

# SAFETY PLAN FOR YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

## Guidance for Professionals and Trusted Adults

This guidance has been developed to assist adults in supporting a young person who is experiencing relationship abuse in developing a safety plan that meeting the young person's needs. The guidance is to help adults who are supporting young people in their professional capacity and those who are helping young people as a trusted adult. The guidance begins by setting out a definition of relationship abuse (Section 1) and clearly identifies situations in which the safety plan should not be used (Section 2). The guidance sets out key principles to follow when assisting the young person (Section 3). The guidance then takes you, step-by-step, through the safety plan (Section 4), including information which must be discussed before starting the plan, what to consider for each section of the plan and what to consider when finalising the plan.

If a young person has asked you to assist them in completing a safety plan and you feel that you are unable to assist and commit to the principles below, you must help the young person identify another adult who can.

Even in situations when young people may not be experiencing high levels of abuse, thinking through the sections of the safety plan can still be useful for the young person.

### Section 1: What is meant by young person relationship abuse?

Abusive behaviour in relationships between young people can take the form of physical, emotional sexual and financial abuse. The intensity and the duration of the abusive behaviour are unique to each relationship. It can involve control of who or where a young person is 'allowed' to see or go, or communicate on social networking pages or on mobile phone. Such control and manipulation leads to isolation from the peer group, trusted friends and family in whom a young person might confide. Coercion may be used to force sexual activity.

Young people may also be coerced into sending inappropriate images or 'sexting' via social media. Sexting is "the exchange of sexual messages and images, creating, sharing and forwarding sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images through mobile phones and the internet" (NSPCC).

Some young people, particularly those who have witnessed abuse or violence at home, may find it hard to distinguish between care and control. Threats, put downs and humiliation are behaviours associated with emotional abuse.

Much of the research into this area has been carried out in the USA where the term 'teen dating violence' is used. In the UK 'teen relationship abuse' is more commonly used as the current cross-governmental definition of domestic violence has a minimum age of 16. We have used the term 'young person/ young people' to include young people under the age of 13.

## Section 2: Who should this safety plan NOT be used for?

While safety planning with young people who are in a variety of circumstances is useful, this safety plan should not be used for work with young people who are experiencing child sexual exploitation or sexual abuse by an adult. Safety plans for these young people should be developed in conjunction with social services and police.

## Section 3: Key concepts to remember when developing a safety plan WITH a young person

1. **Led by young person, supported by adult.** The development of this plan must be led by the young person, but with your support. Ensure the young person knows that you will also sign up to the plan. You can give guidance and suggestions, however the young person must be happy with the plan and agree any future suggested changes.
2. **Responsibility.** Ensure the young person knows that this plan does not make them responsible for the actions of others and it does not guarantee their safety, it only helps prepare them for situations where they might be unsafe. Your responsibility is to commit to supporting the young person in implementing actions in the plan and commit to following through any actions assigned to you and others.
3. **Personalised safety plan.** The safety plan must be personalised to each young person's experience. Relationship abuse is unique for each young person and the plan must be developed to fit their situation. Make sure that any specific needs of the young person, such as pregnancy, disability, religion, culture and ethnicity are taken into account. In addition, the plan must be developed considering the young person's current relationship status.
4. **Create plan when safe.** The young person must feel calm and in control when creating a safety plan. If the young person is feeling scared or frightened, it is difficult for them to think clearly about how to stay safe.
5. **Who else can support?** A safety plan that involves other trusted individuals, such as peers, family members (where appropriate) or other adults is more effective in keeping the young person safe and supporting them. If you intend on sharing the plan with anyone else, discuss with the young person and obtain their consent prior to sharing the plan.
6. **Realistic and manageable.** The plan should be easy to follow and realistic. The more complicated the plan, the less likely the plan will help the young person stay safe when they are in immediate danger.
7. **Recognise risk.** If the young person who is using abusive behaviour finds out about the safety plan, it may put the young person with the safety plan at risk. Discuss this concern with the young person.
8. **Relationship Advice.** It is not your responsibility to tell the young person they must 'break up' with the young person using abusive behaviour nor do you need to be seen as supportive of their decision to remain in the relationship. You need to allow the young person to consider their choices and support them to stay safe. Keep in mind that the young person may be at higher risk if they break up with the young person using abusive behaviour. The young person will feel able to seek your assistance if they feel they are not being judged by you and more likely to come to you when they need help.

9. **Holistic.** The safety plan must consider all aspects of the young person's life where they need to keep safe, including online safety, at home, at school during normal school timetables and off timetable activities and when socialising.
10. **Positive.** In addition to planning for safety, consider positive coping strategies with the young person.
11. **Review.** Discuss with and agree a specific review date with the young person, but allow for an unscheduled review. Ensure any updated telephone numbers or contact details are accurately reflected.

