

# Safety Planning with Children and Youth Domestic Abuse

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- Guidance: developing a safety plan with children
- Other free 'domestic abuse resources' for children and young people
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# MY SAFETY PLAN

My name .....

“ I am a special person and deserve to be safe. ”

“ Domestic abuse is dangerous and against the law. It is not my fault that grown-ups in my house are fighting/arguing. ”

“ No one should ask me to keep secrets that makes me feel bad. ”

If there is any fighting, loud noises or arguing in my house, I WILL: \_\_\_\_\_

Have a special code word/signal with safe members of my family to know when I should follow the agreed plan with them such as calling the police or leaving the house.

My code is:

Safe people who know the code are:



Stay out of the way. I will not get in the middle of the fight/arguing.



Go to a safe place. (Draw or list places where you can go and how to get there; this can be in your house or not.)



Try to do something that makes me feel better. (Draw/write what different things this could be.)



If someone is hurt or in danger, I will call the police (practice with the worker/parent how to call them).

Push the buttons ..... on the phone for emergency services.

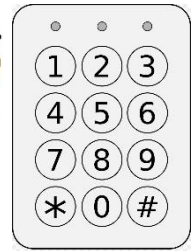
The people who answer will say, "Which emergency service do you require?"

You say: "Police"

You say: "My name is ....."

You tell the problem: "I need help. Send the police. Someone is hurting my....."

You say: "I am calling from..... (give complete address)"



Where/how can I get to the phone?

Domestic abuse makes children/young people feel sad, angry, upset and scared. If I want to talk to somebody about my feelings or worries, I can talk to:

Numbers for free helplines:



My family should have an escape route in case of a domestic abuse emergency.

I will plan the escape route with this safe person.....

We will talk about when we would need to use our escape route and what it is.



If I had to leave my house in a hurry, I would bring .... (draw/write a list below) if I could.








# MY SAFETY PLAN

(younger children)

"I am a special person. I need to be safe. It's not my fault that grownups in my house are fighting/arguing. No one should ask me to keep secrets that make me feel bad."

My name .....

If there is any fighting, loud noises or arguing in my house, I WILL:

<p>Stay out of the way. I will not get in the middle of the fight/arguing.</p>	
<p>Go to a safe place. (Draw different places you can go to.)</p>	
<p>Try to do something that makes me feel better. (Draw what it can be.)</p>	
<p>If someone is hurt or in danger, I will call the police. (Write the number to call down below and practice with the worker/parent how to call them).</p> <p>Where/how can I get to the phone?</p>	
<p>Sometimes, I may want to talk to someone about me feeling sad, angry, upset or scared. The people I can talk to are:</p> <p>Numbers for free helplines:</p>	

# GUIDANCE: DEVELOPING A SAFETY PLAN WITH CHILDREN

*(Reproduced from Safety Planning with Children and Youth: A Toolkit for Working with Children and Youth Exposed to Domestic Violence, Ministry of Justice.)*

When developing a safety plan with children/youth, incorporate the following points into their safety plan:

- 1 GO TO A SAFE PLACE**
- 2 DON'T GET IN THE MIDDLE**
- 3 CALL FOR HELP**
- 4 YOU ARE NOT ALONE**
- 5 YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME**
- 6 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS DANGEROUS AND AGAINST THE LAW**

The core safety planning points for children and youth outlined above are adapted from safety plans found in research literature and from field practice in British Columbia. There is not a “one size fits all” safety plan. Each safety plan should be unique and specific to the child/youth you are working with.

In the following sections, sample scripts are provided as examples of wording that can be used when safety planning with children/youth. You will need to adapt these scripts to be developmentally appropriate depending on the age and developmental level of the child and youth you are working with.

**PRACTICE TIP:** *You can start the discussion of safety planning points wherever it seems most comfortable and useful for the child/youth. Some practitioners suggest that starting the discussion about a safe place/ supports/who can help, can be a good way to initially address the topic. Use books, DVD's, photographs, and drawings, as appropriate.*

## CORE POINTS TO COVER DURING SAFETY PLANNING:



### Go to a safe place

Talk to the child/youth about finding a safe place to go while the fighting is happening. For younger children this could be anywhere where the fighting is not going on. (As “Fighting” is how children/youth often describe domestic violence, this toolkit will also use this term.) Encourage them to do something that distracts or comforts them. Sometimes older children or youth may want to leave the home while the fighting is going on. Talk with them about safe places to go.

i. Who does the child/youth have in their support network and how do they access them? Depending on developmental level, have the child/youth:

- Identify people in their life they feel safe with.
- Draw a map or plan of their home.
- Brainstorm where they can go and what they can do if they don't feel safe when the fighting happens. For example, what about neighbors? Does the child/youth know them? Are they safe? Would they help?
- If the child/youth lives far from town or other people, how do they get to a safe place outside the house?
- Plan with them how to care for or hide special belongings (pet, sentimental things) if they have to leave home in a hurry.

ii. Help the child/youth identify what a safe place looks like both inside and outside the house. If it is safe and appropriate, you could visit the child/youth's home and do a walk through. Alternatively, ask the mother/caregiver to walk through the house with the child/youth and point out the safe places.

