

Victim safety and support

This page is from APP, the official source of professional practice for policing.

First published 16 September 2015 Updated 14 October 2021

Written by College of Policing

35 mins read

Introduction

Above all else

The safety of domestic abuse victims depends on:

- clarity as to who is responsible for risk assessment and safety planning at all times
- accurate and dynamic risk assessment which is reviewed at each trigger point
- appropriate safety planning which is tailored to meet the needs of the victim and reviewed at each trigger point
- clear communication – there must above all else be clarity as to who is responsible for keeping the victim informed, from the point of initial handover by the first responder and throughout the life of the case

Trigger points for risk assessment and safety planning include:

- release of the suspect from custody by the police or the court
- the suspect being charged
- the lead up to a trial
- sentencing
- release from a prison sentence
- the imposition of a court order
- the expiry of a court order
- family proceedings, especially concerning child contact
- start of a new relationship by the victim

Free national helpline details

National Domestic Violence Helpline (Run by Refuge)

0808 2000 247

All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Helpline (Run by Welsh Women's Aid)

0808 80 10 800

See also [CPS Domestic Abuse Guidelines for Prosecutors, Annex E – National support organisations](#)

Communication with the victim

Keeping the victim informed

The [Victims' Code](#) sets out in detail the entitlements of victims of crime and the corresponding duties of the various agencies, including the police and witness care units (WCUs), throughout the entire criminal justice process. For the purposes of the Code, victims of domestic abuse are classed as 'victims of the most serious crime'. This means that they are entitled to an enhanced level of service.

In particular, police should inform domestic abuse victims within one working day of relevant developments including:

- arrest
- interview under caution
- release without charge
- release on police bail, including any conditions, and any change to or cancellation of the conditions (this applies both pre- and post-charge)
- decision to prosecute
- decision to give an out-of-court disposal
- police decision not to prosecute, giving reasons for the decision
- CPS decision not to prosecute, where the decision is made during a charging consultation
- date, time and location of first court hearing

The obligation under the [Victims' Code](#) is for notification within one working day, but officers and staff should seek to notify the victim as soon as possible. This is particularly important when a

defendant is released from custody, so that the victim has time to prepare and initiate any protective measures.

Women's Aid has developed the [Survivor's Charter](#), a statement of minimum standards that should be provided to victims by the justice system. These minimum standards, which all victims of domestic abuse can expect, include being respected, believed and informed.

Bail and breaches of bail

Case officers should inform domestic abuse victims of the police bail decision and any conditions prior to release of the suspect. However, once a decision has been made to bail a suspect, release must not be delayed by difficulties in contacting the victim or their representative.

To comply with the [Victims' Code](#), the [WCU](#), or the police if they are acting as the single point of contact, must notify the victim of the outcome of any bail hearings, including bail conditions and any changes to the conditions, within one working day of receiving the information from the court. The court should in turn be providing that information within one working day of making the decision. Where it is critical that the information is provided to the victim sooner, for example, where the defendant is released from custody by the court on a Friday afternoon, the investigating officer (IO) should make every effort to find out the result from the court, CPS or [independent domestic violence adviser \(IDVA\)](#) so that the victim can be advised of the outcome urgently and the risk assessment updated. In all matters affecting bail, police personnel should seek to notify the victim as soon as possible after any decision is made.

Officers should also inform the victim of action to take if the defendant breaks any of the bail conditions, whether police or court bail. They should explain to the victim exactly what the conditions mean and emphasise that responsibility for complying with bail conditions rests with the defendant. See [proactive policing of breaches](#) for further information on situations where the victim appears to actively encourage the breach.

A [proactive approach](#) to breaches of bail is key to building the trust and confidence of the victim. Reports of a breach should be followed up promptly and as a matter of priority to:

- protect the victim(s) as much as possible
- show both the victim and defendant that action is taken in response to a breach
- refute any argument by the defence that the police do not really believe there is a risk to the victim

Officers should update the victim if the defendant is arrested for breach of bail, if possible in advance of any hearing. If they decide not to place the defendant before the court for any reason, they should tell the victim and explain the decision to them.

For further information see [Checklist: Pre-release considerations](#).

Discontinuance

If a force decision is made not to prosecute the suspect or to discontinue proceedings, the [Victims' Code](#) specifies that a domestic abuse victim should be notified of this within one working day.

This is a police obligation where:

- the police make the decision to discontinue the case prior to charge
- the decision is made by the CPS during a pre-charge consultation with the police

Where the CPS discontinue proceedings after charge, it is their duty to notify the victim within the timescales.

