

## **Safety Planning Interventions with Children**

Below are some considerations to take into account when working with children affected by both domestic violence and substance abuse, including substance abuse coercion. While children as young as 3 and 4 can often be taught elements of safety planning, young children and infants are at greatest risk for harm. Appropriately responding to the safety planning needs of children witnessing or experiencing any type of harm or abuse requires knowledge of a child's developmental stage as well as their capacity to seek and obtain safety. It also requires knowledge of available resources as well as mandatory reporting guidelines in your state.

For additional resources related to children see the NCDVTMH web page on Supporting Children, Parents, and Caregivers Impacted by DV: <http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org/trainingta/supporting-children-parents-caregivers-impacted-by-dv/>. See also "Safety Planning with Children," a video developed by the AWARE Shelter in Juneau, Alaska marketed by Intermedia. To preview a copy of this video see the following website: <http://www.intermedia-inc.com/title.asp?sku=SA13&subcatID=87>

### **It's important to safety plan.**

Children:

- Are at risk and need to be safe.
- Often blame themselves for both the violence and the substance abuse.
- Feel terrified and helpless; angry and sad.
- Wonder, "What can I do?" and "What should I do?"
- Need something to ease the negative impact of domestic violence and substance abuse on their lives.
- Need the power that comes from knowledge of how to keep safe.

### **Safety planning with children...**

- Gives them skills to protect themselves.
- Helps them feel confident.
- Empowers them.
- Gives them a reality check.
- Breaks isolation.
- Helps keep them safe.

### **You can help develop a safety plan to protect your children.**

A safety plan can include:

- How your child can escape from the house if an assault is in progress or drinking/other drug use is scaring them.
- Where to go in an emergency.
- How to call police (explain 911 – how to call and what happens when you call. Let them know if you or someone else in the house is being hurt or is unconscious or passed out from drinking or drug use, it is ok for them to hide in a safe place and call 911 or to call a safe adult for help).
- How to call supportive family members, friends, and community agencies for help.

### **You can help your children.**

- Listen.
- Provide structure, consistency.
- Tell your children it is important for them to be safe. If you are being assaulted, they should not intervene or put themselves in harm's way.
- Reassure children that domestic violence and/or substance abuse is not their fault and that blaming themselves is a common reaction.

- If your child is called on to testify, develop a plan to support the child over issues of fear, anxiety, divided loyalties, painful memories.
- Call your local domestic violence/sexual assault victim service program and substance abuse treatment program to get information about services for children.
- Practice the safety plan with your children.
- Ensure at least one adult provides unconditional positive regard.
- Let your children know it is okay to talk about family violence and/or substance abuse.
- Provide positive messages as well as safety planning. (*For example: "Violence is not your fault. Neither is the drinking or drug use of your parent/guardian."*) Let children know anger doesn't need to lead to violence or substance abuse.
- If your children are drinking, drugging, suicidal, or violent towards other family members, develop a plan for their safety and the safety of others. Set clear limits with children who are violent and abusive or using substances themselves. Refer them to appropriate services.
- Help kids be kids. Provide after school options, encourage them to participate in children's programs. If your community does not have one, explore forming an Alatot or Alateen program. Find out what children's resources are available at your local domestic violence/sexual assault program.