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# **Safety Planning for Children: Strategizing for unsupervised visits with batterers**

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## Introduction

The PennFree Training Committee strongly believes that children should not have to visit with their battering fathers until such time that the children want interaction with the father and visitation can be safe for both the children and the battered mother. Where a batterer is potentially lethal, we believe he should not be accorded any access to the children. Where he has been violent to the children or continues to intimidate or coerce the mother, but is not thought to present a danger of death or injury to the woman or children, we suggest that supervised visitation is the most that should be awarded. And in the situation where the batterer no longer poses a substantial risk of danger to either the child or the mother, then unsupervised visitation may be appropriate. However, we would assert that the custody court should impose specific provisions on awards of supervised and unsupervised visitation to protect the child and the mother against anticipated dangers. We would also commend safety planning with the child. This paper addresses only safety planning for unsupervised visitation. The PennFree Training Committee suggests that safety planning should occur with all children related to risks of violence posed by battering fathers.

Children of battered women who have witnessed their father's violence toward their mother or who have been abused themselves may be quite fearful or anxious about unsupervised visits with their fathers. Children may fear that the father will attack their mother when they are being picked up or dropped off. They may fear that their father will beat them if their mother is not around to protect them or to be the target of his violence. They may fear the unknown. They may fear that they cannot protect their mother against homicidal violence during the night if they sleep at their father's house. They may experience torn loyalties between the parents and may struggle with anger at the mother for leaving or for not having the power to stop the violence. Or they may be caught in a fantasy of family reconciliation while recognizing that their mothers cannot be safe from abuse except through separation. They may have strong feelings of love for their fathers. Even if children are only conflicted, and not fearful, this conflict may create a lot of anxiety.

Planning for unsupervised visits can help children not only manage fear or anxiety, but can also help them develop safety skills and realistic safety plans to minimize the risk of violence during visitation. The goal of safety planning is the empowerment of children. It is critical that safety planning help children identify safety issues and build problem-solving, safety skills. Safety planning can help the children of battered women understand the multitude of conflicted feelings they may be experiencing associated with visiting their father.

Skillful advocates must be careful not to aggravate the fear or anxiety that children of battered women are experiencing in anticipation of unsupervised visits. Identifying and discussing fear is not, in and of itself, beneficial to children. Once identified, children need to have skills for managing these feelings and creating safety strategies to avoid the incidents or interactions feared. Therefore, people helping children of battered women must be committed to assisting the children without frightening them.

Neither should advocates insist on safety planning with children. The child who engages in safety planning should be a volunteer who is interested in learning about how to manage fear or anger and how to act to protect herself from violence perpetrated by the father. Persons assisting children should know the child well and have adequate information about the battered mother and the abuser. If several children are visiting with the father at the same time, a group plan as well as individual safety planning may be helpful.

Any safety plan must be realistic. It must be age appropriate. The child must be competent to undertake the strategies designed. The plan should be simple. Perhaps only children above 8 years of age can be active participants in safety strategies. For younger children, the mother and the child's advocate may have to map out safety plans that rely little on the child for implementation.

Battered women must be clear that safety planning is an option, not a requirement; an option that either the child or the mother can exercise when it seems necessary to do so.

## **Disclaimer - No guarantees.**

Safety planning does not make unsupervised visitation with batterers safe. It may reduce the risks. It may empower children to act to protect themselves. It may make visitation safer by invoking community systems to protect the battered mother and children in the context of visitation. However, safety planning is no guarantee of safety.

And safety planning could potentially increase the risk to the child or the mother. The father who concludes that the child is exposing his violence to the mother or advocate may retaliate. The father who learns that a child is concerned about her own safety may emotionally badger the child about her lack of trust and love for the father. Thus, any safety planning must help a child deal with the possible adversity that may arise if safety planning is revealed to the batterer.

