

Box 8.3 Safety Planning

Jill Davies and Eleanor Lyon (2014) report that the decisions IPV victims make for themselves, their children, and in relation to their abusive partner depend to a large extent on four primary factors: (1) the victim's understanding of the abuse and its severity, (2) the victim's relationship with her children and her concern for their well-being, (3) the victim's relationship with the abusive partner, and (4) the victim's financial and social resources. J. Davies and Lyon also point out that these factors are not the same for all victims and they frequently change over time, which results in a shift in a victim's priorities. All IPV victims, however, make plans in response to these factors, and although they are not likely to refer to them as "safety plans," their goals are to reduce or end the abuse, improve stability, and increase well-being. Assisting IPV victims in safety planning, then, requires flexibility as well as recognition that the victim is the "expert" on her situation, since she has more first-hand knowledge of the circumstances than anyone else. That said, victims may need help sorting out their priorities relative to their available resources, developing effective responses to immediate crises versus short-term problems versus long-term goals, and identifying the costs and benefits of specific strategies.

J. Davies and Lyon (2014) point out that variations in safety plans are "endless" (p. 88). Indeed, Sherry Hamby (2014), in her examination of battered women's protective strategies, identifies a multitude of actions that IPV victims take in response to both immediate and long-term threats to their safety and the safety of their children. These include:

- Setting up a pre-arranged signal with a child, neighbor, or friend that will let them know that help is needed or the police should be called
- Getting an emergency phone
- Asking family members or friends for help getting guns or other weapons out of the house
- Teaching children to call the police
- Placing pets in a kennel or a "foster home"
- Keeping copies of important financial and legal documents in a safe place (e.g., at the home of a friend or relative) where the batterer cannot take them or destroy them
- Keeping spare clothes for oneself and one's children at the home of a friend or relative
- Explaining the situation to one's employer and coworkers and asking for a security plan in the workplace
- Identifying and accessing formal help-providers (e.g., keeping the hotline number in one's phone)

None of these strategies, of course, guarantees safety, and should they fail, the victim is not to blame. But helping IPV victims identify which strategies may be most effective for their particular circumstances, as well as the risks and benefits that may accompany each strategy, can provide victims with a stronger sense of self-efficacy in responding to a specific situation and ultimately improve their safety.