

Safety Planning: How You Can Help

National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life
A project of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Topics in This Booklet

Introduction

How to Use These Materials

What You Can Do

Where to Get Help

What to Look For

Talking About Abuse

Helping a Victim Who Wants to Stay

Planning With a Victim Who Wants to Leave

Top 10 Things to Pack

Introduction

If you are reading this booklet, a person with a cognitive disability may have asked you for help with safety planning due to abuse. Or you may be concerned that someone you know is being harmed. This booklet lists a variety of ways to help.

Cognitive disabilities can be the result of illness, age or injury. A cognitive disability can make completing tasks difficult, due to memory loss or the inability to process information accurately. These individuals are often at greater risk of abuse and/or sexual violence than the general population. This booklet offers suggestions to caring individuals willing to help persons with cognitive disabilities who are being abused. Unfortunately, sometimes persons with cognitive disabilities are hurt by someone they have an ongoing relationship with, like a spouse/partner, relative or caregiver. Persons with cognitive disabilities may not recognize that they

are being abused. They may be afraid to tell anyone. They may not know what to do or who to trust.

Abusive behavior may be physical, sexual and emotional. Financial exploitation, withholding medications, threats, intimidation and intentional isolation are also forms of abuse. Adult women and men of all ages, races, ethnic, economic and religious backgrounds, including gay males, lesbians, bisexuals, or transgender persons, may be harmed.

You Can Help!

You can help a person with a cognitive disability who is being abused or hurt. This booklet describes things to consider when creating a safety plan with a person with cognitive disabilities. Safety planning is a process that identifies helpful steps or strategies to keep a victim of abuse safer. The plan considers options when the person is at home or away from home. Some victims will need to leave in an emergency situation, but may want to return to live with an abuser. Other victims may want to live separately from the abuser.

Keep in mind that not all the ideas listed here will work for everyone. Some plans will need to be a simple one-step plan such as “Call my mom.” Other plans can involve more details like those listed at the end of this booklet.

When creating a safety plan, be creative. Ask for help, especially from domestic violence advocates. Recognize what you can and cannot change. Don’t assume you have to fix the problem. You have been successful if you have listened, provided information and offered nonjudgmental support.

You may be required by law to report abuse, neglect or exploitation against vulnerable adults and/or seniors, especially if you are working in health care or a caregiving field. For information about mandatory reporting laws in your state, contact Adult protective services (APS). (APS’s phone number may be found in the front of your phone book or under government services.)

How to Use These Materials

In the centerfold of this booklet, you should find a one-page safety plan. This plan can be used as a guide with persons with cognitive disabilities. Some persons with cognitive disabilities will not be able to use this plan. For example, a one-step plan to call a friend or family member may be best for some people. Other people will be able to process and retain more safety planning information than is covered on the one page document. For these individuals, feel free to expand and personalize the plan. There is also a sample worksheet of a more detailed safety plan on pages 19-22 for victims who are interested in living separately from their abuser.

Any safety plan can be personalized in a number of ways. Terms like “scared,” “afraid” and “safe” may have different meanings to different people. Feel free to change the language to be most helpful for the person you are helping.

Consider putting a photograph of a safe and trusted person to call on the plan. Or add several pictures if there will be more than one person as a contact.

Also, add phone numbers of friends, family or agencies.

Going over the plan periodically is helpful. Often people forget the plan or need to update who the safe and trusted person is. Changes in the health status of the person with cognitive disabilities may also require changes in the plan.

If you have additional questions or concerns, contact your local domestic abuse program or Adult protective services (APS) office.

What You Can Do

- **Focus on safety.**

Consider if the victim will be safer as a result of the plan. Some ideas may unintentionally increase risk to the victim or you. For example, confronting an angry abuser may put the victim at jeopardy after you leave.

- **Listen. Offer hope and support.**

Do not underestimate the power of compassionate listening. Victims of abuse can benefit simply from being heard, believed and supported. Find out what the victim wants to have happen and support their decisions as best you can.