Children need to hear that the plan is no guarantee of safety and that failure of the plan is not the fault of the child. When a particular safety strategy fails, the child must clearly understand that the violence is solely and exclusively the responsibility of the battering father. However, the child needs to be aware that a safety plan can be re-designed if any component fails and that the process of safety planning involves continuing evaluation and revision.

## **Process of safety planning.**

Meeting with mother. Before meeting with the child an advocate should talk with the battered mother. The mother can help the advocate identify critical background information, including a

history of the batterer's violence towards the mother and the children, an assessment of the amount of woman abuse witnessed by the child, the child's feelings about forthcoming visitation (hopes and fears), the competence of the child to develop and execute safety plans, the safety facilitators in the context of the visitation (people, places and things that might enhance the child's safety), the mother's own feelings about visitation (hopes and fears), anticipated batterer manipulation around visitation and potential elements for a visitation contract relating to child safety and comfort.

The advocate might encourage the mother to begin a journal about visitation issues to help her in assisting the child in designing, implementing, evaluating and revising safety plans.

The advocate should be both a colleague and an educator of the mother - teaching her safety planning and involving her in safety planning and contract development throughout. She may not want to meet with the mother with the child at all times, but should encourage both the mother's independent and interactive thinking about the child's safety. An atmosphere of compassion, support and collaboration is essential. It is important not to diminish the mother's role in the protection of her child in any way. Our goal is to facilitate the mother's empowerment and to build an alliance between the mother and child in safety planning. Since we are still learning how to do safety planning with children, mothers must be told that this is new work for us and that it requires her critical thinking and feedback to us so that we can improve the quality of our advocacy.

Meeting with child. Then at the first meeting with the child, the advocate should explain that the goal is to help the child develop a safety plan that meets her very special and individual needs during visitation. The child should be told that adults and children often remember important things after they leave a meeting, so the child should be aware that there will be several meetings in developing a safety plan and that at each meeting issues can be discussed several times. It will never be too late to add something to a safety plan. The first interview with the child probably should focus on the child's feelings about visitation and her father - What is she looking forward to in visitation? What has her afraid of the visit? What does she love about her father? What about her father makes her afraid?

At the second meeting with the child, the advocate might want to introduce the concept of journaling. If the child is too young to write, she can draw pictures in a notebook and describe the pictures to the advocate who can make titles or commentary under the picture. Older children who can write should also be encouraged to draw if it is an expressive medium preferred by the child. The purpose of journaling is to identify feelings, safety issues, and proposed strategies for safety. The child can share the journal with the advocate or her mother or it can be confidential. It is a means for developing the child's own critical thinking.

Further, the child might be asked to describe the patterns of abuse the batterer has inflicted upon the mother and herself or the other children. The listing might include times, places, context and the acts of violence.

In a third meeting, the advocate could help the child identify when she fears for her own safety or the safety of her mother and siblings in relation to the batterer. She should think about the particular things that her father does that make her nervous. It may be shouting or driving recklessly or drinking or holiday depressions or sports events where his team loses, etc. The advocate can pull

out how often these events occur and how dangerous the batterer is when they occur. The advocate then should ask the child to identify strategies that she has used successfully and unsuccessfully in the past to divert, minimize, or stop the father's violence toward herself or others. Some assessment about what strategies still seem useful should be made.

The next strategy session might help the child identify her particular feelings (again, hopes and fears) about the visit with the batterer. The advocate should help the child identify a plan for handling the interactions/situations feared. For example, the child might say that she does not want her father to drink during her visit, that she wants weapons out of the house, that she would like to have someone other than her father drive during the visit, that she will not be forced to eat during the visit, that she will not be required to talk about her mother, that anything she takes to the visit will not be withheld by the father upon her return to the mother, or that the father will not come into her bedroom or the bathroom.

The advocate should discuss the various options that the child raises to help the child consider the advantages and disadvantages of each and how to best implement the selected options. The advocate must continue to evaluate the child's competence to implement whatever safety strategies are designed. In times of great stress, the simplest strategy may be the best.

