



safety first initiative

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**Building an  
Accessible and Safe  
World:  
Safety Planning for  
Persons with  
Disabilities**

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safety first initiative

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Kansas City Collaborative to  
End Violence Against Women  
with Disabilities

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**Collaborative Partners**

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Funded by Department of Justice,  
Office of Violence Against Women

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**Safety First Process**

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- Years One and Two (2006-2008)
  - Collaborative Charter
  - Needs Assessment
  - Strategic Plan
  
- Year Three to Currently
  - Implementation of Strategic Plan

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**Vision**

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To change the mindset in our metropolitan area resulting in a sustained **collaborative response** that provides culturally competent, respectful, accessible, empowerment based services to women with disabilities who are victims/survivors of violence.

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**Mission & Purpose**

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To enhance the capacity of victim service and disability support agencies to provide the protections and services needed by victims with disabilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To improve the coordination of services between <b>victim service and disability service</b> agencies that support victims with disabilities to navigate and access services.</li> </ul>
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### Needs Assessment Findings

- Our metropolitan area has an array of services for women with disabilities who have experienced violence—however, there are needed improvements
- Services should be empowerment-based to ensure “**comfort, control, and confidence**” for women with disabilities

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### Needs Assessment Findings

- Women with disabilities experience issues regarding **believability**;
- **Under-reporting** of sexual assault/abuse and domestic violence is common;
- Perception that services for women with disabilities are **not always comparable** to that for women in general;
- **Links** between victim services and disability services is lacking;
- Need for **training** and capacity building.

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### Strategic Plan Initiatives

1. Developing policies and procedures that promote **universal design and responsiveness** within the collaborative partner agencies
2. Expanding **safety planning** processes and resources to better address the needs of survivors with disabilities
3. Building **relationships and linkages** between victim service providers and disability service providers

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**Advocate Guide:**  
**Safety Planning for Persons with Disabilities**

- Designed for both disability and victim services providers
- Built with flexibility to suit a variety of environments, situations, abilities
- Safety Plan Template includes guiding questions and considerations for the advocate

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**Presentation Topics**

- **Unique dynamics** of power and control tactics experienced by survivors with disabilities
- **Challenges and safety risks**
- **Safety planning strategies** for effectively serving survivors with disabilities

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**Incidence and Prevalence**

- Limited research exists.
- Research has documented that some women with disabilities experience increased risk of violence compared to women without disabilities.
- We can not generalize findings to all women with disabilities.

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### Incidence and Prevalence

- In one study, women with and without disabilities experience equally high rates of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse.
- A few important differences for women with disabilities existed.
  - They reported a larger number of perpetrators.
  - The duration of their abuse was longer than women without disabilities.

Source: Center for Research on Women with Disabilities, Baylor

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### Crime Victims with Disabilities

- Children with a reported disability are **68 percent more likely to be victims** of maltreatment than children with no reported disability. (Children's Bureau)
- Women with developmental disabilities are at a **4 to 10 times greater risk** than the general population for sexual assault. (Abramson et al)
- More than one-fourth of persons with severe mental illness were victims of a violent crime in the past year, a rate **more than 11 times that of the general population.** (L.A. Teplin et al.)
- **76% of adults with cognitive disabilities have been sexually assaulted.** (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control)

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### Unique Power & Control Tactics

- Perpetrators may target people with disabilities because they perceive them as more isolated and trusting
- May assume survivors will not report violence or be believed
- Caregivers can be perpetrators

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### Unique Power and Control Tactics

**Perpetrators may exert power as a caregiver by:**

- Taking advantage of caregiver privilege- some people have been taught to comply with authority and care givers at all time
- Providing care in a way that accentuates the person's dependency and vulnerabilities
- Denying right to privacy
- Ignoring, discouraging or prohibiting the exercise of full-capabilities

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### Unique Power and Control Tactics

- Withholding food, medication or medical care
- Breaking or hiding communication devices and/or adaptive technology
- Ignoring discomfort or pain
- "Grooming" for abuse
- Exploiting a trusting nature
- Taking advantage of the person's lack of sexual education or knowledge

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### Unique Power and Control Tactics

- Threatening or injuring a service animal
- Giving drugs without the person's knowledge, forcing drugs/medication, or giving more or less than was prescribed
- Claiming injuries related to disability
- Exploiting the lack of access to community services

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**Challenges & Safety Risks for Persons with Disabilities**

- Ineffective, inappropriate response from community and institutions
- Lack of resources or accommodations for disability from service providers
- Language and communication barriers
- Fear of institutionalization
- Service providers don't believe reports of abuse

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**Planning for Safety**

No one can control another person's violence.