Victim personal statement

Under the [Victims' Code](#), the police must offer a domestic abuse victim the opportunity to make a victim personal statement (VPS), even if they have not given any other witness statement. They should also ask the victim if they want the VPS read out or played in court, and if they would like to read it out themselves, although it is for the court to decide how the VPS should be presented.

The VPS is especially important in domestic abuse cases because it is the victim's opportunity to convey the context in which the offending has occurred and the impact it has had on the victim, how the perpetrator has made them feel and any long-term health or other consequences. It is also appropriate to include reference to any observed impact of the offending on children too young to make their own statement, for example, changes in behaviour such as experiencing nightmares or comments made by the child which are heard by the victim.

Note: Any impact of [controlling or coercive behaviour](#) should be specified in the main statement and submitted as evidence in chief.

If a VPS is made early on in the proceedings, it is useful to obtain a further VPS later in the case to provide an update on how the offending has affected the victim, as some consequences are not

immediately apparent and others have long-term impact.

The victim should be advised that the VPS is disclosable to the defence if the suspect is charged. If a Victim Personal Statement is made early on in the proceedings, it should be updated closer to the conclusion of proceedings, if necessary.

For further information see:

- [CPS Legal Guidance on Victim Personal Statements](#)

Victim's views on a restraining order

Officers should ask the victim for their views on obtaining a restraining order from the outset, preferably in their witness statement. Although they are usually imposed post conviction as part of sentencing, restraining orders can also be imposed on acquittal or where the prosecution is discontinued. For the court to properly consider imposing an order, especially a non-conviction order, it needs to know the views of the victim.

These views can also be useful for bail purposes, as the fact that a victim feels they need the protection of a restraining order can help to support an application to the court to impose bail conditions or remand a defendant in custody.

If the victim chooses not to engage later in the proceedings, or cannot be reached in preparation for the sentencing hearing, initial views expressed at the outset can still be put before the court.

A restraining order can regulate contact as well as prohibit it, for example, preventing the defendant from going to the victim's address but still allowing contact, or allowing continued cohabitation but protecting the victim from specific types of behaviour. This should be explained to the victim if they are concerned about child access or wish to stay in contact with the offender, so that they are aware a restraining order may, subject to the views of the court, still offer protection in those circumstances.

Conduct which would otherwise not be arrestable can amount to a breach of a restraining order, which carries a lengthy custodial sentence, so it can be an effective tool for the future protection of the victim.

Special measures

The police must take all reasonable steps to identify vulnerable or intimidated victims. Where such a victim is likely to be called as a witness in criminal proceedings and may be eligible for special measures, the police must explain the provisions included in special measures to the victim, and must record any views that the victim expresses about applying for them.

For further information on special measures see:

- [APP on investigation, working with victims and witnesses](#)
- [APP on prosecution and case management, special measures for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses](#)

See also:

- [CPS Legal Guidance on Special Measure](#)

Contact from prisoners

Victims and/or witnesses in criminal cases must be protected from interference or intimidation. Any victim/witness receiving any form of communication from their attacker in prison should contact the police officer dealing with their case.

Research into protecting victims from further abuse, intimidation and coercive behaviour from perpetrators in prison by blocking communication channels is currently ongoing. For more information see: [Stopping unwanted prisoner contact with victims of domestic abuse - College of Policing.](#)

Officers (or the victim) can request in the case file that prison staff prevent a perpetrator from contacting the victim by phone, letter or through visits and that they should withhold contact details. See also: [Post-arrest management of suspect and case file - College of Policing.](#)

The government hosts an online form to notify of unwanted contact from prisoners and request that it be stopped. It can be found here: [Unwanted Prisoner Contact.](#)

Withdrawal

When a victim indicates that they wish to withdraw their support for the prosecution process, a statement should be taken stating and describing any reasons for the withdrawal. This should be done by a domestic abuse specialist where possible. Withdrawal statements taken with care may still be used as evidence in current or future criminal proceedings or as evidence within the family court system.

Any withdrawal of support for a prosecution should prompt a revised risk assessment process and safety planning. The officer in the case should notify the CPS without delay if the victim indicates a wish to withdraw support for the prosecution.

