**Safety planning with children**

Physical and emotional safety is one of the biggest considerations both during and after experiencing domestic abuse. When you and your child have not had the consistent experience of feeling physically or emotionally safe, secure and protected, survival and coping skills can be developed in order to increase feelings of safety and control.

**Safety planning with children can be a way to increase both their and your feelings of safety and empowerment.**

**It is essential for children to know that the abuse is not their fault and that it is not their responsibility to stop it.**

There are many different ways safety planning and exploring safety can be introduced to children, it is also dependent on your individual circumstances. Please contact us if you would like to talk about ways that may work for your family.

* Go through a plan with them, consider safe places in the home, routes out of the home and somewhere they can go outside of the home, it can be helpful to think about this for different times of day. (Ideas suggested below).
* You can think about a code word or signal, that means a certain action needs to be taken or a way of raising the alarm to neighbours or family.
* Avoid going to where your children are during an incident of domestic abuse, this could increase their risk.
* Give your children’s school details - they may need to support your child and keep them safe e.g. copy of a court order, photograph of the abuser.
* Speak to your child’s school about confidentiality, not giving your address or phone number to anyone, not allowing your child to go with anyone without talking to you first.
* Always tell children to stay out of the abuse, and reassure them it is not their responsibility to stop it.
* Communicate with your children about what is happening, reassure their ability to talk about their feelings and what is happening, help them think about the adults they have in their life that they trust and can share worries and feelings with.
* It is important not to tell children they are like the person perpetrating the abuse, or speak hurtfully about that person in front of the child, stick to labelling their behaviour as unsafe.
* Talk about things your child can do when they feel unsafe; I can do big deep breaths, I can listen to my favourite music, I can cuddle and talk to my teddy, I can think about something or someone that makes me feel safe, I can draw or journal. It may be helpful to consider putting a coping box or bag together with your child with some of their favourite things.



I can use my safety plan, a safety plan includes some things I can do when the adults in my home are behaving in a way that is scary and unsafe. It is ok if I cannot do any of the things on my plan.

I must not get involved - this could lead to me getting hurt – my safety is important and it is not my responsibility to stop it.

The safe place I can go to inside my house is ………………………….

The safe place outside my house is………………………………….

A safe way out of my house is ……………………………….

I know how to call the police, the number is………………………….

My address and phone number is……………………………………

Below are five adults I trust and I can talk to about my worries:

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Giving your child practical skills appropriate to their age is helpful and empowering, such as how to telephone the police and give their name and address, being careful not to add extra guilt or anxiety if they do not feel able to do this.

Conversations about safety, creating a safe place physically or imagining it, transition objects like a fiddle toy, teddy, smelly blanket etc. Safety tours and plans are all ways to increase multi-layered feelings of safety. All children are different, some may prefer to talk, write down, draw or play out ideas with puppets or toys.

Safety plans can be adapted depending on the age and development needs of the child. We can help you with exploring different ways to improve safety.

This can be a really hard thing to think about but it is important to understand that children experience domestic abuse too. By understanding, listening and safety planning you can increase their feelings of safety and empowerment.

If the domestic abuse has stopped children may be told they are safe now, but struggle to understand that feeling and truly believe that they are - continue communicating and revisiting this as needed.

Find out more about our [**support services for children and young people**](http://www.westmerciawomensaid.org/help-support/support-for-children-and-young-people/).

Read through our other [**safety plans**](http://www.westmerciawomensaid.org/help-support/i-need-help/) and our [**online safety guide**](http://www.westmerciawomensaid.org/help-support/online-safety/) or [**call the helpline**](http://www.westmerciawomensaid.org/contact-us/) to ensure you have all the relevant information. **In an emergency always call 999 - if you cannot speak press 55 to alert the call handler that you need help.**