- **Get help from others.**

Ask for help from caring friends, family and professionals who the victim trusts and agrees to let you contact.

- **Recognize the person's strengths and abilities.**

Find out what the victim is currently doing to stay safe and build on that plan. Consider what the victim does well and what things are hard for the person to do.

- **Recognize your limitations and abilities.**

You may decide you cannot help. It is ok to admit that you need to say no or that your role may be limited. If you cannot help, please try to find someone who can. Consider a team approach of friends, family and professionals who can each help in their own way.

- **Respect the victim's decision.**

Whether the victim chooses to stay with an abuser, leave an abuser immediately, or leave an abuser slowly over time, respect the decision without judging. It can be challenging to support a person who stays or leaves and returns to an abuser multiple times. However, often victims are faced with difficult choices and few options. Many victims who end relationships with their abusers have left several times before the final break. (If you live in a state where you are mandated to report suspicions of abuse, neglect or exploitation, let the victim know that you must make a report.)

- **You do not need to fix the problem.**

You can offer options and support while connecting the person with community resources or other options.

If you witness abuse, sexual assault, or violent behavior

- Call law enforcement or 911.
- Consider the safety of the victim and yourself before taking action.

If the person contacts you after an abusive incident,

- Call law enforcement or 911 if you fear for the safety of the victim or yourself.
- Get medical help for the victim as needed.

If you suspect abuse (based on witnessing signs of abuse or the person tells you about abuse), ask the following questions,

- What are you afraid of?
- What do you want to have happen? Why?

Get the victim and yourself to a safe place such as:

- A public place such as a mall, park or library where other people are around to help.
- An emergency shelter.
- A place the abuser will not look for the victim.

To get help, consider calling any of the following for additional help and information:

- Law enforcement or 911 if you believe a crime has been committed.
- Adult protective services (APS) if you would like social service staff to investigate the abuse and offer help.
- Domestic violence or sexual assault programs to learn about places to stay, legal options and counseling.
- The victim's caseworker or case manager.
- The victim's family and/or guardian (if none of these people are suspected abusers).
- If the abuser is a paid caregiver who works for an agency, contact the agency.

Where to Get Help

You may find it helpful to gather some or all of these phone numbers in advance.

To find these numbers in your community, look in the phone book on the front pages OR under social services or community services in the front of the phone book OR in the government section OR in the yellow pages OR call directory assistance.

Police/Sheriff

To stop or report a crime.
911 or _____

Adult Protective Services (APS)

Social service staff can offer information and help.

Domestic Violence Program

Advocates may be able to offer information on emergency housing, legal options and counseling.

(Find the number of a local program by calling the national hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or 1-800-787-3224 {TTY})

Sexual Assault Program

Advocates may be able to offer legal and medical information and counseling.

(Find the number of local a program by calling the national hotline at 1-800-656-4673)

Doctor or Other Health Care Provider

Name _____
Phone Number _____

Insurance or Medicare

Provider Name _____

Dentist

Name _____
Phone Number _____

Caseworker

Name _____
Phone Number _____

Guardian

Name _____
Phone Number _____

Other (such as family member or friend)

What to Look For

Listed below are some signs to look for if you suspect abuse. Often abusers do things to get their way – to control or punish their victims. Victims will do what abusers want them to do to avoid being hurt.

If someone tells you he or she has been hurt or is afraid, consider that abuse may have occurred. Even if you have reason to doubt the abuse is real or don't believe other things the person tells you, you can still call social services to have staff investigate if abuse is occurring.

A victim may:

- Have injuries that do not match what the victim or suspected abuser says happened.
- Withdraw in the presence of the suspected abuser.
- Exhibit unusual behaviors for the person (e.g., rocking, being aggressive, acting fearful).
- Have bruises, scratches, black eyes, burn marks or rope marks.
- Be wearing inappropriate clothing, heavy makeup or glasses to hide bruises or injuries.
- Be receiving substandard care or not paying bills despite having enough income or assets.
- Be living in unsanitary and unsafe living conditions (e.g., dirt, fleas, lice or fecal/urine smell).