Advocates should focus on what the child thinks she could do to keep herself safe. It is important that the advocate not quickly offer adult suggestions for safety plans. Silence is okay for a while. The advocate must give the child time to come up with solutions of her own. It is important for the advocate to go at the pace of the child. Adults may think of a zillion strategies. The child will probably best incorporate the one she identifies. If the child is blocked, the advocate can carefully measure out suggestions - one or two a session, assuming that there is plenty of time for development of the safety plan. The child must recognize that the planning is an on-going process and that she can engage in planning anywhere, including in the home of the batterer.

The child might also want to think of things that she could do to avoid confrontation with the batterer. Perhaps if he insists upon her attending his church, she can do so. Or if he hates her makeup or clothes, that she will dress in a way that does not irritate him. In thinking about ways that she could change her behavior in order to avoid conflict with the batterer, it is critical that she understand that it is not her obligation to do so, that these avoidance strategies may not immunize her from disputes with batterer, and that any violence used by her father is solely his responsibility.

At the next meeting, the advocate might want to meet with the mother and the child together to think about the components of a safety contract with the batterer. These components then could be the subject of negotiation with the batterer, either directly or through his attorney. If negotiations fail to achieve bottom-line results, then the mother might want to forward the proposed safety conditions to the court and ask the court to impose them upon the perpetrator.\*

Thereafter, once the mother and child know whether their contract for safety during the visit has been accepted or the court has imposed specific conditions, they can begin to make a plan about the first visit.

After the first visit, there should be another meeting to evaluate the safety issues related to the visit. Perhaps the contract needs to be modified or the plan needs to be supplemented.

Since the building of safety skills and plans is never completed, advocates must help children identify others outside of the domestic violence program who can assist the child in this continuing endeavor. The fundamentals of safety planning cannot be learned in one lesson. Thus, advocates need to help mothers or other committed adults learn how to assist children in the continuing process of design, implementation and evaluation of safety plans.

## **Possible Safety Strategies.**

Information. Children need to have information to act in an empowered way. Issues likely to arise during visitation should be identified and discussed beforehand. Problem-solving about anticipated interactions or events can help the child respond with clarity about issues she has examined and thought through.

For example, batterers often use visitation to gather information about their battered partners. A father may subject a child to extensive inquiry about the activities and friends of the mother. The child is often caught in an untenable position. If she tells, she fears that the mother's safety may be jeopardized, but if she doesn't tell, she may be beaten or penalized. This interrogation about the mother is virtually certain. The child should have information that questions may be directed at her about the mother and should have the opportunity to think about how she will respond to pressure for disclosure. It is critical that she understands that it is important to put her safety first. This probably means answering her father's questions. But it can also mean that once she comes home, she may share the line of inquiry with her mother.

If the battered mother is an alcoholic or an addict, the batterer is certain to query the child about the mother's consumption and/or her participation in treatment. The child's dilemma is compounded in these circumstances. In Al-Anon she is told that she need not keep the "family secret" about drug or alcohol consumption. On the other hand, she knows that the world and her father find fault with her mother for consumption. Thus, she may believe that to expedite her mother's recovery she should honestly talk about her consumption and/or treatment. Yet, to protect her mother from the violence or manipulation that the batterer may inflict upon learning of her consumption or failure in treatment, the child may feel that she must not disclose any information to the father. Children in this position are often confused. Again, it is important to help the child to understand that her safety is first. On the other hand, if she has the opportunity to strategically plan for response to her father's questioning, she may find a way to avoid the duplicity of hiding her mother's consumption and the danger in disclosing it. Advocates working with children whose mothers are addicted to alcohol or other drugs must be well-informed about the complications involved in integrating safety and recovery strategies for battered women and children. Advocates must be able to help children ferret out the apparent contradictions and develop strategies that have integrity for kids.

