

THE DANGER ASSESSMENT AND SAFETY PLANNING

Updated October 2019

1. Has the physical violence increased in severity or frequency over the past year?

- Ask the woman what tools she has already used to keep herself safe.
- Advise her that if she plans on returning to her partner it is probable that the severity and frequency will increase over and above what she has experienced so far.
- If she does return and then decides to leave again, she needs to be aware of the dangers of leaving and be informed that it is best not to confront her partner with her decision to leave the relationship. It is recommended that she leave when he is not present.

2. Does your partner own a gun?

- Inform the gun registry.
- Inform RCMP/local police.
- Explore if the gun can be locked up.
- Plant a seed about the dangerousness of a gun in the home.
- Identify a safe room in the house.
- Important to note the question refers to gun ownership, not access. But if the person who has been abusive has access to a gun this should be noted and taken into consideration when safety planning with the woman.
- Important to use your professional judgment.

3. Have you left him after living together?

3.A (If you have never lived together, check here: _____)

- Remember if the woman left her partner to come into the shelter then the answer is yes to the above question.
- According to the research a woman leaving her partner after living together increases her risk of femicide.
- Talk to the woman about the probability of escalation of abuse if she decides to return to her partner.
- Ask about past behavior if she has left previously.
- Does she have what she needs so that she does not have to go back to get it personally?

4. Is your partner unemployed

- According to the research unemployment is the number one demographic risk factor for femicide.
- Explore - If she does go back and he is unemployed it is more likely he will be around the home more – what does that mean for her and her safety?

5. Has he ever used a weapon against you or threatened you with a lethal weapon?

- Discuss what a lethal weapon is. Explore what he has used before.

6. Does he threaten to kill you?

- This is a sensitive question – she may answer yes but insist he doesn't mean it.
- Talk to her about death threats and that people do not usually make threats lightly.
- Encourage her to listen to her inner voice – and her feelings.
- Spend time exploring the previous threat. What was happening before he made the threat, what happened next? What emotions come up for her as she remembers that experience? What is that telling her?

7. Has your partner avoided being arrested for domestic violence?

- According to the research avoiding being arrested increases her risk of femicide. The abusive partner may experience a sense of power when he avoids arrest.
- Explore with her the option of calling police if there is risk of another incident. Inform her that arrest for domestic violence can be a protective factor. Explain that sanctions may be placed on her partner.
- Inform her about other legal options – EPO, Restraining orders.

8. Do you have a child that is not his?

- This increases her risk. The child serves as a constant reminder that she was with someone else.
- Talk to her about the safety of her child/children.

9. Has your partner ever forced you to have sex when you did not wish to do so?

- This refers to forced sex – not pressure.
- This can be an important awareness for some women – that it is possible to be sexually assaulted within a relationship. Forced sex is a risk factor for femicide.

10. Does your partner ever try to choke/strangle you or cut off your breathing?

10.A (If yes, has he done it more than once, or did it make you pass out or black out or make you dizzy? check here : _____)

- If a woman answers yes – and it was a recent incident – follow the VON Strangulation Protocol as outlined in the ACWS training material. Refer for medical attention.
- It is important to educate about the impact of strangulation – even if the strangulation happened a long time ago.
- There is an increased risk of femicide with repeated strangulation, or when it results in altered consciousness or blacking out.

11. Does your partner use illegal drugs?

- If the drug is a prescription drug or marijuana make note of that but it would not be scored as a yes. Use of marijuana and abuse of prescription drugs needs to be addressed in the safety plan.

- It is important to talk about a safety plan around where to go if the partner is using. Possible questions to explore with her - where can she go? Is it possible to report to the police? Would this increase her risk?
- Help her determine the patterns of her partner's use – is it weekly, daily, on pay day.
- Other questions: where does he store the drugs? Are they safe from the children?
- She may talk about her own drug use – explore how safe or not safe she is when she is using. Possibly may need to do safety planning around her own use – where is a safe place? Who are safe individuals to be around? Safety is the first concern. It is important to be nonjudgmental.

12. Is your partner an alcoholic or problem drinker?

- Includes binge drinking, heavy drinking on a regular basis.
- Have a similar conversation as above.

13. Does your partner control most of all of your daily activities?

- According to the research, a yes answer to question 3 and a yes response to this question presents an elevated risk for femicide. Women who have left their partners after living together are at an elevated risk for femicide especially if he is highly controlling.
- Critical area to review when safety planning
- The second part of the question – “she doesn't let him” – important to talk about this. If she stands up to her partner are there risks for her safety?

14. Is your partner violently and constantly jealous of you?

- If yes – high risk for murder suicide.
- Let her know that violent and constant jealousy is a risk factor for murder- suicide.

15. Have you ever been beaten by your partner while you were pregnant?

- If a woman is pregnant and there has been a recent assault- refer her for medical treatment.
- An assault when a woman is pregnant increases the risk of miscarriage.

16. Has your partner ever threatened or tried to commit suicide?

- This is a risk factor for murder/suicide
- Threat of suicide is a control factor

17. Does your partner threaten to harm your children?

- A positive response does not necessarily mean a call to Children's Services. Does indicate a need to do more exploring.
- Have a conversation about the actions she has taken to keep her children safe. Reassure her that removing her children from an unsafe situation and coming into shelter is the best protective thing she could have done for her children.
- Let her know the impact of witnessing violence on her children.

- Validate her feelings.

18. Do you believe your partner is capable of killing you?

- A very sensitive question. A woman's own perception of her risk should always be considered. Yet research indicates that only ½ of femicide victims and near femicide victims accurately predict their risk.

19. Does your partner follow or spy on you, leave threatening notes or messages on your answering machine, destroy your property, or call when you don't want him to?

- This refers to stalking behavior.
- According to the research 80% of victims of femicide or attempted femicide were previously stalked by their partner or ex-partner.
- Provide information about stalking. The Domestic Violence Action Team Anti-Stalking Program document is a helpful resource.
- Advise her that stalking is illegal and encourage her to report to the police.
- Police may talk to the abusive individual about the stalking behavior and that might be enough for the behavior to stop.
- It is important to document all stalking behaviors. Recommend that she log all unwanted contact and stalking behavior, save all electronic messages, emails, face book, text messages, etc. Help her understand that everything is public on face book unless you make it private.
- It is important to provide her with information on how to be safe online and on social networking sites.
- Inform her that phone pictures can be traced to the location where the photo was taken.
- Ask her if she would like to speak to a lawyer.
- Some abusive individuals continue to harass partners by phoning. Some have been able to get phone numbers of their partners from individual phone companies even after the woman has continued to change her phone number. If contacting the phone provider does not work advise her to contact the CRTC (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission).

20. Have you ever threatened or tried to commit suicide?

- If the threat or attempt was recent follow shelter protocol.

THE CALENDAR AND SAFETY PLANNING:

- It is important to think outside the box when safety planning
- Safety planning is a collaborative process; Crisis intervention workers support women to develop a safety plan that is unique to their circumstance.
- It takes time and lots of discussion. It is important to look at the patterns of abuse that are identified as a result of completing the calendar.
- It is important to not only look at safety from the violence but also look at life generated risks including poverty issues, child custody issues, safe housing, etc.