**PRACTICE TIP:** *Many children/youth have cell phones. If the child/youth has one, be sure to include using their cell phone in their safety plan, keeping it with them in and out of the house.*

### SAMPLE SCRIPT TO COVER IN YOUR CONVERSATION WITH A CHILD/YOUTH ABOUT FINDING A SAFE PLACE:

a) Figure out ahead of time a safe place you can go to inside your home when there is fighting, arguing, and/or loud voices that make you feel scared or worried.

- A safe place in your home is anywhere where the fighting, loud noises and arguing are

not happening.

- Going to your safe place does not mean that you have to hide. It just means getting away from the fighting. Stay there until the fighting stops.
- If there is a lock on the door of a room, this might be good place to choose because you can lock the door.

b) While keeping yourself out of the way of the fighting, you might want to do something that makes you feel better, like:

- Listen to music.
- Watch television.
- Write, draw pictures, or play a video game.
- Be with any of your brothers/sisters and talk or play a game together.
- Remember to give yourself positive messages and use techniques you have learned to help keep yourself calm such as breathing techniques (take a deep breath and count to 10) and going to a space/room that makes you feel calmer.
- Call the Kids Help Phone at ..... (add the phone number) and talk to someone if it is safe to do so.

c) If you think you might be safer outside of your home during the fighting, think ahead of time about some safe place(s) to go to. Talk with your mother/ caregiver about where that safe place will be so you can meet up together after the fighting, when it is safer. Figure out how you will get there:

- Walk
- Ride your bike
- Take a bus
- Call someone for a ride
- Call a taxi

d) Try to keep some money in your pocket, purse, or room, for things like making a call from a public pay phone if there is one, or buying a bus ticket.



## Don't get in the middle

Talk with the child/youth about how getting in the middle of the fighting could be dangerous for them. Affirm with the child/youth that they may feel conflicted about the fighting and may want to stop the



fighting themselves. Tell the child/youth that it is safer for them, and their mother/caregiver, if they do not get involved. If they need or want to stay close by, advise the child/youth to stay out of sight, and if possible, to have a phone nearby.

Talk about what the child/youth needs to do before, during, and after the fighting so that they don't get in the middle. Remind the child/youth that the best way for them to help is to keep him or herself safe and/or get another adult that can help.

**PRACTICE TIP:** *In some cases it is important for the child/youth to trust their instincts. It may be that when they yell or cry that the fighting does stop.*

### **SAMPLE SCRIPT TO COVER IN YOUR CONVERSATION WITH A CHILD/YOUTH ABOUT NOT GETTING IN THE MIDDLE:**

- Don't get in the middle (of the fighting, arguing, loud voices).
- Sometimes when adults are fighting, arguing, or using loud voices, some kids want to help, such as by staying in the room, or yelling to stop the fighting. But it is safer for you, and for your mother, if you do not get involved in trying to stop the fighting.
- If you feel like you need to stay close by, then stay out of sight and as far away as possible, and try to have a phone nearby.

**3**

## **Call for help from emergency services**

Discuss with the child/youth how to get help. Review the specific steps to follow when talking with emergency services, and discuss naming a code word for the mother/caregiver to use to indicate the child/youth needs to call 911 or 999 (depending on the country). It is important to remember that not all communities use 911 or 999 (depending on the country) for emergencies and rural areas often don't have street names and addresses. Therefore, the child/youth needs to know how to describe exactly where they are located. Talk to the mother/caregiver about writing down their address and/or specific landmarks and keeping this information where the child/youth always knows where it is in case of an emergency.

- A key point to stress is that the child/youth is not responsible for keeping their mother/caregiver safe, but they may be able to get help.
- For younger children, use a real (unconnected) phone so the child/youth can role-play phoning for help from emergency services and giving information.
- Sometimes, depending on the child/youth's previous experience, they are reluctant to call the



police. For example, some children/youth see the police as the people who have broken up their family in the past and/or some children/youth find it difficult to call the police on their abusive parent. Discuss the police's role in protecting the public and encourage them to call the police for help.

