



Promoting the Safety of Clients Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence During a Pandemic or Other Public Health Emergencies

During the COVID-19 pandemic, increased rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) have been reported. Public health measures to mitigate the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus have left many individuals who experience violence spending increased time with or in closer proximity to partners who use violence. Community-based supports, such as shelters, have also been challenged to provide pre-pandemic levels of safety planning services. This resource provides guidance for public health nurses on the types of safety planning strategies that are recommended (and not recommended) to promote the safety of clients experiencing IPV during a pandemic or other public health emergency.

Evidence-Informed Guidance¹:

The safety planning recommendations in this resource are informed by findings from a systematic review of 33 articles and a review and ranking of the strategies by more than 100 experts and survivors of IPV from Ontario, Canada. To tailor these recommendations to home visiting programs, the practice “tips” were informed through the shared expertise and feedback of the PHN-PREP Advisory Board of public health nurses and managers.



Highly Recommended Safety Strategies: Very helpful for promoting safety



Plan for Safety

- Duplicate or put aside important papers (e.g., ID, passport, children’s birth certificates)
- Keep phone and keys close by or on one’s person
- Using **distancing techniques*** in the home
- Create a safety plan with children
- Pack an emergency kit (e.g., clothes, medications, bus tickets, money, clothes) ahead of time. Store kit with a family/friend or place where it can be quickly accessed and will not be located by the abuser
- Create a mental list of potential safe havens
- Keep a record of incidents of violence or coercive control
- Consider strategies for keeping pets safe
- Work out an escape plan



***Distancing techniques**

specifically refer to finding ways to be in a different part of the home or property than the abuser during strict lockdown orders when leaving the home is not possible. These techniques could include doing chores, yard work, work-related activities, or entertainment activities that happen to be located away from where the abuser is spending their time. The idea endorsed here is that avoiding the abuser could keep conflicts from arising.

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Highly Recommended Safety Strategies: Very helpful for promoting safety (continued)



Connect with others

- Talk to public health nurse, or other health care provider (e.g., physician, primary care nurse) about the abuse
- Alert a neighbour to the situation
- Talk to friends and/or family members
- Reach out to others who have experienced IPV (in person or online)
- Access online, virtual, or app-based counselling (but NOT couples therapy)
- Have someone call to check in regularly
- Seek out legal advice

Increase Safety Online

- Delete text, web-browser, and other online records more frequently
- Change passwords to phone, email, online accounts etc. more often

Recommended Safety Strategies: Somewhat helpful for promoting safety

- Receive cash or electronic payments from friends or relatives
- Remove or hide knives, utensils, and/or tools to avoid partner's easy access
- Manage the environment to minimize known triggers and reduce risk
- Do things you know will promote calm in the home

Not Recommended: Strategies that may result in an escalation of violence or coercive control



- Do Not: Try to “keep the peace*” in tense situations
- Do Not: Switch to texting or emailing instead of phone calls. Texting/ emailing is dependent on a woman having access to a private and secure device (which is not always possible) and increased time spent texting/emailing may provoke suspicion from the person using violence
- Do Not: File for a restraining order while socially isolating with partner
- Do Not: Hide alcohol or other substances that may make the abuse worse
- Do Not: Use anyone else in the house (and in particular, children) to defuse a potentially violent situation
- Do Not: Delay plans to end the relationship

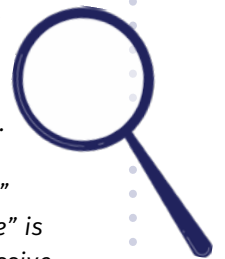
Safety Alert:

Clients who believe their lives are in immediate danger or who fear for the lives of their children or others in the home are encouraged to bypass safety planning entirely and contact emergency services.



**Keeping the peace was not recommended because it was viewed as an active intervention to calm down an already escalating situation. Several of our respondents felt that trying to be the interlocutor between an abuser and another member of the household, a pet, etc or trying to calm down an argument could result in further escalation and, potentially, abuse. The difference between “distancing techniques” and “keeping the peace” is that distancing is a passive intervention that avoids communication whereas keeping the peace is more active and could place the woman at the center of a potentially violent situation.*

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Practice Tips for Public Health Nurses:

- Following a client's [disclosure of their experiences of IPV](#), it is the public health nurse's role to actively listen without judgment, validate their experiences, identify their priority concerns, and [conduct a risk assessment](#) (or refer to a provider trained in risk assessment).
- If it is understood the client's life is not in immediate danger, initiate a conversation around safety planning from a strengths-based perspective. This starts by asking the client what strategies they are currently using to increase their level of safety.
- To enhance the client's current safety strategies, discuss the strategies outlined in this guidance-which are tailored specifically for safety planning during a pandemic or other public health emergency.
- Become familiar with community-based services available to support safety planning and be prepared to describe to clients what they can expect from: legal aid, shelter services or violence against woman sector, housing, counselling, victim services and child protection agencies.
- Use a [warm referral process](#) to link client to other community agencies, professionals (e.g., domestic violence advocate), or services.
- If there are children in the home, it is critical to consult with, and as required, report suspected child exposure to intimate partner violence to the local child protection service.
- For clients who do not have their own bank account, discuss the benefits of having a personal account and review with them the process for opening up a personal bank account.
- Inquire if taxi companies in your local community will transfer a woman (and her children) for free to a local shelter.



¹Metheny, N., Perri, M., Velonis, A., Kamalanathan, J., Hassan, M., Buhariwala, P., Du Mont, J., Mason, R., & O'Campo, P. (2021). Evidence for changing intimate partner violence safety planning needs as a result of COVID-19: results from phase I of a rapid intervention. *Public Health*, 194, 11-13.

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