Checklist: Taking comprehensive withdrawal statements

A withdrawal statement should contain the following information:

- confirmation of whether the original statement given to the police was true – if the original account has to be amended, an explanation for this should be included
- whether the victim has been put under pressure to withdraw
- nature of the original allegation (if not fully covered in a previous statement)
- victim's reasons for withdrawing the allegation
- with whom they have discussed the case – particularly anyone who has advised them (a solicitor, for example)
- whether any civil proceedings have been, or are likely to be, instigated
- impact on the victim's life and that of any children if the case continues

Withdrawal statements should be forwarded to the CPS and accompanied by a background report from the officer in the case which should include:

- the officer's views on the case, including any suspicions of witness intimidation or pressure, if not already included in the withdrawal statement
- details of any identified risks to the safety of the victim, children or any other person
- details of the support available to the victim (for example, access to an IDVA)
- how the victim might respond to being compelled to attend court
- the likely impact on the victim and any children, of proceeding or not proceeding with the case

See also [**CPS Domestic Abuse Guidelines section on Withdrawals and Witness summons.**](#)

Witness care units

See APP on prosecution and case management, [witness care units \(WCU\)](#) for general information on WCUs.

See the [Victims' Code](#) for information on the duties of WCUs to victims.

A witness care officer (WCO) is normally allocated as single point of contact for victims and witnesses in a particular case. Although they are always responsible for sending trial warnings and hearing outcomes, it may be appropriate in domestic abuse cases for the IO to remain the main point of contact for the victim because of the dynamics of risk in such cases, especially in higher-risk cases.

WCOs should be trained in basic risk assessment so that they can recognise danger signs and refer any concerns to the IO for an updated risk assessment. This is particularly important if the WCO is the single point of contact for the victim.

Independent domestic violence adviser, young people's violence adviser and independent sexual violence advisers

IDVAs work alongside the police and other criminal justice agencies, other statutory agencies and the voluntary sector, independently of any one agency, to provide support to victims of domestic abuse. The exact nature and arrangements for the IDVA service vary across the country, mainly depending on the source and degree of funding underpinning it. They are universally recognised to be an effective form of support for victims and to assist in achieving positive outcomes.

IDVAs work primarily with people at high risk of domestic abuse, in some areas only those referred to a [MARAC](#), to secure their safety and that of their children. They are often the main point of contact and work to assess level of risk, discuss options and develop safety plans, alongside the police. IDVAs should maintain current information about victims and witnesses in domestic abuse cases. They should also update police officers responsible for the case, and attend and contribute to MARACs, as required.

Arrangements should be made to ensure the safety of IDVAs during the course of their work. Police domestic abuse supervisors should ensure that they are promptly updated with any information relevant to risk to keep them as safe as possible when carrying out their role.

The CPS should be made aware of an IDVA's involvement in a case. IDVAs should be represented in the [specialist domestic violence courts \(SDVC\)](#), where they can provide additional information and updates from the victim where requested by the court or CPS.

Police domestic abuse supervisors should ensure that communication between IDVAs and police officers is maintained. IDVAs should be consulted over changes in police working practices and routinely included in briefings and update meetings.

Young people's violence advisers (YPVA) support victims aged under 18 and can support 16- and 17-year-old victims of domestic abuse in a similar way to how IDVAs support adult victims.

Independent sexual violence advisers (ISVAs) provide targeted professional support to victims of sexual violent crime. They may be based in sexual assault referral centres or specialist sexual violence support organisations. They ensure that safety is coordinated across all agencies and link in with essential services.

Risk management

Risk management is used here to refer to management of the responses adopted in cases where risk is identified, to minimise risk of further harm by the offender. Risk management in domestic abuse cases should include, where appropriate, a multi-agency approach to developing and implementing interventions and risk management plans, underpinned by effective [information sharing](#).

For further information see [understanding risk and vulnerability in context](#) for detailed information on risk identification and assessment.

Checklist: Risk management

Any risk management processes should:

- extend beyond the initial investigation, through the court process and beyond
- include a locally agreed risk management framework, for example, PLANBI – Proportionality, Legality, Accountability, Necessity and based on Best Intelligence/Information at the time
- provide officers and staff with possible actions which are proportionate to the risk and aimed at specific risk variables

- describe a tactical menu of intervention options for victims and offenders corresponding to each grading of risk – standard, medium and high
- be able to be adapted from a standard response to meet the needs of a serious and complex case, allowing for professional judgement and decisions to be made based on individual cases and problem solving in partnership
- remain dynamic so that significant changes may be reflected easily within assessments and management plans
- be subject to review at set intervals which are appropriate to the risk grading
- assist those in the criminal justice system to make decisions, for example, those which depend on information about the public interest and risk to victims and others
- be linked to multi-agency risk management processes which focus on high-risk cases, potential escalation and/or repeat incidents, for example, [MARACs](#)
- provide clarity on which internal unit and/or external agency takes the lead, or is responsible for certain actions as part of the risk management plan
- include the review of actions from the risk management plan as part of ongoing safety planning
- be communicated to the victim(s) to ensure that they are kept up to date throughout the process, where appropriate and achievable

