

Employer Guide to Safety Planning

Safety plans are an important tool to help reduce a survivor's risk of harm from an abusive individual at home, in the workplace, and in the community. This guide provides information on different types of safety plans with a focus on those aspects related to the workplace.

Background

In the United States, 52.2 million women and 27.6 million men will experience sexual violence; 19.1 million women and 6.4 million men will be stalked; and 43.6 million women and 37.3 million men will experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime.ⁱ Whether domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual harassment, or stalking, these forms of violence touch every workplace. Abusive actions taken by harm-doers not only affect the safety and ability of those who experience violence to thrive at work, but their actions also threaten the workplace as a whole. How workplaces respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and harassment (DVSASH) can shape the options those experiencing violence have to remain safe at work and can contribute to whether the workplace has an effective culture of prevention, safety, and accountability.

How Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Stalking, and Harassment Impacts Workers and the Workplace

The violent actions of harm-doers – whether at home or in the workplace – disrupt and impair an individual's ability to pursue and maintain employment. In addition to the impacts of trauma, between 77 and 88 percent of individuals experiencing violence report that their partners intentionally disrupted their ability to work.ⁱⁱ Research has found that harm-doers frequently make harassing phone calls, show up at work, prevent their target from getting to work on time or cause them to leave early, and keep them up all night so they would struggle to perform their job duties the next day.ⁱⁱⁱ

Employees experiencing violence or trauma may exhibit the following signs:

- Physical injury or chronic illnesses
- Increased absenteeism
- Inability to concentrate
- Increase in personal calls, texts, or visits
- Unwillingness to report or cooperate with an investigation
- Appearing agitated, angry, sad, or hypervigilant
- Other general changes in behavior or work performance

See “[Is it Domestic or Sexual Violence: Recognizing the Potential Signs](#)” for more information.

What is a Safety Plan?

Individuals experiencing DVSASH are often encouraged to create a (comprehensive) **safety plan**. A safety plan is a survivor-led tool that outlines a set of actions that can help lower their risk of experiencing violence. Safety plans are specific to an individual and consider their safety needs at home, in the community, and in the workplace.

Safety plans, best developed with a trained victim advocate, cover safety in the home including options for alternative housing arrangements and items to have readily available in case of a need to quickly vacate the home; how to safely commute to school and/or work; who can serve as an emergency contact; protecting access to email, phone, and online accounts; keeping children safe; and strategies to promote emotional health.



The National Hotline offers an interactive online tool that guides individuals through developing a comprehensive safety plan at www.thehotline.org/plan-for-safety/create-a-safety-plan

Safety Plans in the Workplace

While comprehensive safety plans include some basic safety measures for the workplace, employers have the unique ability to address one's safety needs when at work. To help promote an employee's safety at work,

workplaces should work with the impacted employee to better understand what they need to be safe and how the workplace can support their safety.

There are generally two types of safety plans in the context of the workplace – one specific to the employee experiencing violence (personal safety plan) and one focused on the overall workplace (workplace safety plan). Both plans are designed to reduce the chance that a harm-doer will be able to harass or harm the employee at work.

Workplace Personal Safety Plan

A workplace personal safety plan should reflect an individual's safety plan (if developed) and serve as an extension to promote the safety of an employee who is experiencing violence and harassment while working – including during one's commute. If an employee does not have a safety plan, employers should encourage them to seek the support of a victim advocate to develop a strategy and provide a list of local programs. It is important to look at potential risks that may be present during one's commute to and from work, childcare arrangements (if parenting), and the physical workspace itself. When exploring actions that can be taken at the workplace, workplaces should center the employee's agency, voice, and choice when developing a safety planning – these forms of violence are about power and control and workplaces should take great care to minimize the risk of replicating those dynamics when supporting an employee.

Based on the needs shared by the employee, explore whether the following actions could help prevent a violent incident from occurring, reduce the frequency of harassment at work, or help them feel safer in the workplace.

Personal Safety Plans vs. Workplace Safety Plans: At a Glance

	Safety Plan	Workplace Personal Safety Plan	Workplace Safety Plan
Outlines actions to increase an individual's physical and psychological safety at home, in the community, and in the workplaces	✓	✗	✗

Outlines actions the employer will take to increase an employee's physical and psychological safety while working	✓	✓	✗
Outlines actions the employer will take to keep the workplace and all workers safe from threats of domestic violence, sexual violence and harassment, and stalking	✗	✗	✓
Created in partnership with a trained victim advocate	✓	✗	✗
Created in partnership with employer	✗	✓	✓

Examples of changes to consider could include:

- Establishing clear communication procedures for the employee to report a threat at work.
- Changing their work phone number or extension.
- Screening their calls to reduce harassment, or providing them with a phone that has caller identification and having another employee record the voice mail greeting.
- Keeping their home address and telephone confidential and removing them from online and phone directories.
- Changing their shift to disrupt stalking.
- Relocating the employee to another workstation away from windows and doors, or away from the place the perpetrator expects to find her/him.
- Arranging for an escort to and from the employee's vehicle or public transit at the beginning and end of each work day/shift.
- Providing the employee with a parking spot near the building entrance to increase their sense of security.

- Having a secured entrance.
- Providing the harm-doer's photo or physical description to reception, security, and/or staff working nearby to prohibit them from accessing the site and to notify the employee when they are present.
- Obtaining an emergency contact telephone number, other than the perpetrator's, in case the employee is late or absent from work
- Requesting a restraining or stay away order against the harm-doer specific to accessing the workplace.