An abuser may:

- Make humiliating remarks, or engage in name-calling and constant criticism.
- Isolate the victim by making it hard for the victim to see family or friends.
- Monitor phone calls, read mail, and or control where the victim goes.
- Make up impossible "rules" and punish the victim for breaking them.
- Destroy property, punch walls, and throw things.
- Threaten to harm the victim, pets or loved ones.
- Keep weapons and threaten to use them.
- Refuse to give the victim needed medications.
- Steal money or possessions from the victim.
- Say things like "he's impossible," "she's stubborn," "he's so stupid" or "she's clumsy."
- Act "charming" and "friendly" to family, friends and professionals, but treat the victim poorly.
- Refuse to let anyone talk to the victim alone.

Talking About Abuse

Checking In

Isolated individuals are more likely to become victims of abuse. Regular visits and questions about a person's life can prevent abuse or get the victim connected to help.

Be sure to have some time alone with the individual (out of both eye and earshot of other family members and caregivers.) Ask the individual some general questions about their life such as:

- What did you do today?
- Where did you go?
- Who did you see today?
- How do you like spending time with (name different people in the person's life)?

Asking About Suspected Abuse

Tell the person that you want to be sure he or she is not being hurt. If you suspect abuse and are required by law to report to adult protective services (APS) or another investigative agency, let the victim know you will need to make a report. Let them know APS or a professional may be able to help.

To ask about abuse, consider asking the following questions:

- Are you afraid of anyone?
- Has anyone made you do something you did not want to do?
- Has anyone said things to make you sad or upset?
- Have you been hit, kicked, pushed or hurt in any way?

If the person talks about being afraid or hurt, ask “How would you like me to help?”

Let the victim know how courageous it is to ask for help. Tell the victim the abuse is not his or her fault.

Persons Who Are Nonverbal

Some persons with cognitive disabilities are nonverbal. If the person cannot talk, look for other indicators that abuse may be occurring. Behavior changes, such as acting fearful or aggressively, may be signs of abuse. Also look for bruises or other marks on the person's body.

Sexual Abuse

Keep in mind that persons with cognitive disabilities are at higher risk for sexual assault than the general population. If you suspect sexual abuse has occurred, call law enforcement.

Helping a Victim Who Wants to Stay With an Abuser

Ending any relationship, even an abusive one, can be difficult. Many victims want to continue a relationship with the abuser (especially a spouse, partner or child). Often they love the abuser and hope the abuse will end. They may be afraid of what the abuser will do. Some victims face poverty and have no place to live if they leave. The reasons for staying with an abuser or returning to one are varied and complex. Victims who stay or return need continued support and information.

Some victims have guardians, who make decisions on their behalf. Guardians should be encouraged to get information from professionals and family members while making choices for the victim. If you suspect the guardian of abuse, contact adult protective services (APS).

Victims who chose to stay with their abusers may need to separate from the abuser at times. See the next pages for steps to take and things to bring if the person you are helping leaves the abuser for a period of time.

If the victim chooses to continue a relationship with the abuser, you can still do the following:

- Listen and offer support. Be a consistent presence in the victim's life.
- Assist the victim in being less isolated.
- Provide support and information about available services.
- Help pack a bag for you to keep in case the victim leaves.
- Have copies of important papers and prescriptions in a safe location.
- Work with the victim to create a plan to increase safety and/or get out of the house quickly.
- As a reminder, place large stickers on all phones with the numbers 9-1-1.
- If the victim is being stalked or harassed, consider security measures like a dog, motion lights, smoke alarms or security alarm systems. Some security companies or law enforcement agencies offer free systems or discounts for victims of abuse. (For people who are hard of hearing or deaf, flashing light alarms may be available.)

