

Creating Safety: A Guide to Recognizing and Implementing Safety Strategies

Introduction

This resource was designed to guide practitioners in working with young people to identify unsafe situations so that they can implement safety strategies when they are faced with challenges. Through activities and guiding questions, young people have the opportunity to explore the signs that a person or situation is not safe or they need to remove themselves from a specific environment. This resource focuses on prioritizing the needs of young people and supporting healthy self-awareness as well as promoting an overall culture of safety.

Optional tools:

- Identifying Safe and Unsafe People and Places
- Safety Identification Web - Situations
- Action Plan - Responding with Safety

Key Considerations

This toolkit is not meant to be part of an intake. Having this type of emotionally charged conversation may be a lot to process and is ideally held with someone the young person has already built a relationship and comfort with. This tool is best used when safety comes up very clearly or naturally, or after several meetings together. Bringing up unsafe people, places, and situations, specific to the young person's life may be very triggering and challenging. Try to be aware of this throughout the process and consider whether or not these activities should be broken up into segments. We recommend doing the second and third parts together so that the discussion is not left off with negative things, but instead with real ways to address those very challenges.

Helping Young People Identify Unsafe Situations

Consider beginning with the Identifying Safe and Unsafe People and Places tool to set the scene for a conversation about safety. Next we recommend engaging in a Safety Identification Web, which allows for self-identifying the relationships, environments and specific triggers that feel unsafe.

Sample questions for discussion with the youth/young adult:

1. What are common activities in the environments you are often in?
2. In general, how safe do you usually feel with the people and in the places that you spend time?
3. What would you consider your "triggers"?
 - A stimulus such as a smell, sound or sight that reactivates a feeling of trauma
4. How do you identify when something is triggering?
5. What sort of things would you consider to be "crossing the line"?
6. What kinds of safety boundaries do you have?
7. How do you identify when one of your safety boundaries have been broken?
8. How has a person or situation made you feel unsafe?
9. On a scale of 1-5 how much do you feel like safety is a priority in the environments and relationships you are in?

Understanding Goals & Supports Needed

Safety Identification Web-Situations

The goal of this part of the discussion is to make a space to reflect on the state of safety, and to determine what the best course of action. After the young person has identified environments, activities, and situations that make them feel unsafe and different levels of awareness of their safety, open a discussion to explore their goals for these situations through the Identifying Safe and Unsafe People and Places and the Safety Identification Web-Situations. This can also be done by reviewing their documents. (Continue to tool 3 and make a general safety plan, check in on physical and emotional state of walking through this etc.)

Sample questions for discussion with the youth/young adult:

1. Offer scaling questions: Example - On a scale of 1-5, How confident are you with your level of safety? How confident are you in your ability to respond to unsafe situations? (1 - being least confident, 5 - being most confident)
2. Are there any ways you would like to see this situation change? In what ways?
3. What are the different ways you identify unsafe situations? (i.e. gut feeling, observation, listen to a trusted friend)
4. What made you decide to categorize the people and places that you did where you did? (gut feeling, specific action)
5. How can you identify things to be aware of before you are in an extreme situation?
6. In what ways can we support you in increasing your safety?

Making a Plan and Sharing Resources

Action Plan

The final section in this toolkit focuses on action planning. It is designed to provide actionable, tangible steps in helping a young person increase their safety wherever they are, and move towards creating a culture of safety. Some of the sections are designed to be very specific to the young person's community and location. Consider using a safety planning tool. The [Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence: A Teen's Guide to Safety Planning](#) and [Love is Respect: Safety Planning](#) resource are examples.

Sample questions for discussion with the youth about opportunities to implement safety:

1. Who is one person you would feel comfortable calling if you were in an unsafe situation and needed help? (refer to [Mapping Connections Resource](#))
2. Where is somewhere you could go if you felt unsafe? (refer to part one)
3. What do you want to be able to do when you realize you are in an unsafe situation?
4. How do you think the people around you would react if you decided to do something like leave because you felt unsafe? How do you feel about that?
5. What is one way you could avoid being in a (situation where they expressed to feel unsafe) in the future?
6. How could you most comfortably express to someone that something makes you feel unsafe? What would make you feel more comfortable?
7. If it is not safe to express your concerns, who else could you tell?

Conclusion

Creating a culture of safety can truly transform lives. This can start with suggesting a bus route that is more direct and less chaotic. This can start by introducing language that breaks down a box keeping someone from believing they deserve to feel safe. Starting small is still starting!

Our hope is that the content of this toolkit is used to further the conversation and culture of safety by walking through unsafe situations and implementing safety strategies. This toolkit may also be used to further conversation you may have had with young people surrounding family and their broader support network by addressing some of the complexities that come up when someone they have a strong relationship with may not be safe.

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Identifying Safe and Unsafe People and Places

People	Places
Safe	Safe
Sometimes Safe	Sometimes Safe
Unsafe	Unsafe

Safety Identification Web – Example



Key	
—————	Something to be aware of
- - - - -	Triggering – need to assess
vvvvvvvvvv	Major red flag – action needed

How do I know I'm unsafe? These are ways my mind and body try to alert me.

Physical:

My stomach starts to hurt.

Emotional:

I start to feel worried and nervous, even though I thought I was having fun before.

Other (mental, sexual, spiritual, or anything else you want to share):

I start thinking about of the bad things that could happen.