## Section 4: Step-by-step Guidance

### 4.1 Getting started

1. When assisting young people with creating a plan, you must have some understanding of the level and frequency of abuse the young person is experiencing. Ask the following in an open, sensitive and non-judgemental manner.
  - a. What situations make them most scared?
  - b. How often do they feel worried or afraid?
  - c. If they have already thought about or drawn up safety plan?
2. If you are assisting in a professional capacity, you need to explain to the young person that you may have to break confidentiality if the young person is at risk of serious harm and what may happen if you do this.
3. If a young person indicates that they are at risk of serious harm, professionals should follow the procedures for their organisation for child protection. If you are supporting the young person as a trusted adult and you are concerned about the young person being at risk of serious harm, contact the relevant authorities, such as the police or social services. If you are unsure about who to contact, ask the child protection lead for your organisation or call the NSPCC Helpline at 0808 800 5000.
4. Young people must guide you in picking which sections of the plan are most relevant to their situation. Briefly review each section, even if not relevant, with young people to ensure they are happy to leave that section not completed.
5. Not all sections need to be completed, some young people will need very few safety measures put into place. Where young people do indicate that they have a high level of violence and/or high frequency of abuse, complex plans should not be developed. You must help the young person consider how they can simply, but effectively, plan for their safety. Complex safety plans have little chance of being followed when a young person is scared and in immediate danger.

### 4.2 Who can help me?

1. You should help the young person identify at least one trusted adult who they can talk to about the abuse. This person may be you or it may be someone else. You should ensure that the choice is made by the young person and not by you; otherwise the young person is not likely to seek help from this person.

2. If the young person chooses someone who is a school staff person to be their trusted adult, assist them in identifying someone else who is outside of the school staff that they can reach during weekends and school holidays.
3. You should support the young person, to the extent they request, in speaking to the trusted adult(s) about the abuse, and obtaining their schedule and contact details for the young person.
4. If the young person feels that it is necessary, they should consider agreeing a code word or phrase for use with all trusted adults. The code word or phrase is to be used if the young person feels threatened or scared to alert others to this fact, without alerting the young person's partner/ex-partner.
5. Reinforce with the young person that if they are in immediate danger, they should call 999.

### 4.3 Staying safe at school

1. Determine if the young person needs to consider safety in the school. Does the young person using abusive behaviour go to the same school? Does the young person feel unsafe at school? If they do not need to consider safety in the school, move to the next section.
2. If you are not a professional at the young person's school, help the young person identify some adult at the school they trust in order to help complete this section of the safety plan.
3. Consider what level of safety planning is needed for the school environment. Are there places in the school that the young person feels unsafe? Are there specific times or classes that the young person feels unsafe?
4. Consider how widely the information about the safety plan needs to be shared with school staff and discuss with the young person. In situations where there is not a high level of safeguarding concerns, it may not be necessary for a large number of staff to know about the safety plan. In other situations, it may be necessary for specific staff to know about the safety plan in order to support the young person. With the young person's consent, share the plan with the appropriate staff members
5. If needed, agree with school staff where the young person can go in the school as a safe space. This should be a location that will always have an adult available, such as the school office, the pupil support office, the library, the head of year, etc.
6. Discuss simple strategies for safety where appropriate, such as changing locations of lockers or arranging for friends to accompany them between classes.
7. Consider whether the young person needs to be able to leave the classroom without lengthy explanations, either because they are feeling frightened or upset. This consideration is particularly important if the young person is in the same classes as the young person using abusive behaviour. If this is needed, consider how this can be done with the least amount of disruption to the class. Some schools have implemented systems where students can use a specific card to get out of class at any time, but they must then proceed immediately to a certain specified location. Other schools have the same concept, but without a physical card. School staff are notified who can use this system.
8. Consider if school clubs present a safety concern.
9. Consider if special safety plans need to be considered for upcoming school trips or enrichment days.

10. Consider whether the journey to and from school presents safety concerns for the young person.

#### 4.4 How can I stay safe outside of the school?

1. Determine if the young person needs to consider safety outside of the school. If they do not need to consider safety outside of the school, move to the next section.
2. If the young person feels unsafe about getting to school, help the young person consider how they might try to change or modify their journey to help them feel safer. Some communities are offering safe haven schemes.
3. If the young person takes public transport to school and they feel their journey may be unsafe, help them consider how they can make their journey safer. General safety ideas the young person may want to consider are: identifying busy and well-lit bus stops to use, staying in well-lit areas of train and tube stations, identifying help and information buttons on station platforms, staying near ticket booths and public transport staff, sitting in carriages with several people in them, preferably mixed age groups and knowing where emergency alarms are in tube and train carriages.
4. Help the young person explore options for getting to safety should they not have access to their mobile phone. Determine if there are pay phones available on their route or stores or businesses that would allow the young person to call someone for help.

