

# Assessing the Immediate Risk of Violence

Once intimate partner violence or children's exposure to intimate partner violence has been disclosed/observed, how can you assess if your client or their children are in immediate danger?

## Framing your questions

If your client discloses a situation of family violence, it is important to validate their experience and their feelings. You may be the first person your client has spoken to about their situation. A therapeutic relationship that is supportive and collaborative will empower a client to make changes or take the next steps. The client needs to make the decisions; you are there as first-line support.

### FIRST-LINE SUPPORT

As primary health care providers, midwives offer first-line support to pregnant people in violent situations. According to the World Health Organization, first-line support involves five tasks that respond to emotional and practical needs. Consider all five tasks as you assess the immediate risk of violence.



**LISTEN**



**INQUIRE ABOUT NEEDS AND CONCERNS**



**VALIDATE**



**ENHANCE SAFETY**



**SUPPORT**



Before asking any questions, present the concerns you have to your client and explain confidentiality. If you are concerned about child protection, disclose all mandatory reporting obligations. Below is a list of suggested sample questions and examples of supportive responses.

**Feel free to adapt them to your client and context.**

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS

### Examples of questions to assess the immediate risk of violence:

- “Has the violence or aggression happened more often or gotten worse recently? Has your partner become increasingly angry or agitated? Are they taking things out on you more often?”
- “When did this start? Did this start in the last pregnancy or is this new?”
- “Has your partner/ex-partner ever tried to strangle, choke, suffocate you, or threatened you with a weapon?”
- “Has your partner threatened to harm or kill you if you leave?”
- “Does your partner/ex-partner have access to a weapon?”
- “Has your partner/ex-partner threatened to kill themselves, you or your child/children?”
- “Do you believe your partner is capable of killing you?”
- “Do you have a safe place to go for you and your child/children if you feel threatened?”
- “Do you feel safe to return home right now?”

*Adapted from [Danger Assessment -5 \(DA-5\) Brief Risk Assessment for Clinicians](http://www.dangerassessment.org), [www.dangerassessment.org](http://www.dangerassessment.org)*

### Examples of how to respond to immediate risks of violence:

- “I am taking what you have told me seriously; I am here to help.”
- “Thank you for sharing this with me; how can I support you?”
- “Do you think we can discuss ways to help you work through this/get you to safety? I can help you as much as you would like.”
- “Would you like me to support you to call the shelter/police and/or child protective services?”

## FOUR KEY REMINDERS:

### 1. It's their call

Acknowledge and respect the client's wishes to disclose or make a referral.

### 2. Change takes time

Remember that a client deciding to leave their partner and move their family to a shelter is not an easy decision but disclosing may be the first step towards making a change.

### 3. Keep the doors open

Consider the client's stage of change. If they are not ready to make a change, invite the client to revisit their decision another time.

### 4. Have resources for support

Make sure you have a list of local resources you can use to make referrals and offer support.

## SUPPORTING RESOURCES

Visit [canadianmidwives.org/family-violence/resources/](https://canadianmidwives.org/family-violence/resources/) for our companion resources on recognizing and responding to family violence:

- Recognizing & Responding to Family Violence
- Asking About Intimate Partner Violence & Children's Exposure to IPV
- Child Maltreatment & the Duty to Report
- When, What and How Local Resource Mapping
- Supporting Clients Experiencing Violence
- National Resources

## REFERENCES:

Johns Hopkins School of Nursing. *Danger Assessment -5 (DA-5): Brief Risk Assessment for Clinicians*. 2017, <https://www.dangerassessment.org/DATools.aspx>. Accessed 10 March 2023.

NSW Government. *Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool*. 2015.

World Health Organization (WHO). *Responding to Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence against Women: WHO Clinical and Policy Guidelines*. 2013, <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/85240>. Accessed 10 March 2023.

*Note: Refer to your provincial or territorial regulatory college for specific mandatory reporting guidelines*