- **Free cell phones programmed to 911 are often available through the local domestic violence programs (see phone book or call the national hotline 1-800-799-7233 for more information).**
- **Persons who wander can be registered with the National Alzheimer's Association Safe Return program (1-800- 272-2900). This program is available for anyone with a cognitive limitation, not just persons with Alzheimer's disease. The person will receive a necklace/bracelet with the 800 number of the safe return program. If the person wanders or escapes from an abuser and is found, the 800 number can be called and a trusted person can be contacted for help.**
- **Contact your local domestic violence program or adult protective services (APS) for information about restraining or protective orders.**

Planning With a Victim Who Wants to Leave

Victims who want to leave have many decisions to make. To leave as safely as possible, planning can be crucial. Consider contacting your local domestic violence agency or adult protective services (APS) to get assistance in safety planning.

If you decide to do safety planning with a victim of abuse who has cognitive disabilities, consider the critical issues listed on this page. The following pages are a worksheet that can be used to help a victim through the initial and long-range safety planning process.

Start by thinking through the steps of how the person can leave their home. Will they need help from a friend, neighbor or family member? Taxis or public transportation may work for some victims, but may not be available in rural areas. Determine where the person can go and how he or she will get there.

Most victims who leave abusers benefit from ongoing emotional support. Participating in hobbies, exercising and yoga, listening to music or getting counseling are ways for victims to take care of themselves through this difficult time. Having someone who will listen is very helpful.

Where Will the Victim Live?

- Can the victim remain in his or her home safely?
- Is there an emergency shelter in the community?
- Can the victim live at the shelter independently or will assistance be required?
- Are friends or family an option?
- What about church groups or other organizations?
- Where does the victim want to live after the crisis?

Money

- Can the person get money for the short term?
- Consider contacting APS for information about financial programs to help.

Health

- What health related items (medications, glasses, walker, hearing aids, etc.) will the victim need to live without the abuser?
- Who is the victim's doctor? Consider telling the doctor or other health care provider what is happening, keeping in mind that in states with mandatory reporting social services might be called. Get help with health issues and caregiving arrangements.
- Is respite care available through social services?

Who Else is Effected by the Abuse?

- **Who can help with children, grandchildren or other persons living with the victim?**
- **Can a friend or family member care for pets or livestock if the person can't take them along? (If no, contact your local domestic violence program. There may be a safe haven for pets program in your community.)**
- **Does the victim have a guardian?**

Legal

- **Has the abuser been arrested? If yes, what support does the victim need?**
- **Does the victim want a protective or restraining order? A restraining or protective order is a legal document saying the abuser must not have contact with the victim. You can contact your local domestic abuse program or APS for help with restraining/protective orders.**
- **Are there immigration issues? You can contact a local domestic abuse program or the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services for more information.**

Planning to Leave

This worksheet may help you organize a safety plan if the victim decides to leave and asks for your help.

The victim is afraid of:

The victim wants:

The reasons given are:

Where Will the Victim Live?

Short-term plan:

Long-range plan:

Money

Short-term plan:

Long-range plan:

Health / Medications

Short-term plan:

Long-range plan:

Others Affected by Abuse

Short-term plan:

Long-range plan:

Legal

Short-term plan:

Long-range plan:

The Top 10 Things to Pack

You may be asked to help the victim pack. Take only what you can without putting yourself or the victim at risk.

Keep in mind that ending contact with an abuser or leaving a relationship can be the most dangerous time for victims. Many abusers want to maintain control over the victim or have ongoing access to the victim's money and other possessions. If the victim is getting help or leaving, the abuser may respond by becoming more threatening and/or dangerous.

If you have time to plan and pack, the top 10 things to pack are:

- **Identification (may need this to get help)**
- **Money**
- **Extra keys**
- **Copies of important documents, such as a birth certificate**
- **Medications/prescriptions**
- **Glasses, contacts, dentures, walkers, wheelchairs and hearing aids, communication boards and other related items**
- **Clothes and personal items**
- **Copy of protective or restraining order (if victim has one)**
- **Personal phone book or list of important phone numbers**
- **Items of sentimental value like photos or jewelry**

No one should scare or hurt you!