Children whose fathers have problems with drugs or alcohol need information about the likely conduct of the addicted parent during visitation. The father may be morose and tell the child that he cannot make it without her. The father may blame the child for his drinking/drugging problem.

The father may make grandiose and convincing promises of sobriety if the mother will reconcile. The father may deny any problem and blame the mother for fabrication of the drug or alcohol problem and the violence. The father may threaten suicide unless his specific demands are met. The uninformed child is in an intolerable position in the face of these manipulations.

Education of the child around predictable drug or alcohol behavior may be specifically drawn around the father and his likely conduct, but it should also be about alcoholism/addiction in general so that the child has a broad base of knowledge about typical behaviors of addicted/alcoholic parents. Further, the child might be taught skills to enhance her critical thinking in crisis or emotionally-laden situations. "Self-talk" is a critical skill. "I am not responsible for my dad's drinking....I am not responsible for his violence....I cannot make life better for him....I can and should put my safety first....I can call for help if there is an emergency....I can talk about how confused I feel later with my advocate....I can weather this storm."

Another example of information that children need in order to strategize for unsupervised visits is an understanding of their own conflict resolution around the issue of loyalty. During a visit a father may raise and test the child's loyalty to the father. Even if he doesn't, the child may find herself struggling with feelings of guilt and ambivalence about "betrayal" of the father. The confused child will surely begin to blame herself/himself for the violence inflicted by the batterer and the break-up of the family. Thus, safety planning must squarely address the issue of torn loyalties. Safety planning should also help children figure out that their father has exclusive responsibility for the violence and that the parents are the only ones responsible for making decisions to separate or divorce.

If there is a risk of medical emergency, e.g. the father or the child might have an insulin reaction, the child should be acquainted with emergency medical procedures that are age-appropriate. If the father has a history of mental illness or suicide attempts, the child should be taught crisis intervention skills, both to protect herself and her parent.

Each child's need for information related to unsupervised visitation will be different. Information and skills should be taught in an atmosphere of warmth and respect, encouraging the child's creativity and participation. It is critical that the learning environment does not evoke fear or despair and does not mislead the child into believing she has power or control over the batterer or his violence. Creating a balanced and empowering learning environment for children at risk is very difficult.

Avoidance. The child can attempt to avoid a situation (place, time, circumstance) of prior violence. Avoidance can be covert or overt. For example, if the batterer has typically assaulted the child in circumstances where the child has failed to meet his expectations for excellence at video games, the child might enthusiastically suggest other activities or even fake a temporary disability. [A word of caution - faking injury involves the child in lying to the father, a strategy which may put the child at greater risk. Thus, avoidance through lying is usually ill-advised.] However, if the father insists upon his own plans, perhaps the child could enlist someone in the father's extended family to share the occasion with them. The goal is to maximize safety by building a context that creates disincentives and adverse consequences for the father's violence.

**Phoning Home.** Children need to know how to use a phone, which includes learning how to call long distance, how to make a credit card call, and how to achieve operator assistance. What with the recent changes in the telephone system, it is particularly important for the child to learn how to be persistent and clear with telephone operators.

The child should be taught the phone number where the mother can be reached at all times during the visit. This may or may not be her home phone as the mother may choose not to disclose her residence phone to the batterer. The child may not be able to safeguard the privacy of this number, but may want to think about ways to protect the confidentiality of the number.

On the other hand, the mother may not be able to be available at a telephone during the entire visit. It might be helpful if she obtains an answering machine so that the child could leave messages about her safety and well-being. The child needs to know how to talk to an answering machine to indicate whether she is calling just to say hello and to hear her mother's reassuring voice or to report an emergency related to abuse. The child should practice making telephone calls, dealing with operators, and talking to answering machines.