### **SAMPLE SCRIPT TO COVER IN YOUR CONVERSATION WITH A CHILD/YOUTH ABOUT CALLING FOR HELP:**

- a) You are not responsible for keeping your mother/ caregiver safe, but you may be able to get help.
- b) Talk with your mother about a code (special) word that only the two of you will know, that she can say out loud to let you know when you should call for help.
- c) You could also talk with your mother about a signal only the two of you will know that she can use to let you know something is going on. For example, if you are not at home when the fighting is starting, your mother and you could agree that, if possible, she will turn on the porch light, or close certain window blinds to let you know to go somewhere safe.
- d) Know how to phone to get help from emergency services if you think someone is getting hurt, you don't feel safe, or if you hear your mother say the code word.
- e) Try to use a phone that is not in the room where the fighting is happening or use a cell phone. Even if your cell phone minutes are used up, you can still dial 911/999 (or the equivalent in your country) and get through. If it is safe to do so, go to a neighbour's house and use the phone there, or to another safe place, such as a local store, to make a call.
- f) This is how you make an emergency call:

Push the buttons 9-9-9 (or the equivalent in your country) on the phone for emergency services.

- The people who answer will say, "Which emergency service do you require?" You say: "Police"

You say: "My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am \_\_\_ years old.

- You tell the problem: "I need help. Send the Police. Someone is hurting my mother."
- You say: "I am calling from (give complete address)"

g) After you have said these things, the best thing for you to do, if you can, is to stay on the phone. The person on the phone might need to ask you some more questions, or you might want to talk to them some more. If you do hang up the phone, the 911/999 operator may call back, which could make it dangerous for you and your mother/caregiver.

h) If you cannot stay on the phone because you do not feel safe, tell the person on the phone you are just putting the phone down without hanging it up.

i) Wait for the police or help to come.

### Numbers that children and youth can call for help:

*Give the child numbers for different organisations such as children's helplines or domestic abuse charities in their area. Explain that they can call them anonymously about what is going on in their lives and explain what "anonymously" means.*

*Tell them also know which numbers to call if they would like to report abuse of themselves or their siblings and explain what would happen if they filed a report.*



## You are not alone

Encourage the child/youth to identify who else they could talk with about the domestic violence in their family. Help the child/youth to understand they are not as alone as they may feel. The person(s) they choose to talk with could be someone who could help in an emergency and/or someone they could seek support from over time.

If it is appropriate, encourage the child/youth to talk to a safe person who will listen to them.

- Provide the child/youth with community resources and refer appropriately.
- If necessary, you can help to program numbers of safe people and places into their cell phone if they have one.

### SAMPLE SCRIPT TO COVER IN YOUR CONVERSATION WITH A CHILD/YOUTH ABOUT FINDING OTHERS TO TALK WITH ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS:

Make a list of people you trust and can talk to about your feelings about the violence that is happening in your family. Here are some ideas:

- Another person in your family (elder, aunt, uncle, grandparents, cousin, foster parents, mother, caregiver)
- A friend
- A friend's parent
- A neighbour

- A teacher, principal, counsellor or other support staff at your daycare/school.
- Your babysitter
- Your (girl guide/boy scout/group) leader, or a coach or mentor
- The imam, leader, minister, priest, or rabbi at your church/mosque/synagogue/temple
- A help line



## You are not to blame for the fighting. It is not your fault

Reaffirm to the child/youth that they are not to blame for the fighting. Let the child/youth know that even though they may hear their name in the fight, it is not their fault.

### SAMPLE SCRIPT TO COVER IN YOUR CONVERSATION WITH A CHILD/YOUTH ABOUT HOW THE FIGHTING AT HOME IS NOT THEIR FAULT:

- No matter what, the fight is not your fault, even if you hear your name in the fight or if you are worried the fight is because of you, for example because you did not clean up your toys or get a good grade in school.
- Adults have many ways to solve conflict/problems but violence should never be one of them.
- You cannot make a person behave violently or be abusive; how a person behaves is their choice, and you are not to blame for their behaviour.

**PRACTICE TIP:** *Children and youth often feel conflicted towards to the abusive parent. For example, they want to help their mother/caregiver so they call the police. They then have an overwhelming sense of guilt for getting their father in trouble. If the child/youth is feeling guilty for calling the police, or getting the abusive parent in trouble, reaffirm with the child/youth that they did the right thing.*

# 6

## Domestic violence is dangerous and against the law

Discuss with the child/youth that domestic violence is dangerous and against the law. Physical and sexual violence is against the law. However, domestic violence can take many forms, and not all are against the law. For example, verbal abuse is not against the law unless it includes verbal threats as “uttering threats” is against the law.