Survivors do not cause violence, therefore cannot stop the violence.

However there are things survivors can do to stay safer when an abusive person puts them in danger.

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**Planning for Safety**

The act of planning for safety helps survivors think through possible dangers in a variety of situations and have a plan in mind about what to do when their physical and/or emotional safety is threatened.

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**What is a Safety Plan?**

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A safety plan is just what it sounds like. It is a plan you have in your head or that you have written down on paper.

Some safety plans are very simple and others look at many situations a person may find themselves in with an abuser.

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**Beliefs and Values  
Guiding Planning for Safety**

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- Empowerment
- Safety is paramount
- Use what a survivor already knows
- Confidentiality and Informed Consent
- Be open to different ways of communicating

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**Beliefs and Values:  
Communication**

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- Use of pictures, assistive communication, interpreters
- People First language- puts person before the disability
- Plain language
- Use language to describe things that the survivor will be familiar with
- Be mindful of the pace which you speak

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**Safety Planning Considerations**

**1. Assess for danger**

**2. Assess needs for accommodation and accessibility:**

- Do you have any physical health, mental health or medical needs that you would like us to know about? If yes, what kinds of accommodations do you need?
- Do you need help with reading, writing or other communication?

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**Safety Planning Considerations**

**3. Promote access to accessible community resources**

- Become familiar with community agencies serving persons with disabilities
- Know in advance which agencies fulfill requirements for accessibility and accommodations and will ensure survivors with disabilities receive equal services
- Accessibility goes beyond physical access

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**Safety Planning Considerations**

**Consider accessibility related to:**

- Documents
- Communication
- Transportation
- Service animals
- Personal care attendants
- Medical care
- Flexibility in adjusting rules to accommodate survivor

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### **Safety Planning Considerations**

**4. Assess how survivor uses technology and help plan ways to safe guard these devices.**

Safety Net program of the National Network to End Domestic Violence provides up to date information and guidance on technology safety

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### **Assistive Technology Examples**

- Remote controls
- TTY machines
- Screen readers
- Communication boards
- GPS devices
- Emergency alert buttons
- Video phones
- Key chain voice recorders to help with memory

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### **Internet Safety**

- Use a safe computer.
- It is not possible to clear footprints of your computer or online activities.
- If being monitored it may be dangerous to suddenly delete entire internet history.
- Use home computer for routine searches- (the weather) and safe computer for safety planning.

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**5. If survivor is planning to leave, provide recommendations on what to prepare/bring**

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- Accessible transportation
- Medication and medical supplies
- Contact information for medical providers, home health care provider, personal care attendants
- Assistive devices (hearing aids, eye glasses, communication boards, wheel chair)
- Instructions for use of technical equipment
- Spare batteries for assistive devices
- Supplies for service animals

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**Safety Plan Template**

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- New format for safety planning
- Can be used by domestic violence, sexual violence and disability service providers
- Covers a broad range of environments and safety risks

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**Safety Plan Template**

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Provides guidance on:

- Getting started with safety plan
- Questions to ask
- Important considerations and resources
- Notes section

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**Safety Plan Template**

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- Designed to encourage discussion with survivor
- Begins with broad questions to help survivor state needs
- As needs identified, leads to more detailed questions
- Closing section to review key aspects of plan and who is responsible for next steps

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**Resource**

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The Vera Institute of Justice  
[www.accessingsafety.org](http://www.accessingsafety.org)

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**Final Thoughts:**

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- Working with survivors with disabilities is not necessarily different, but requires us to be more inclusive.
- We don't have to be experts about everything; we just have to know the resources in our community!

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**Thank You!**

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