#### 4.5 Safety behaviours

1. Discuss with the young person safety measures that can help them be safer in general. This includes ensuring their mobile phone is always charged, they have spare change in case they need to make a call and written contact numbers in case they are unable to access their mobile phone.
2. If the young person has a restraining order, ensure that they know to call the police immediately if the order is breached. A breach of a restraining order is a criminal offence.
3. Discuss general safety tips, such as keeping windows locked and doors locked, checking who is calling before answering, not answering calls from unknown/blocked numbers, not walking alone and be aware of their surroundings. For some young people, they may not be able to avoid walking alone at times. For those situations, help the young person consider how to stay safe on their journey.
4. Provide the young person with a list of contact numbers that are appropriate for their situation, such as police, emergency and non-emergency numbers and ChildLine. For numbers in your local area, consider numbers to any services that fit their needs, such as local GPs, Sexual Health Services, school nurse, school counsellor, youth worker, and Young Person's Violence Advocate.
5. Discuss with the young person how to keep any information they have safe and secure.

#### 4.6 Staying safe when using your mobile phone and internet

1. Determine if the young person needs to consider mobile phone or internet safety. If they do not need to consider safety on their mobile phone or internet, move to the next section. If the young person takes steps as identified in this section, ensure that you have discussed the possibility that these steps may cause anger or danger from their boyfriend/girlfriend, particularly if they are still in the relationship.
2. Help the young person determine if they need to change their phone number. Support them in calling their provider to find out what process they will need to change their number if they are on a contract. Some phone providers will allow them to change their number for free if the change is for the young person's safety. If the young person is using a pay as you go phone, they can get a new SIM with a new mobile number. Suggest to the young person when they give their new number to friends and family that they should let them know that the new number should not be shared to others (or particular people) without the young person's prior consent.
3. Discuss with the young person about changing their password/code on their mobile phones, or putting a passcode or pin on their phone if they haven't already done so.
4. Support the young person in thinking about their safety on social networking sites. They should consider whether they need to adjust the privacy setting on who can access their sites, whether they consider blocking certain individuals and whether they may need to remove their accounts on sites if they are unable to feel safe. If they are unsure, let them know they can speak to their trusted adult about any concerns they have about particular sites.
5. Ensure the young person knows how to report behaviour which is inappropriate on all their social networking sites.
6. Discuss with the young person whether others have access to their account because they have shared their password and consider whether they should change passwords to keep their accounts secure.
7. Discuss with the young person as to whether they need to consider deleting their browser history, use private settings when browsing sites, or use alternative computer (such as at school or in a public library) to access sites for help and support.
8. Mobile devices and apps for social networking sites use GPS to allow others to track where the mobile device is being used. Discuss with the young person whether their location services might be used by their current/ex-partner to track them.
9. Discuss with young people whether they need to tell their friends not to post pictures of them on social networking sites, particularly if the friend has their location services turned on.

#### 4.7 Emotional support and coping strategies

1. Discuss with the young person what strategies they have for coping with the stress of the situation. Help them identify trusted friends and adults they can talk to when they are feeling upset or scared. Ensure they know how to contact relevant helplines and helpful websites.
2. If you feel the young person may need support and counselling, discuss ways in which they can access this.

#### 4.8 Ending the Relationship

1. It is not your role to support the young person to remain in a relationship that is abusive, but it is also not your role to force the young person to end their relationship.
2. Should the young person decide to end the relationship, support them in planning for their safety when ending the relationship. You should encourage the young person to take someone with them when they are ending the relationship and stress the importance of telling their trusted adults about when and where they are planning to do it. Often, ending a relationship can result in escalated violence.
3. Remind the young person that if the violence does escalate whilst trying to end the relationship they should dial 999 immediately.

#### 4.9 Finalising the plan

1. Discuss with the young person who else needs to know about this plan. Keep in mind that if young people do not want specific individuals to know about the plan and there is not a safeguarding requirement to inform those individuals, you must respect the young person's wishes.
2. Young people should be encouraged to tell their parents/carers, but some may not want their parents/carers to know about the safety plan. There are many reasons for this and in some cases, parents knowing about the plan may put the young person in danger. In other cases, the young person may be embarrassed or scared about how their parents may react. Ask the young person if you can support them in speaking to their parents.
3. Discuss with the young person where they will keep a copy of the plan. Support them in thinking about where is safe and if they need access to the written plan regularly.
4. Discuss with the young person when to review the plan next and set a specific date and time. Ensure the young person understands that if something changes that impacts on their safety, that their plan should be reviewed and revised before the scheduled time.
5. After completing this plan, ensure that you follow all appropriate safeguarding policies for your organisation and that you inform the young person about all the actions you are taking.