**Emergency Assistance.** If there is a 911 emergency number in the community, the child could be taught to dial that number and ask for assistance from the police or the emergency medical team. The child will need to be able to give the location of the place to which she is calling emergency personnel. She will also need to use language which will convince the police that she is in an emergency situation. Where a father has been criminally convicted of domestic violence and there is an outstanding protection order or the child has been found to be abused by the father by the juvenile court and the police have notice of the visit, perhaps the child will be able to persuade the police to intervene quickly and protectively.

This strategy requires fairly substantial preparatory work by the advocate or the mother. They need to know if the police will respond quickly to a 911 call from a child and whether the police will take the child into protective custody rather than just writing a report and leaving the child with the batterer. Many 911 numbers now record the phone number and location of incoming calls to assist police and other emergency workers to find the location of the emergency even if there is a disconnection. It is important to find out if this display of the child's phone number occurs in the jurisdiction where she will be visiting with the father.

**Group Safety.** If there are several siblings visiting at the same time, safety planning may be at least partially a group effort. However, it is possible that a child may reject any responsibility for safety planning other than for himself and should not be cajoled into cooperation. Even the cooperative sibling may want to be minimally engaged in the protection of others. All the children in the family need to understand that they do not have the power to stop the abuse, are not responsible for the violence and that the failure of a safety plan can only be charged to the batterer. If one child has been physically, sexually or emotionally abused by the battering father, particular strategies might be articulated to protect that child. The other kids will then need to know how to "check in" with the abused child in both visible and invisible ways. They will need to know at least portions of the safety plan of the abused child.



Escape Logistics. A child will want to identify all of the potential escape route from the father's house - doors and windows that the child can open, herself. She should locate all of the telephones in the home of her father and perhaps attempt to keep any cordless phone in her immediate vicinity. She might want to also locate pay telephones and fire alarms near the father's home. If there is a nearby church, she might want to learn the office hours, meet the minister and learn how to gain entrance to the church for refuge. Other escape routes should be evaluated with the child.

Managing the intoxicated father. When a father becomes intoxicated during the visit, it is helpful if the child has strategized for handling the father during intoxication. Safety is paramount. Therefore, the child should try to keep herself between the father and routes of escape. The child should also try to remove all potential weapons from the immediate location of the intoxicated father. If there is a lot of noise from a stereo or television in the house, the child might try to turn down the noise and eliminate other stimulation such as lights, visitors, disputes with siblings, etc. The child should attempt to remain calm and speak in quiet, soothing tones. The child should try to maximize predictability and tell the father exactly what she is doing in quiet, slow speech - such as, "I'm going to walk back to the desk now and sit down."

Cooperation with an intoxicated father is generally a useful strategy except when the child's life is placed at enhanced risk by the cooperation. If the child believes that the father is not able to operate a vehicle, she could ask that they use other means of transportation. If the father insists, the child could choose to run.

It is critical that the child understand that she is not responsible for taking care of the father during his intoxication. Intoxicated people are hard to predict. He may be happy at one moment and violent the next. Therefore, it is absolutely legitimate for the child to put her life and well-being ahead of her father's if she believes that he is becoming erratic, paranoid and potentially violent. Escape must always be seen by the child as an effective option in a situation where her father is intoxicated.

Contract. It may be helpful to draw up a contract between the child and the battering father or have the court enter an order describing the parameters of unsupervised visitation. The contract might include the rights of the child, including the right to contact the mother or advocate by telephone at any time during the visit. The contract should also set forth the responsibilities of the father and any limitations on his liberties. These might include, an agreement not to consume drugs or alcohol during the visit, to make no inquiry about the mother and her life, to take the child to planned activities, to return all the child's clothing and personal possessions brought with her on the visit, to remove weapons from the house during the visit, to pick up the child at a specified location other than the mother's house, to refrain from forcing a child to eat, etc. The contract should reflect the child's preferences and incorporate safety measures.