Checklist: Reducing risk in identified cases

Officers should use the following measures to reduce risk in identified cases, as appropriate, by:

- implementing legal interventions (for example, arrest of suspect, use of restraining orders under the [Protection from Harassment Act 1997](#))
- enforcing breaches of bail conditions and court orders
- implementing fast response systems in line with local police force policy
- investigating instances of witness intimidation promptly and thoroughly
- assisting the victim to improve security at their home, see [crime prevention strategies](#)
- arranging for the victim to be taken to a place of safety, where appropriate
- being alert to the possibility that the perpetrator has reported the victim as missing and/or mentally ill so that the police will find the victim for them – see [associated investigations, missing persons](#)
- issuing [DVPNs](#) and applying for [DVPOs](#)
- applying for specialist civil orders, for example, [violent offender orders](#), sexual harm prevention orders or sexual harm orders

- assisting victims to develop and implement their [safety plans](#)
- encouraging victims to access support
- making [appropriate referrals to support agencies](#)
- referring identified high-risk cases, potential escalation and/or repeat incidents to a [MARAC](#) or local equivalent
- linking into prison monitoring and intelligence processes when a perpetrator is in prison, whether on remand or serving a sentence
- ensuring that both a victim safety plan and a perpetrator management plan are established prior to the offender's release
- liaising with established multi-agency perpetrator management processes where applicable, for example, [multi-agency public protection arrangements](#) (MAPPA) or integrated offender management (IOM)
- ensuring that property exchange or recovery can occur safely, see [assisting with the recovery of property](#)

Domestic abuse frequently continues post separation and victims and their children are often at more risk of further harm or homicide during and post separation.

Referral to MARAC

Where a victim of domestic abuse is identified as being at high risk of harm, potential escalation and/or repeat incidents, they should be referred to [MARAC](#). The one-off meeting combines up-to-date risk information with an assessment of the victim's needs. The MARAC process establishes whether the offender poses a significant risk to any particular individual or to the general community and links the victim's needs to the provision of appropriate services for the victim, children and perpetrator.

A key product from the MARAC process is the construction and implementation of a multi-agency risk management plan. The risk management plan should provide professional support to all those at risk, reducing risk of harm and repeat victimisation. MARACs should also improve agency accountability and support for staff involved in high-risk cases.

If a victim is being re-homed in another force area, the new police force should be notified alongside the MARAC process.

Domestic violence disclosure scheme

See management of information, [domestic violence disclosure scheme \(Clare's Law\)](#) for more detailed information.

The domestic violence disclosure scheme (DVDS), also known as Clare's Law, was introduced to increase protection for domestic abuse victims. It establishes recognised procedures for disclosing information to enable new or existing partners of previously violent individuals to make informed choices about how and whether they take forward that relationship.

The scheme contributes to risk management by enabling victims to find out from an early stage about the potential for risk from prospective or new partners. This allows the victim to:

- make decisions about the nature and extent of the relationship
- put in place protective measures and access support if the relationship is to continue

It also enables the police to analyse patterns of requests under the scheme. This makes it possible for them to identify individuals who may be as yet unknown to the police but are attracting a volume of requests under the right to ask entry route which may indicate a cause for concern. It may also make it easier for them to identify serial perpetrators.

Perpetrator management as a risk reducing measure

Forces should ensure they have a system to actively manage and monitor known serial perpetrators of domestic abuse and other perpetrators with a history of domestic abuse. Whether this is implemented by domestic abuse specialists, through neighbourhood or local policing teams, or through multi-agency arrangements, it should be regularly reviewed at senior officer level.

Some forces have domestic abuse perpetrator specialists. These act as a single point of contact for a perpetrator, similar to an offender manager, and work with the person to divert and disrupt their behaviour. Diversionary measures might involve assistance to get a job or housing, for example, where the person keeps returning to the victim's address because they are homeless. Disruption tactics could involve regular police checks, issuing a [DVPN](#)/applying for a [DVPO](#) or [ANPR](#) monitoring.

Existing perpetrator management processes should be utilised, for example, IOM and [MAPPA](#). A management plan should be established when a domestic abuse perpetrator is due for release from prison, alongside a review of the victim's safety plan.

