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# The Risk Identification and Safety Assessment (RISA) Tool: A Trauma-Informed and Intersectional Approach to Risk Management



*Your Facilitators:*



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# The Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic

A specialized clinic in downtown Toronto offering free trauma-informed wrap-around services to women and gender-diverse people who have been subjected to violence.

- Legal advice, representation and Court support
- Professional counselling and transitional housing services
- Multilingual interpretation (200+ languages) and Social Purpose Enterprise
- Centralized Intake and client advocacy services, including case management and special projects

**We have served over 16,000 women and gender-diverse people from diverse communities last year and over 150,000 since 1985.**





# Why use a risk assessment tool?

- Helps us identify signs or factors we may otherwise miss
- Provides an understanding and shared language about risk for service providers
- Ensures we know what kinds of questions to ask, how to identify high-risk situations, and how to factor risks into safety planning with clients
- Can provide stronger evidence in the legal system

Importantly: an effective risk assessment tool can help save lives



## Research Insights from Survivors & Service Providers across Canada



Extensive Literature Review  
& Consultations with 597  
Service Providers across  
Canada (2020-2021)



Consultations with 38  
Survivors of GBV in Ontario  
using the Clinic's  
Consultation Protocol  
(2021-2022)



Piloting of a Risk  
Identification & Safety  
Assessment (RISA) Tool with  
220 service providers across  
Canada (2023)



# RISK ASSESSMENT RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Current tools focus mainly on PERPETRATOR BEHAVIOUR
- Tools need to consider specific RISK FACTORS faced by black & racialized women
- Tools are focussed primarily with PHYSICAL VIOLENCE
  - Need to include POWER & CONTROL
  - ... Heterosexual couples only
- Tools are developed & tested in ENGLISH
- Tools need input from SURVIVORS or testing in service provider settings

## Feedback & Engagement

Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic  
Freedom From Violence.

### FEEDBACK FROM SURVIVORS

On the Use of Safety Planning and Risk Assessment Tools by Service Providers

### MESSAGES TO SURVIVORS

FROM SURVIVORS

**SAFETY PLAN**

- RECOMMENDATIONS
- Include EMOTIONAL SAFETY
- EMPOWER US
- MORE ACCESSIBLE SAFETY PLANNING STRATEGIES

**RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS**

- FEEDBACK
- I NEED SUPPORT
- YOUR PATIENCE & UNDERSTANDING ARE CRUCIAL
- Don't JUDGE until you've walked in someone else's SHOES
- TOO TECHNICAL
- Service provider emotionally detached
- Telling my story was challenging
- FAST PACED
- NOT TO BE INTERVIEWED and INTERROGATED
- Help me paint a PICTURE...
- More questions on support systems in place
- Consider other forms of abuse, not only PHYSICAL
- Risk factor of ISOLATION
- Help survivors come to terms with ABUSE

**WHAT'S MISSING**

- TOOL ASSESSMENT TOOL
- OVERWHELMING
- Questions DID NOT ALIGN with individual EXPERIENCES
- REACH OUT FOR HELP
- Try THERAPY and COUNSELLING
- YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR MINDSET
- YOU DON'T DESERVE THIS... ABUSE IS NEVER OK
- We are RESILIENT
- How beautiful that something SO BAD turned out so GOOD
- TRUSTED FRIENDSHIPS HELP US FEEL SAFE
- We are LEARNING from each other's EXPERIENCES, RESILIENCE, SAFETY and COPING
- YOU ARE NOT ALONE

**MESSAGES TO SURVIVORS**

FROM SURVIVORS

WE ARE LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER'S EXPERIENCES, RESILIENCE, SAFETY AND COPING

TRUSTED FRIENDSHIPS HELP US FEEL SAFE

WE ARE RESILIENT

GRAPHIC JOURNEYS



# Introducing the RISA Tool

[www.riseaboverisk.ca](http://www.riseaboverisk.ca)





## Pause & Check-In

What did you find most *exciting* or *interesting* about the RISA demo?

What, if anything, are you *curious* or *concerned* about?

Can you see yourself using the RISA tool?



# Role Play

## Case Example:

Alex is 22 years old and lives with her same-sex partner. The couple has lived together for 3 years. Alex disclosed that her partner has been emotionally abusive since they moved in together and was recently physically violent.

Alex is thinking about leaving her partner but is unsure because she recently lost her job and has no means to pay for her living expenses if she were to move out. She is currently isolated from her family due to homophobia and is reluctant to reach out to them for support.

Alex is unsure what her legal rights and options might be for separating from her partner.



1. *What about Alex's situation jumps out to you as potentially putting her at risk of future harm?*
2. *Are there any safety considerations you can think of that might be particularly relevant to Alex's situation?*





Prompt: Please tell me about your current living situation

Are you currently living with the person(s) causing harm?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't Know
- ☐ Client Prefers Not to Say
- ☐ Skip for Now

Comments/Notes

Prompt: Sometimes there are considerations like whether to stay or leave your current living situation

Are you considering or planning to leave the person who is causing harm?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't Know
- ☐ Client Prefers Not to Say
- ☐ Skip for Now

Comments/Notes

Prompt: In some cases, survivors come to us after the person who harmed them has been charged or police have been involved

Has the person(s) causing harm to you been charged or released on bail?

- ☐ Yes (please describe below)
- ☒ No
- ☐ Don't Know
- ☐ Client Prefers Not to Say
- ☐ Skip for Now

If yes: What do you know about the charges? Any details that you think are important for me to know? Are there any protection orders in place (e.g. peace bond, restraining order). If yes, is there an expiry date that you are aware of?

Prompt: In some cases, survivors come to us for help with their family court application or after being served with court documents.