Any actions taken should be done in accordance with the employee's wishes. Well intentioned actions may put the survivor at greater risk. Individuals experiencing violence and harassment know what they need to be safe. Employers should also strive to maintain the privacy of the employee experiencing violence and harassment and only share what information is essential. This sharing should be done with the knowledge of the impacted employee.

Workplace Safety Plan

A workplace safety plan sets out specific actions that an employer will take to help keep the workplace and all employees safe from the threats of domestic violence, sexual violence and harassment, and stalking. These plans should be in place regardless of whether there is a current threat and periodically updated to ensure its applicability.^{iv}

Workplace safety plans will vary depend on factors including the size, type, and location of the workplace; if the work is done remotely or offsite; the number of employees and who regularly has access to the workplace; and whether you are aware of any threats made against an employee.

A workplace safety plan may include:

- Making emergency phone numbers readily accessible so they can be retrieved at a moment's notice.
- Ensuring the workplace is well-lit and secure, both inside and out.
- Providing regular trainings to all employees on how to reach out to other employees in crisis and how to report safety concerns or threats.

- Specifying when it would be necessary to contact security and/or the police and when to lock down the workplace.
- Creating code words and how to spread the word (such as via email, text, or other form of group communications) so employees can discreetly alert others to potential danger.
- Providing employees with panic buttons and/or personal alarms, particularly if they work in isolation or have a high exposure to risk.
- Creating an interdisciplinary team comprised of human resources, security, and employees at various positions in the organization to work with external specialists such as anti-violence organizations, victim-service agencies, or threat assessment professionals to develop effective, trauma-informed and survivor-centered policies, practices and employee education programs.
- Providing care and supportive services to all employees after an incident that occurs in the workplace.

Conclusion

Employers are not expected to, and should not, take on the role of an advocate or social worker to develop a comprehensive safety plan for those who are experiencing violence or harassment. Employers should, however, take the steps necessary to support the safety and well-being of their employees who are experiencing violence and harassment within the workplace through reasonable modifications to the physical workplace and workplace practices and basic security measures. Workplaces should consider not only the personal safety of the individual, but the workplace as a whole. Individuals experiencing violence and harassment know best what they need to be safe and thrive at work. Collaborating with survivors to develop solutions will create a safer and more resilient workplace for all.

For More Support

Contact the National Resource Center for Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence at <https://www.workplacesrespond.org> for more information, technical assistance, and training.

Additional Resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline - <https://www.thehotline.org/>

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) – <https://www.rainn.org/>
Victim Connect – <https://www.victimconnect.org>

Workplaces Respond provides technical assistance to workplace stakeholders seeking to better prevent and respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and harassment impacting the workplace. Scan this QR code to access the Resource Center.



This project is supported by Grant No. 15JOVW-22-GK-04852-NRCW awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed herein or in any materials herein, are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

© 2024 Futures Without Violence. All rights reserved. This product provides only general information; it does not constitute or supplant legal advice or consist of the practice of law and should not be used or relied upon as such. Legal advice is dependent upon the specific circumstances of each situation and upon the law in specific jurisdictions. Do not rely on legal information without consulting an attorney licensed to practice law in your jurisdiction.

ⁱ Breiding, M.J., Chen J., & Black, M.C. (2014). Intimate Partner Violence in the United States — 2010. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

ⁱⁱ Hess, C., & Del Rosario, A. (2018). Dreams Deferred: A Survey on the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Survivors' Education, Careers, and Economic Security (p. 53). Institute for Women's Policy Research. https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/C475_IWPR-Report-Dreams-Deferred.pdf; FreeFrom. (2020). Survivors Know Best: How to Disrupt Intimate Partner Violence During COVID-19 and Beyond. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56a24df4d8af10a5072bed7c/t/5f358b263ca8db1d891a3fc9/1597344678710/Survivors+Know+Best+Report.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ridley, E., Rioux, J., Lim, K. C., Mason, D., Houghton, K. F., Luppi, F., & Melody, T. (2005). Domestic Violence Survivors At Work: How Perpetrators Impact Employment. Main Department of Labor & Family Crisis Services. https://www1.maine.gov/labor/labor_stats/publications/dvreports/survivorstudy.pdf.

^{iv} As of 2022, nine states have laws that prohibit employers of a certain size or larger from discriminating against employees who are survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and/or stalking (each law varies in coverage). Several of these laws, including in California and Illinois, require employers to also provide reasonable accommodations to employees who are survivors to address safety concerns related to their victimization including a transfer, reassignment, modified schedule or implementation of a safety procedure and assistance in documenting domestic, sexual, or gender-based violence that takes place in the workplace or in work related settings.

The content of this guide was drawn from the following resources:

Legal Momentum. 2005. Know Your Rights: Safety Planning in the Workplace: Protecting Yourself and Your Job. Washington, DC. <https://wscadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Workplace-Safety-Planning.pdf>

Workers' Compensation Board of British Columbia. 2015. Addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace: A Handbook for Employers. Vancouver, B.C.

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/resources/health-safety/books-guides/addressing-domestic-violence-in-the-workplace-a-handbook-for-employers?lang=en>

Australian Human Rights Commission. 2012. Domestic Violence and the Workplace: Employee, Employer and Union Resources. Sydney, Australia.

https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/Annex%20B%20safety_planning.pdf