See also domestic abuse and the intelligence process, [using intelligence to target perpetrators](#).

For further information see:

- Tactical menu of options available via [College Learn](#), a learning tool restricted to registered users
- [Principles for the management of serial and potentially dangerous perpetrators of domestic abuse and stalking](#)

Safety planning

Crime prevention strategies

Improving home security

Crime prevention officers (or their local equivalent) should be made available to victims of domestic abuse to provide advice on home security. Where victims of domestic abuse choose to remain in their home, the police should support them to do so and assist in making them safe. Target-hardening measures and improvements in home security, including smoke alarms, burglar alarms and new lighting, can reassure victims and their families and help to protect them from further abuse. Consideration should be given to using alarm systems, mobile telephones (some of which have a facility to record and/or transmit live to the police control room) and CCTV to provide the victim with further safety measures and reassurance. Such devices may also provide evidence to support further police action.

A referral to the fire service can be useful if it is considered that there is a risk of arson. A fire safety survey checks safety in the home and assesses escape routes.

Neighbourhood and police safety schemes

Cocoon watch schemes request the help and support of neighbours, family and relevant agencies in protecting the victim by contacting the police immediately if further incidents occur. A cocoon watch identifying the victim is only implemented with the informed consent of the victim. It is possible to have limited cocoon watch without consent where the victim is not named, for example,

an awareness-raising leaflet drop in the neighbourhood which states that domestic abuse is taking place in the area. In some cases, and in consultation with the victim, it may be appropriate to make the suspect aware of the action. Cocoon watch should not be used where there is any reason to suspect that neighbours and/or family may be involved in the abuse, or if the victim may feel more at risk by neighbours being informed, for example, revealing the sexual orientation of a victim could place them at risk of homophobic abuse.

Police watch schemes provide a visible police presence to both the victim and the suspect. It involves regular police patrols within the vicinity of reported incidents. In some situations police officers may visit to check on the safety of the victim.

The role of neighbourhood policing teams

The policing team responsible for dealing with domestic abuse investigations should keep neighbourhood policing teams (NPT), or equivalent local policing team, routinely informed of domestic abuse offenders and high-risk cases in their particular geographic area. NPTs can assist in the risk management of individual offenders (for example, through the enforcement of civil orders, through police watch activities, or where appropriate, by conducting unannounced curfew checks on perpetrators who do not live with their victims). Team members can be key sources of information provided by, or obtained from, the community.

The information provided can assist in ongoing risk identification processes and in longer-term risk management. NPTs can also use community information to identify domestic abuse offenders and those who present a current and significant risk to others. NPTs should be briefed about cases that have been [referred to a MARAC](#) and are located within their geographic area. Where necessary, the teams should be given relevant information enabling them to contribute to the MARAC action plan.

Relevant information which could be made available to NPTs, for example, in daily tasking meetings, includes:

- known perpetrators and victims in the local area
- any known locations for domestic abuse offending
- children associated with households where domestic abuse is known to occur – this includes children not normally resident there but who visit or stay over on a regular basis
- newly imposed non-molestation and restraining orders, DVPNs and DVPOs and other civil orders

- pending or recent release of a perpetrator on licence
- current victim safety plans

Any risk identification and assessment information acquired by team members should be dealt with according to [APP on information management](#). Some domestic abuse-related issues may require the preparation of a neighbourhood problem-solving plan, for example, if minority communities are identified as under-reporting domestic abuse.

Where appropriate, NPTs should work with domestic abuse specialist officers and supervisors to assist with information gathering, enforcement issues, and developing risk action plans.

Where NPT officers are asked to visit victims, they should be fully briefed on the situation and purpose of the visit.

Aggregated information relating to the prevalence of reporting of domestic abuse cases and the number of identified high-risk cases should also be considered for inclusion in neighbourhood profiles. The purpose of this profile is to record information about the neighbourhood and to assist the community engagement and collaborative process. Information relating to specific cases will not, however, be appropriate to include in any publicly available document.

Sanctuary schemes

The [Secured by Design \(SBD\)](#) Sanctuary Scheme is a victim-centred initiative developed by the police and the fire and rescue service. The scheme should form part of the package of safeguarding interventions available to multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) for high-risk victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

It offers high-risk victims/survivors of domestic abuse, who no longer live with the perpetrator, the choice to stay safely in their own homes. This maintains social roots and stability for their children.