### SAMPLE SCRIPT TO COVER IN YOUR CONVERSATION WITH A CHILD/YOUTH ABOUT THE DANGERS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

- a) Domestic violence is dangerous and people can get hurt.
- b) It is against the law to hurt someone.
- c) It is okay to love the abusive parent but not their behaviour.

## Closing the Safety Planning Discussion:

Summarize the Safety Plan With the Child/Youth.

Affirm with the child/youth that what they are experiencing is not their fault. They are not alone.

- 1) Discuss with the child/youth and their mother/ caregiver if it is safe for the child/youth to have a copy of their safety plan with them, and if appropriate, give them a copy of their safety plan. Discuss with the child/youth and their mother/caregiver a safe place for the child/youth to keep their safety plan.
- 2) For young children and younger youth, it is likely their mother/caregiver was present during the safety planning. Make sure the mother/caregiver has reviewed the plan, is in agreement, and has a copy.
- 3) For older youth, it is likely their mother/caregiver was not present during safety planning. Encourage the older youth to share parts, if not all, of the safety plan with her.
- 4) End with an activity so that the child/youth leaves your office on a positive note. Some activities include:
  - Have the child make a picture of their safe place and talk about why this place is safe.
  - Have the child/youth share three wishes they have for their life.
  - Have the child/youth think of one or two positive messages they can tell him or herself.

- Have the youth put contact numbers into their phone.
- With the child/youth, create a visual such as a picture to remind them of their safety plan, if it isn't with them.

## For further guidance see

[Safety Planning with Children and Youth: A Toolkit for Working with Children and Youth Exposed to Domestic Violence \(the toolkit\)](#)

**Safety Planning  
with Children and  
Youth**

A Toolkit for Working with Children and  
Youth Exposed to Domestic Violence



## Other free 'domestic abuse resources' for children and young people:

- [6 session feelings programme for children affected by domestic abuse](#)

The guide outlines a 6 session 'Feelings Programme'. It details activities which can be completed with a child or young person who has lived with domestic abuse which may have impaired their ability to understand emotional situations and respond appropriately.

- [Coping with domestic abuse: Booklet for CHILDREN aged 6 to 12](#)

The information in this booklet is meant to help children and their parents who live with domestic abuse. It is hoped that it will help them to understand what is happening and will encourage them to talk to other people who can help.

- [Domestic abuse: educational toolkit – activities & resources for children/young people](#)

'Spiralling' is an education toolkit and film for use as a resource to help prevent domestic abuse in the next generation, by carrying out activities with and for children and young people of all ages. It includes a short film about a young couple's abusive relationship, and an extensive toolkit of resources and activities to do with young people.

- [I Have Two Homes – video story for children about separation/divorce](#)

Divorce happens in lots of families. This honest book follows Nina as her parents separate. It's a sad but hopeful KidTime StoryTime as everyone gets used to a new life and new homes.

- [Children's booklet - Feel safe at home: What to do if violence is happening around you](#)

A compact and user-friendly booklet for children aged seven to twelve. It talks in straightforward language about what domestic violence is, how it can make children feel, and how and where they can get help. The booklet explains that domestic violence is not their fault, and that there are people who will listen and understand.

- [Visitation Through the Eyes of Children: A Safety Planning Workbook for Children Exposed to Family Violence](#)

The visitation booklet was designed for children ages 6-11. It is for a child who had been exposed to family violence and whose parents are now living separately. It teaches children strategies to adapt and be safe when visiting their other parent.

- [Family Court Through the Eyes of Children: A Workbook for Children whose Families Have Gone to Court due to Family Violence](#)

The family court booklet identifies with children ages of 12 -15. This booklet was created with the intention of providing a user friendly tool to support children and help them understand about the complex issues and feelings that arise once a family goes to court.

- [Safety Planning Through the Eyes of Children: A Workbook for Children Exposed to Family Violence](#)

The safety planning booklet was designed for children ages 3-5 to support them and their parent to develop a safety plan on a developmental level appropriate for the child's age.

- [When can we go home? An activity book for kids who've had to leave their homes](#)

The book is designed to help children do two things: cope with the reality of being away from their homes and develop the "emotional intelligence" skills they need to be resilient throughout life.

## SAMPLE SCRIPTS

### Sample script to cover in your conversation with a child/youth about finding a safe place:

a) Figure out ahead of time a safe place you can go to inside your home when there is fighting, arguing, and/or loud voices that make you feel scared or worried.