Some people may make you feel afraid, scared, uncomfortable, or hurt your feelings.

Some people may push or hit you.

Some people may touch you in private places that make you feel afraid or hurt.

Sometimes you do not know the person who scares you. But sometimes it is someone you really care about like your:

- ◆ Husband, wife or partner**
- ◆ Girlfriend or boyfriend**
- ◆ Son or daughter**
- ◆ Sister or brother**
- ◆ Someone else in your family or a good friend**
- ◆ Staff person**
- ◆ Someone else who helps you (like helping with cleaning, making meals, or bathing)**

If someone hurts me, or I am scared or afraid:

- ◆ I can yell “no” or “stop” very loudly.
- ◆ I can try to get away from the person who is hurting me.
- ◆ I can dial the police at 9 - 1 - 1.
- ◆ I can tell someone I like—someone I am not afraid of and feel comfortable talking about scary or uncomfortable things with.
- ◆ If the person I like and talk to cannot help, I can ask if they know someone else I can talk to.
- ◆ I can keep asking until I find help. It’s OK if I feel mad or sad if it takes time to find the right person to help.
- ◆ I can start to make a plan to feel safe.
- ◆ We can call (608) 255-0539 and buy a copy of “Safety Planning: How You Can Help.”

*This space for
photo of person
I can talk to*

Name _____

Phone _____

For further information or to order additional copies, contact:
National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL)
Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV)
307 South Paterson, Suite #1
Madison, WI 53703
Phone: 608 255-0539
Fax: 608 255-3560
E-mail: ncall@wcadv.org
Website: www.ncall.us

For permission to reprint any portion of this document, please contact NCALL/WCADV and include the following statement in your citation or publication: “Permission has been granted for this material to be used in the context as originally intended. This information is excerpted from “Safety Planning: How You Can Help, (2003).”

Copyright 2003 by the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life, Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence

The Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence

(WCADV) is a statewide membership organization of domestic abuse programs, formerly battered women, and other individuals who have joined together to speak with one voice against domestic abuse. As a statewide resource center on domestic violence, we offer such services as:

- Training and technical assistance to domestic abuse programs;
- A quarterly education journal;
- Forums for the involvement of battered women;
- Networking and support for programs for battered women and professionals in related fields;
- Training for professionals in legal, medical, social service, child welfare, housing, education, aging, and mental health fields and for employers throughout Wisconsin;
- Technical assistance for attorneys, legal advocates, prosecutors and public defenders, health workers, elder abuse, disability and child welfare professionals, and limited funds for victims to acquire direct legal assistance.

The National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life

(NCALL) is a project of WCADV. NCALL’s mission is to eliminate abuse of older adults and people with disabilities by family members and caregivers by challenging beliefs, policies, practices and systems that allow abuse to occur and to improve safety, services and support to victims through advocacy and education.

Acknowledgements

This safety planning tool was written by Bonnie Brandl in collaboration with a marvelous Colorado Task Force. Special thanks to Debora Beck-Massey, Joanne Otto, Paulette St. James, Angela Scott, Cheryl Siefert, and Carol Thompson.

Special thanks to the following experts for reviewing and commenting on various drafts of this planning tool: Wendie Abramson and SafePlace staff, Nancy Alterio, Wayne Engelbrecht and Working Partnerships staff, Ricker Hamilton, Michelle Hebert, Amy Judy, Tiffany Lodholz, Eleanor Lyons, Howard Mandeville, Libbey Meister, Tess Meuer, Holly Ramsey-Klawnsnik, Julie Rozwadowski, Deb Spangler, and Christine White.

Many thanks to Mary Lauby, WCADV Executive Director, and all of the WCADV staff for their continued support of NCALL and the work that we do. We would also like to thank David Michael Miller for his graphic arts skills.

Thanks to Janice Green, our grant administrator from the Office on Violence Against Women, who was a pleasure to work with on this grant project.