This is achieved by increasing the security on all easily accessible doors and windows to delay entry by the perpetrator. A room in the home is converted into a secure and safe room (SBD sanctuary room) including fire safety measures. It provides a safe place for the family to wait until the emergency services arrive.

The minimum technical specifications for the installation of a SBD Sanctuary safe room are provided in the SBD Sanctuary Scheme Installation Manual. This also includes associated security and fire safety measures.

The scheme is designed to meet the needs and circumstances of the individuals involved and should be fully integrated with local risk management processes. It is not appropriate or safe in all circumstances and is generally used in identified high-risk domestic abuse cases. For every referral made, a full risk assessment should be carried out by the police crime reduction unit and domestic abuse specialist officer. Partner agencies should be consulted where appropriate.

Addresses with sanctuary schemes installed should be clearly flagged on the IT systems of partner agencies, so that in the event of an emergency telephone call, it is clear that an immediate response will be necessary.

For further information, see [Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government \(2010\) Sanctuary Schemes for Households at Risk of Domestic Violence: Practice Guide for Agencies Developing and Delivering Sanctuary Schemes.](#)

Technology

Developments in technology make new safety measures available on an evolving basis.

Personal safety devices/handsets use the latest mobile phone technologies to prioritise emergency calls from victims. Special handsets/devices, such as a TecSOS phone or equivalent, can be issued to victims as part of safety planning. They are linked to a monitoring service or direct to the police. The system recognises the individual device and can provide associated victim details, even from a silent call. GPS technology identifies the location of the device. The device also usually has a facility to record the call and any nearby activity for evidential purposes.

Proximity tagging of perpetrators involves fitting the perpetrator with a device that alerts the victim and police if the wearer comes within a certain distance of the victim and/or a defined area.

Developing safety plans

Safety planning is a process by which the victim may consult appropriate agencies to discuss increasing personal safety and the safety of any children. It should form part of a partnership approach between professionals, victims and children and may include an assessment of the level of risk, developing a crisis plan and a plan for the future, both short and longer term.

The police have a role in helping to develop and support safety plans as part of their risk management processes. In general, the victim, with assistance from an [IDVA](#) or other independent advocacy service, should carry out the safety planning, with officers being able to contribute to the process by implementing safety measures as part of a risk management plan or action plan. It should be carried out in consultation with other agencies, for example, fire service, housing, children's services.

Supervisors should ensure that during the safety planning process, officers consider and facilitate the use of traditional crime prevention and target-hardening measures (locks, home security, mobile telephones and alarms) and police watch schemes. Domestic abuse specialist officers should act as police advisers to victims developing safety plans and, wherever possible, should do so in partnership with IDVAs or voluntary sector support groups. For further information on crime prevention see [crime prevention strategies](#). Officers may need to consider taking steps to ensure firearms licences are revoked or not granted to perpetrators, in accordance with [APP on Gun Crime](#).

Where applicable, the most effective way of improving the victim's safety is for their location not to be known to the suspect. This is particularly important if the victim is residing at a refuge or in temporary accommodation. If there is a risk that the address may be disclosed in unrelated proceedings, for example, in civil recovery proceedings or benefits applications, this should be discussed as part of safety planning as it may be possible for a letter or statement to be provided highlighting this risk for the purposes of those proceedings.

Safety plans should use existing resources and protective factors to establish measures to protect victims and any children and reduce risk. Safety planning provides reassurance to victims and their children, while increasing their awareness of the specific risks associated with domestic abuse. The plan should focus on the individual victim's and children's needs and circumstances, with their safety and protection a priority at every stage.

Many victims will already have safety planning measures in place. These plans can often be supported and developed by professional assistance. Voluntary sector groups and IDVAs have established expertise in carrying out safety planning with victims and others affected by domestic abuse. Police officers should be available to advise on reducing risk and on additional safety measures that can be put in place by the victim, police and others (for example, housing providers). It is essential to build on the safety measures developed by the victim, rather than insist on

dramatic changes or make additional demands upon them.

For further information see:

- [Referral to MARAC](#)
- [CPS Domestic Abuse Guidelines for Prosecutors Annex E](#)

Checklist: Principles of safety planning

Safety planning should be formulated to:

- assist in reducing the risk of further harm
- reflect and supply information to any risk identification and assessment processes
- build on existing coping strategies
- avoid frustrating existing safety mechanisms, for example, advice to block the perpetrator's messages would not be appropriate where the victim uses them to know when the perpetrator is angry and coming to their home so that they can prepare and make themselves safe
- reinforce the fact that abuse and violence may recur, and increase knowledge of the levels of danger the victim and children may face
- encourage victims and children to increase their own safety
- assist victims to focus on their own needs as opposed to the needs of the offender or organisations providing services
- give victims and children a wider range of options, including staying in their own home
- be kept confidential from the offender
- be part of a safety and protection process rather than a single occurrence
- be appropriate for all domestic abuse victims irrespective of their level of contact with the offender, eg, whether they are separated or living with the suspect
- involve other agencies or third parties where appropriate and safe to do so, for example, housing services or employers

Safety plans need to remain dynamic and should have review periods built into them to coincide with potential [trigger points](#).

