abuse or violence. In order to help women look at how to increase their safety workers need to be able to respond in a calm and containing manner; being aware of their own responses and feelings that may impact on how available they are for the women that they are working with.

If a woman is at immediate risk of harm, all staff have a responsibility to respond, regardless of the situation and the agency you are from. In practice, this means that either you or a colleague completes a risk assessment with her (if appropriate and safe

to do so) and has a discussion about safety. At the very least, this will involve referring to an advice or support agency - this does not simply mean giving a phone number or a leaflet to someone – you can make a call on her behalf or help to arrange for transport for her to get somewhere safe.

# When risk is immediate consider:

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- What does she need to be safe?
- How does she feel about the situation, are things getting any worse?
- Does she want/need to take any action today?
- What has she done in the past to get safe and how helpful was this?
- Does she have anyone who can help?

It is important to establish what a woman wants from you and your organisation. It may be that her expectations cannot be met and you must be clear about this to her. This does not mean, however, that you do not offer her any assistance.

You must also consider your own safety and minimise any risks you might face from the perpetrator.

# Pre-Risk Assessment

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Before using any risk assessment tool, consider:

- How much time does she have to talk to you?
- Is it safe to talk now? If not, what is a safe way to contact her and when would be best?
- Is she happy to be involved in the risk assessment process?
- Explain why you are asking these questions – it helps us to identify the risks she may be facing and will support the safety planning process.
- Explain that if she is facing high risk you may have to share the information with other organisations in order to provide her with the best protection – this gives her an option to refuse the risk assessment process.

# Power & Control Wheel

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## Using intimidation

Making you afraid by using looks, actions, gestures. Smashing things. Destroying your property. Abusing pets. Displaying weapons.

## Using emotional abuse

Putting you down. Making you feel bad about yourself. Calling you names. Making you think you're crazy. Playing

mind games. Humiliating you. Making you feel guilty.

## **Using isolation**

Controlling what you do, who you see and talk to, what you read, where you go. Limiting your outside involvement. Using jealousy to justify actions.

## **Minimizing, denying and blaming**

Making light of the abuse and not taking your concerns about it seriously. Saying the abuse didn't happen. Shifting responsibility for abusive behaviour. Saying you caused it.

## **Using children**

Making you feel guilty about the children. Using the children to relay messages. Using visitation to harass you. Threatening to take the children away.

## **Using male privilege**

Treating you like a servant. Making all the big decisions. Acting like the "king of the castle". Being the one to define men's and women's roles.

## **Using economic abuse**

Preventing you from getting or keeping a job. Making you ask for money. Giving you an allowance. Taking your money. Not letting you know about or have access to family income.

## **Using coercion and threats**

Making and/or carrying out threats to do something to hurt you. Threatening to leave you, commit suicide and report you to social work. Putting pressure on you around court proceedings. Making you do illegal things.

**Source:** Domestic Abuse Intervention Project,  
202 East Superior Street, Duluth, Minnesota 55802 218-722-2781  
[www.duluth-model.org](http://www.duluth-model.org)

# Risk Assessment

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Risk Assessment can help a woman in several ways:

- Identify the level of risk she is facing, particularly if she is minimising her experiences.
- Establish whether a referral into the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) for domestic abuse is required.
- Help agencies plan for how to manage the risks she faces.
- Reduce the opportunity for repeat victimisation by the perpetrator.
- Support the safety planning process.
- Helping to assess whether there is any risk to any children or vulnerable adult.



# Safety Planning

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## **Safety during an incident:**

- How will she leave if she needs to (how can she get out safely from different areas of the home, what doors, windows would she use).
- Where can she keep her purse and keys to get them quickly if she needs to leave.
- Is there anyone she can tell about the violence and ask them to call the police if they hear suspicious noises.
- When she expects an argument can she move to a lower risk space, where would this be? (try to avoid arguments in bathroom, garage, kitchen, near weapons or rooms without access to an outside door).
- If she has to leave where will she go? What options does she have?
- If there are children could they be asked to call the police, how will she let them know she needs them to call for help (code word?).

- What can she tell the children to help keep them safe?
- What tells her when the situation is serious (what feelings etc does she get), encourage her to think about how she usually copes with these and to manage the risk?

### **Safety when preparing to leave:**

- Is there anywhere she can leave money and an extra set of keys so she can leave quickly.
- Where can she keep important documents so she can have access if she has to leave? What are these documents?
- Is she able to open her own bank account prior to leaving?
- Does she have the number for emergency housing, police etc?
- Make sure mobile phones are kept charged.
- Is there any friends or family she can get support from if she decides to leave?
- Can she leave spare clothes somewhere?

- What else does she need to take with her, how will she get this out of the house?
- Can she access public transport, does she know when this runs until (timetables)? Would she be able to get a taxi if needed, how would this be paid for?
- What else can she do to increase her independence?
- When will she review her safety plan, how will she let her children know?
- Is she able to rehearse her escape plan?
- Does she need to think about changing her mobile after she leaves, can she be tracked through this? Can she switch the tracking off, can GPS and location services be switched off?

Whilst this guidance is primarily focussed at supporting female victims of gender based violence, the information can also be used to support men who have experienced abuse.

# MARAC – Multi- Agency Risk Assessment Conferences for Domestic Abuse

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When a recent (i.e. within the past 3 months) incident of domestic abuse is disclosed to staff, they have a responsibility to ensure that a MARAC Risk Assessment (RIC) is completed. This may be by the individual staff member themselves or a referral to an appropriate support service (Women's Aid or Victim Support) should be made where steps will be taken to ensure the RIC is carried out.

The RIC is available on most agency intranets and publicly at:

[www.forhighlandschildren.org/4-icspublication](http://www.forhighlandschildren.org/4-icspublication)