The contract might include some back-up clauses that describe the child's rights in the event of the father's violation. For example, if the father becomes drunk, the child might have the right to leave and return to the mother. If this component was in a custody order, the mother might be able to enlist the police in helping her pick up the child should the child report the father's intoxication. It would also be helpful in subsequent litigation to have this paragraph in place. The batterer might oppose this element and insist that the child should, instead, go to his mother's. If the fall-back plan

with the grandmother is acceptable to the child and the mother, it might be preferable to agree to this provision for the safety of the child and then litigate on the violation of the agreement not to drink or consumer drugs. Contract issues certainly will involve negotiation back and forth. The final product will not guarantee the child's safety but may both enhance safety and avoid future disputes between the parents regarding the visitation.

**Kidnapping.** Few battering fathers will take children and flee with them. However, if there is any notion that this might happen, the child should probably learn additional safety strategies relating to kidnapping. The child should be helped to identify her surroundings - the names of towns, restaurants, roads, schools - all those things that would help the child understand where she is. Certainly, if she is old enough to read a map, teaching the child how to use the map as a means of locating the abduction route will enable her to help those attempting to rescue her.

Children can learn to tell people dressed in police or military uniforms their names, home phone number, and how to ask for help. Children can leave notes on napkins in restrooms not likely to be used by the perpetrator. There are many ways that the child can get a message out that she is being kidnapped without disclosing her efforts to the batterer. Secrecy in communication may be necessary for her own safety.

Since many fathers who snatch their children tell them that the mother is dead or doesn't care, the mother might tell the child that she is not to believe that the mother is dead unless a certain person (named by the mother) confirms that the mother has died. A child needs to hear that the mother loves her and will search for her diligently if there is an abduction. Abducting fathers also threaten children that they will kill the mother if the child reveals her whereabouts. The child should be told that this is not a meaningful threat, that the mother is acting to safeguard her own life and that the child should put her own safety first. The child needs to understand that the mother will be very clear with the police that both the mother and the child need protection.

Kidnapping a child against her will is a pretty desperate act by the perpetrator. This desperation may result in a hostage situation if the perpetrator is found. Thus, the child should understand that escape is the preferred strategy prior to a hostage situation, but if there is a hostage-taking, the child should carefully evaluate whether placating the father may be a safer strategy than resisting him. Placation may be more helpful if the police are attempting to intervene in the hostage situation.

## **Rehearsal.**

Children will need rehearsal of safety plans. Much of the rehearsal should occur as an ordinary event of daily life rather than as emergency safety measures related to visiting the father. Children learn better in situations where they are not anxious. An excess of focused rehearsal will make the child more anxious about the visit and diminish her ability to implement a safety plan. [Furthermore, mothers will be blamed for prejudicing children against fathers if most safety rehearsals are focused on visitation.]

Rehearsal can be done in journals whether the child draws pictures or writes her strategy. The battered woman might drive the child through the neighborhood where she is going to visit in order

to identify pay phones and fire alarms. If, for example, it is decided that the child should call her therapist if frightened or abused during the visit, the child needs to talk with the therapist about how to make contact. Again, rehearsal should be done in a way that builds the child's skills without increasing her fears. This is a difficult undertaking, at best.

## **Mother's Supplemental Safety Planning.**

The battered mother may want to consider things that she can do independent of the child to protect both the child and herself. (See section on Safety Planning for Battered Women.) However, as the child is developing her own safety skills and strategizing for visitation, the mother might want to think of supplementary safeguards. For example, if the mother thinks that confrontation and potential assault on her is more likely in her home, she may want to arrange for pick up and delivery of the child in a safer place - at the police station, at her brother's home, etc.

If the father changes residences or cars or license tags or promises the children magical vacations, the mother might begin to gather information about these changes and promises in order to prevent a kidnapping or to locate the children quickly. It might be helpful to obtain periodic pictures of the child and father together. These will greatly enhance the efforts of law enforcement should there be a snatch.