- A safe place in your home is anywhere where the fighting, loud noises and arguing are not happening.
- Going to your safe place does not mean that you have to hide. It just means getting away from the fighting. Stay there until the fighting stops.
- If there is a lock on the door of a room, this might be good place to choose because you can lock the door.

b) While keeping yourself out of the way of the fighting, you might want to do something that makes you feel better, like:

- Listen to music.
- Watch television.
- Write, draw pictures, or play a video game.
- Be with any of your brothers/sisters and talk or play a game together.
- Remember to give yourself positive messages and use techniques you have learned to help keep yourself calm such as breathing techniques (take a deep breath and count to 10) and going to a space/room that makes you feel calmer.
- Call the Kids Help Phone at ..... (add the phone number) and talk to someone if it is safe to do so.

c) If you think you might be safer outside of your home during the fighting, think ahead of time about some safe place(s) to go to. Talk with your mother/caregiver about where that safe place will be so you

can meet up together after the fighting, when it is safer. Figure out how you will get there:

- Walk
- Ride your bike
- Take a bus
- Call someone for a ride
- Call a taxi

d) Try to keep some money in your pocket, purse, or room, for things like making a call from a public pay phone if there is one, or buying a bus ticket.

### Sample script to cover in your conversation with a child/youth about not getting in the middle:

- Don't get in the middle (of the fighting, arguing, loud voices).
- Sometimes when adults are fighting, arguing, or using loud voices, some kids want to help, such as by staying in the room, or yelling to stop the fighting. But it is safer for you, and for your mother, if you do not get involved in trying to stop the fighting.
- If you feel like you need to stay close by, then stay out of sight and as far away as possible, and try to have a phone nearby.

### Sample script to cover in your conversation with a child/youth about calling for help:

a) You are not responsible for keeping your mother/caregiver safe, but you may be able to get help.

b) Talk with your mother about a code (special) word that only the two of you will know, that she can say out loud to let you know when you should call for help.

c) You could also talk with your mother about a signal only the two of you will know that she can use to let you know something is going on. For example, if you are not at home when the fighting is starting,



your mother and you could agree that, if possible, she will turn on the porch light, or close certain window blinds to let you know to go somewhere safe.

d) Know how to phone to get help from emergency services if you think someone is getting hurt, you don't feel safe, or if you hear your mother say the code word.

e) Try to use a phone that is not in the room where the fighting is happening or use a cell phone. Even if your cell phone minutes are used up, you can still dial 911/999 (or the equivalent in your country) and get through. If it is safe to do so, go to a neighbour's house and use the phone there, or to another safe place, such as a local store, to make a call.

f) This is how you make an emergency call:

Push the buttons 9-9-9 (or the equivalent in your country) on the phone for emergency services.

- The people who answer will say, "Which emergency service do you require?" You say: "Police"
- You say: "My name is \_\_\_\_ . I am \_\_ years old."
- You tell the problem: "I need help. Send the Police. Someone is hurting my mother."
- You say: "I am calling from (give complete address)"

g) After you have said these things, the best thing for you to do, if you can, is to stay on the phone. The person on the phone might need to ask you some more questions, or you might want to talk to them some more. If you do hang up the phone, the 911/999 operator may call back, which could make it dangerous for you and your mother/caregiver.

h) If you cannot stay on the phone because you do not feel safe, tell the person on the phone you are just putting the phone down without hanging it up.

i) Wait for the police or help to come.

### **Sample script to cover in your conversation with a child/youth about finding others to talk with about their feelings:**

Make a list of people you trust and can talk to about your feelings about the violence that is happening in your family. Here are some ideas:

- Another person in your family (elder, aunt, uncle, grandparents, cousin, foster parents, mother, caregiver)
- A friend
- A friend's parent
- A neighbour
- A teacher, principal, counsellor or other support staff at your daycare/school.
- Your babysitter
- Your (girl guide/boy scout/group) leader, or a coach or mentor
- The imam, leader, minister, priest, or rabbi at your church/mosque/synagogue/temple
- A help line

### **Sample script to cover in your conversation with a child/youth about how the fighting at home is not their fault:**

a) No matter what, the fight is not your fault, even if you hear your name in the fight or if you are worried the fight is because of you, for example because you did not clean up your toys or get a good grade in school.

- b) Adults have many ways to solve conflict/problems but violence should never be one of them.
- c) You cannot make a person behave violently or be abusive; how a person behaves is their choice, and you are not to blame for their behaviour.

**Sample script to cover in your conversation with a child/youth about the dangers of domestic violence:**

- a) Domestic violence is dangerous and people can get hurt.
- b) It is against the law to hurt someone.
- c) It is okay to love the abusive parent but not their behaviour.