

2.4 Understanding Risk and Assessing a Woman's Safety

It is important for the client and service provider to develop an understanding of the impact of the abuse. Of particular concern is whether the woman is at risk of death or of serious injury.

The following questions, adapted from the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (2001) are included to help service providers identify high risk indicators. The tool is to be used by a counselor / advocate with a woman. ***It should not be used by a woman alone, as it can be traumatic.***¹

1. To the best of your knowledge, has your partner assaulted any previous spouses / partners or children from another relationship?
2. Has your partner assaulted / threatened you before?
3. Has there been a recent increase in assaults / threats?
4. Have your children been assaulted by your partner?
5. Have the police been called to respond to any domestic situations involving your partner prior to this incident?
6. Has your partner destroyed or damaged any of your belongings or contents of your home?
7. Has your partner injured or killed your pet?
8. Has your partner threatened to kill or harm you?
9. Has your partner threatened to kill or harm the children?
10. Has your partner threatened / attempted suicide? In these threats, have there been specific details of a plan, e.g. specific weapon, time, place, dangerous act?
11. Does your partner own or have access to firearms or weapons?
12. Has your partner recently applied for a Firearms Acquisition Certificate?
13. Has your partner used, or threatened to use guns or other weapons against you, the children or any other person?
14. Have you separated or discussed separation with your partner?
15. If so, is your partner reacting in an aggressive and / or threatening manner?
16. Is your partner obsessed, overly jealous, or extremely dominant with you?
17. Has your partner forcibly confined you, or prevented you from using the telephone, leaving the house, or contacting family or friends?
18. Has your partner engaged in any stalking behaviours with you in the past?

¹ Adapted from The Region of Peel Woman Abuse Protocol, which is based on Metropolitan Toronto Police, Domestic Violence Supplementary Report, as cited in the Ontario Provincial Network of Sexual Assault Care and Treatment Centres (n.d.) *Domestic Violence Response Teams Training Binder*. Toronto, Ontario.

19. To the best of your knowledge, has your partner engaged in any stalking behaviour with other people?
20. Does your partner use drugs or alcohol?
21. Is your partner under psychiatric care, or has your partner been under such care in the past?
22. Is your partner on any medication?
23. Is your partner taking such medication as prescribed?
24. Has your partner breached any court order, such as bail conditions or restraining orders?
25. Do you believe your partner is capable of severely injuring or killing you (or your children)?
26. Do you have any fears for your safety, or the safety of your family?
27. Do you have a personal safety plan in place to help protect yourself and your children in the event of a problem with your partner?
28. Have you obtained a custody order, or a restraining order?
29. Is there anything else that is causing you to fear your partner?

Once these questions have been discussed, it is important to assist the woman in developing a customized safety plan. You should emphasize that although the woman does not have control over her (ex) partner's violence, it is possible to increase her own safety, as well as the safety of her children.