To evaluate the child's safety during the visit, she might enlist the aid of some friends who could monitor the visit. For example, a friend could attend the batterer's church to check out the child's well-being. Another friend could do an educational canvass through the batterer's neighborhood, going door to door to talk about children of battered women to neighbors and child abuse to the perpetrator; thereby somewhat subtly enlisting the aid of the neighbors in responding to any request by the child for help, observing the child to assess her safety and enlightening the perpetrator about the long-term consequences of abusing children and terrorizing mothers.

The possibilities of supplemental safety strategies by mothers related to visitation are endless. However, first some assessment needs to be made of the potential danger for the child during visitation. If it seems minimal, safety planning and skills development may not be essential. If there is great risk, more extensive work is warranted. Thus, dangerousness assessment is a fundamental part of safety planning. (See section on Dangerousness Assessment.)

## **Risks of Safety Planning.**

Several serious risks emerge from safety planning. The first is that the child will become fearful beyond the reality of danger and become immobilized by that fear. Another risk is that the child will feel she can stop the abuse or that she will believe she is at fault if the safety plan fails. Still another risk is that the battered mother who engages in this safety planning with the child will be seen by the court as an unfriendly parent for "interfering" with any reconciliation between the child and the father.

Since courts, family and friends who view the batterer as a bad partner but a good father may retaliate against the mother for encouraging safety planning, it might be better that the child engage in safety

planning with an advocate or therapist in consultation with the mother. If safety planning is seen as a professional activity rather than maternal resistance, hostile attitudes from the court and community may be minimized. If domestic violence programs begin to routinely engage in safety planning with kids, the service might be viewed by the courts as essential for children of battered women, so much so that safety planning could become an integral part of every visitation order entered in favor of a battering parent.\*

Another risk is that the batterer's breach of a visitation order or a safety contract will be ignored by the court; the court may choose continued batterer access over child safety. Not only is there the danger that children will become angry and disillusioned with their protecting mothers and advocates in these circumstances, but the children may despair of hope for safety and autonomy, concluding that they and their protectors are powerless and that survival will best be served by carefully accommodating and deferring to the abuser. But perhaps the child who is engaged in safety planning is in a better place than the child who has not engaged in this problem-solving process because the safety-planning child has a supportive community in which to revise planning, approach safety from a different angle, and examine justice-seeking as a lifetime pursuit.

Another risk which must be emphasized is that the battered women's movement does not have a great deal of experience in formulating safety plans for children of battered women. Certainly, we have been doing this work informally for many years, but as we formalize our practice, it may come under closer scrutiny. Therefore, safety planning should be done meticulously with the goals of teaching children safety skills and critical thinking, assisting the mother in protecting her child, and building an empowering relationship between the mother and child. Advocates should periodically consult with child development experts to evaluate whether safety planning activities adequately account for the cognitive and moral developmental capabilities of children of various ages.

Tasks confronting battered women separating from their partners are monumental. So much must be done and so quickly. Therefore, it is essential that advocates help battered women assess the need for immediate, extensive safety planning relating to children's visits with their fathers. If careful assessment of danger to the child reveals that the batterer is not likely to assault or kidnap her, much of what appears in this paper may be unnecessary. It may actually aggravate a situation in which the child can act with adequate safety and some comfort. The greater the risk to the child, the more important these deliberations.

## **Issues for Advocates**

This is new work for battered women's and children's advocates. We must evaluate the efficacy of safety planning with children routinely.

Questions to be answered are:

What is age-appropriate safety planning?

To what extent should children participate in the process of safety planning?

How do we create learning environments for children that do not foster false promises of safety, exacerbate the fears of children or facilitate the father's retaliation?

Is safety planning more hazardous than helpful? More time-consuming than productive?

The PennFree trainers hope that advocates will be able to share our experiences and evaluations about the efficacy of child safety planning as PCADV programs network on D & A issues over the course of the next several years.