Domestic abuse specialist officers should provide practical advice to victims as an integral part of any safety planning process. In particular, if weapons have been used in the past, it may be possible to move them out of easy reach or to make them less dangerous.

Officers should remind victims that computers (in particular, internet logs), telephone bills and mobile telephones keep a record of the people or organisations contacted. This means that contact with support agencies may need to be erased or otherwise made safe so that the offender does not see them.

For further information see:

- [Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#)
- The National Stalking Helpline: 0800 802 0300

Satnavs and other GPS devices

Victims should be made aware that satellite navigation systems (satnavs) can present a particular risk to them, especially those planning to leave their abuser. If the satnav history is not wiped, it can reveal to the perpetrator any journeys to a prospective new home or other connections to the new life that the victim is planning. For those staying with the abuser, it allows the perpetrator to monitor the victim's movements and alert them to any 'unauthorised' journeys.

Many smartphones and other mobile devices have location services which can be dangerous for victims. For example, if the mobile device is linked to social media sites, those sites can automatically update to publicly display current location. They may also allow the perpetrator to monitor the victim's movements through the use of spyware.

Practical safety methods may include:

- changing locks on doors and windows
- replacing wooden with steel doors
- security systems
- sanctuary schemes, where in operation (including additional locks, door chains, spyholes, window bars, alarms, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, outside lighting and electronic sensors)
- issuing a [personal safety device/handset](#)
- proximity tags

Some police forces have home and/or personal alarm systems with direct connections to the emergency services. These devices usually provide recorded evidence.

Checklist: Developing safety plans with victims

Domestic abuse officers advising victims and managing safety provisions in plans should:

- establish how the victim can be contacted safely and ensure this information is passed to all officers in contact with the victim
- establish the location of the offender, if separated from the victim
- obtain the victim's views about the level of risk
- determine methods to facilitate any existing child contact arrangements safely
- ensure that the victim has the means to summon help in an emergency (this may include plans to summon help on their behalf when the offender is present) – consider issuing a [personal safety device/handset](#)
- identify where a victim might go if they have to leave quickly and what they will take with them
- encourage victims to report all incidents to the police or other organisations that will record the incident and maintain accurate and detailed records – including photographic evidence of injuries, body maps and details of the psychological effect of the abuse
- refer the victim to organisations that provide longer-term support and advice
- refer the case and details of the safety plan to a MARAC in cases identified as high risk, potential escalation and/or repeat incidents
- encourage the victim to seek professional advice about legal and financial matters and child contact
- inform victims of criminal or civil law provisions which may be applicable, for example, restraining or non-molestation orders ? the [National Centre for Domestic Violence](#) can assist with obtaining [civil orders](#), as can other organisations
- make victims aware of the potential pitfalls of social media use, for example, identifying current location through status updates/geo-location systems on smartphones which automatically update to publicly display current location, or the risk of the account being hacked if the perpetrator is aware of the victim's passwords
- consider the possibility of spyware on the victim's computer or smartphone
- flag the risks associated with satnav use
- consider that victims with insecure immigration status, from minority ethnic communities, victims with disabilities or from socially isolated communities may fear contact with the police – such individuals or groups may have additional barriers that need to be overcome in safety plans
- involve the victim's workplace in the safety planning process where appropriate and safe to do so – an understanding employer who allows the victim time to prepare their exit strategy is an

extremely valuable form of support

- involve schools and nurseries in safety planning

Young people aged 16 or 17 years old may be victims of intimate partner abuse involving their peers. This will require additional considerations, for example, if they both attend the same school any safety planning will need to take that into account. In such circumstances, the involvement of the school or college in developing workable protective measures is essential.

The victim may wish to consider applying for a [civil order](#) to keep the offender away and also changing their routine, for example, times and travel arrangements to work and shopping. These measures may make it more difficult for the offender to follow the victim. It may be appropriate for victims to speak to their employers to maximise their safety at work. The victim may need to inform child minders, nurseries and schools of the situation and give strict instructions about who is permitted to pick the children up and what action to take if attempts are made to remove them without permission.

Checklist: Safety planning and children

Domestic abuse officers should encourage victims to:

- include children in the safety planning process – the primary aim of any safety plan for children is to escape from dangerous situations and avoid injury
- rehearse escape plans with children
- identify a safe place or person for children to go to if their parent is being attacked, preferably somewhere where it would be possible for them to contact the police
- ensure that children know how to contact the police and provide them with details of useful telephone numbers to use, if it is safe to do so
- check that any children are not the subject of abuse themselves
- involve schools and nurseries in safety planning. See: [Operation Encompass](#)

Witnessing domestic abuse can be very damaging to children and such incidents should be reported to the local authority's children's department. Where children have repeatedly witnessed domestic abuse, officers may need to encourage the local children's department to reassess their needs. Older children should be signposted to specialist domestic abuse services, including [YPVAs](#)

For information on the harmful effects of domestic abuse on children, see [child abuse investigations](#).

Example safety plans

The following safety plans are included as examples and provide useful information for police officers in terms of practical safety advice for victims of domestic abuse.

If you are staying with your abuser

If you are staying with your abuser:

- seek professional advice and support from local support and outreach organisations, domestic abuse services and helplines
- consider how agencies can make contact safely, for example, through a work number or at a friend's address
- consider where you can quickly and easily use a telephone and who are safe people to contact – memorise a list of numbers for use in an emergency, such as friends, police, support organisations
- consider a signal (such as a codeword) with children, family, neighbours, friends or colleagues which will alert them to call the police if help is needed
- think through escape routes in advance, avoiding rooms with no exit or with weapons in (for example, bathroom or kitchen) where possible
- try to put by some money for fares and other expenses
- seek and obtain medical help for any injuries ensuring that they are recorded and if possible photographed ? these may be used at a later date to support court cases or rehousing applications
- consider changing online passwords regularly, especially for social networking accounts – this may not be appropriate where the perpetrator regularly accesses your accounts as part of coercive control as it may escalate risk
- avoid the use of satnavs and be aware that the perpetrator may monitor your movements by checking the satnav history if not wiped

If you are planning to leave

If you are planning to leave:

- take care over whom to trust with any plans that you are making to leave
- avoid satnav use when travelling to a prospective new home or destination and always wipe the history if you do – your abuser may check it to see where you have been and find out what you are planning
- consider whether or not a **civil order** is a viable option – seek legal advice
- make an extra set of keys for home and/or car and store them somewhere safe
- make up a bag with spare clothes, telephone numbers, keys, money and keep it safe so you can take it quickly, or keep it with a trusted friend
- have the following available in case you have to leave quickly:
 - important papers such as birth certificates, social security cards, driving licence, divorce papers, lease or mortgage papers, passports, insurance information, school and medical records, welfare and immigration documents, court documents
 - credit cards, bank account number
 - online passwords, especially for banking and social media
 - some money
 - extra sets of keys – for car, house and work
 - medications and prescriptions, including those for children
 - telephone numbers and addresses for family, friends, doctors, lawyers and community agencies
 - clothing and comfort items for you and the children
 - photographs and other items of sentimental value such as jewellery
- take identification that might help others to protect you from the abuser, such as a recent photo of the abuser and their car details
- talk to children about the possibility of leaving and try to take all the children, whatever long-term arrangements might be
- avoid making any unusual changes to routine which may alert your abuser that something is going on

If you are living without your abuser after separation

If you are living without your abuser after separation (in your own home or after moving):

- seek expert legal advice on child contact and residence applications, and about options for [civil orders](#)
- change telephone numbers to ex-directory, screen calls and pre-programme emergency numbers into the telephone
- change all online passwords, especially for social networking accounts, and check privacy settings on social media sites
- take your satnav with you and wipe the history of any you are leaving behind
- change the locks and install a security system, smoke alarms and an outside lighting system
- notify neighbours, employers and schools about any injunction, and ask them to call the police immediately if they see the abuser nearby
- make sure that schools and those who care for your children know who has authorisation to collect them
- employ safety measures before, during and after contact visits with children
- consider changing children's schools, work patterns – hours and route taken – and the route taken to transport the children to school
- avoid banks, shops, and other places frequented when living with the abuser
- make up a codeword for family, colleagues, teachers or friends, so that they know when to call the police for help
- keep copies of all relevant paperwork (including civil injunctions) and make written records of any further incidents

Tags

Domestic abuse Victim care