Are you planning to start an application in family court, or have you been served with court documents?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☒ Don't Know
- ☐ Client Prefers Not to Say
- ☐ Skip for Now

Comments/Notes

Client is unaware of her options in family court because she is not married. She might be considered common law, so should refer her to someone who can discuss legal options.



## If/When living with the person(s) who caused harm

While living with the person(s) who caused harm, you may want to work with your service provider to identify patterns of abuse in your situation as well as the forms of risk you may be facing, so that you can proactively plan ahead for yourself and your loved ones. Be sure to review the [General Safety Strategies](#) and [Emergency Safety Strategies](#) included in this plan.

In addition to the strategies included in this plan, you may want to consider:

- Create an emergency escape plan and memorize it, including places you can go to in a situation of an emergency
- Plan your emergency exit(s) in case of violence
- Consider what transportation options are available to get you to a safe place (e.g. taxi fare, bus routes, trusted support)
- In the case of an argument, try to move to a place with the lowest risk of getting hurt.

## If/When preparing to leave

Preparing and having a plan is essential if you decide to leave the relationship. There are steps you can take. Consider reviewing the recommendations below when planning to leave an abusive situation:

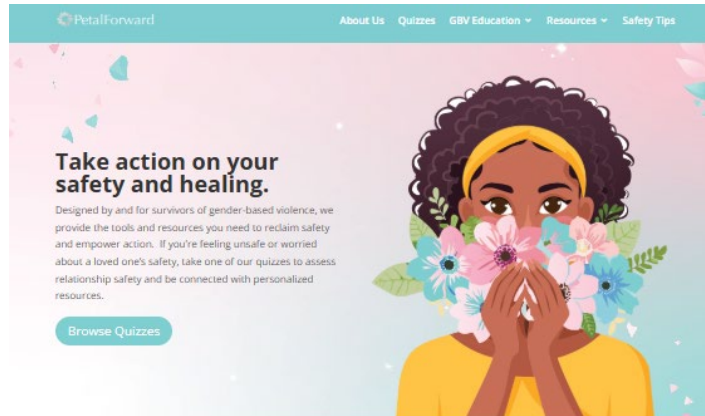
- Don't let the person who caused harm to know about your plan to leave
- Keep in mind where the safest exit is with clear pathways
- Try to hide any evidence of leaving
- Turn off your phone location services off. Review [Technological Safety section](#) for more tech safety tips
- Tell your children only after it is safe to do so.
- Tell trusted friends, family, or neighbours about the violence and give them my full address, including apartment number, so they can call the police if they need to.
- Set up a code word with people you trust so when you text them or speak the code word, they will know how to call the police right away.

If residing with the person causing harm, consider making the following arrangements:

- Know that physical safety is more important than any items you may want to bring with you o Create an emergency escape plan and memorize it
- Compose a list of important telephone numbers for contacts such as the police, the most appropriate shelter, a crisis line, and trusted supports
- Consider a trusted support or shelter that you can go to and safely stay with
- Keep a bag or suitcase packed or ready to pack for yourself and your dependent(s)
- Try to set aside some money and leave it with a trusted support
- Leave extra clothing and important small items with a trusted support
- Open a bank account and/or safety deposit box and have all documentation directed to you (or arrange to have mail sent to a trusted support)
- Consider what transportation options are available to get you to a safe place (e.g. taxi fare, bus routes, trusted support)



# Petal Forward Tool



## What is GBV?

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to any act of violence that is directed against an individual based on their gender identity or perceived gender. Sometimes it is used interchangeably with terms such as domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV). Explore the sections below to learn more about GBV, how to identify it, and how it can impact survivors.

### Understanding GBV

Gender-based violence (GBV) can take many forms, including physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. Click on the button below to learn more about GBV and its forms.

[Learn More](#)

### Healthy vs Unhealthy Relationships

Understanding the signs of a healthy or unhealthy relationship can be a helpful way of identifying potentially unsafe relationships. Click on the button below to learn more.

[Learn More](#)

### How Trauma Impacts Relationships

Trauma can affect people in many ways, including physically, emotionally, and relationally. To learn more about how trauma might be impacting your relationship, click on the button below.

[Learn More](#)

## We're Here to Help

Getting help for GBV can feel overwhelming, but we're here to help. Visit our Support page to find resources based on where you live and what you are looking for, whether it's legal support, housing, or just someone to talk to. Remember, you are not alone, and there are people ready to support you every step of the way. ❤️

[Access GBV Services](#)

## Feeling unsafe in your relationship?

Identify potential risk factors in your relationship that might be making you feel unsafe, receive personalized safety tips, and find out where to go for support. The questions are voluntary and you can skip any question.

[Start Quiz](#)

## Worried about a loved one?

Identify potential risk factors in your loved one's relationship that may be making you concerned for their safety and determine next steps. The questions are voluntary and you can skip any question.

[Start Quiz](#)

## Feeling unsafe online?

Identify potential risk factors that might be making you feel unsafe online, receive personalized safety tips, and find out where to go for support. The questions are voluntary and you can skip any question.

[Start Quiz](#)

## Feeling Unsafe Online Results

One or more of your answers suggest that you may be at risk of *significant* harm. It is important to speak to a qualified professional about your safety. Personalized safety tips and resources are provided below.

[Safety Tips](#)

[If/When living with the person\(s\) who caused harm](#)

[Social Media](#)

[Password Safety](#)

[Spyware](#)

[Web Browsing](#)

[Doxing](#)

[Impersonation](#)

[Online Child Abuse](#)

[I'm worried about my images being posted online](#)

[Suggested Resources](#)

Access Petal Forward at: [www.petalforward.ca](http://www.petalforward.ca)

## Next Steps



**Set-up** a free RISA account using the link provided and start exploring the interactive version of the RISA Questionnaire & Reports. Feedback welcome!

**Check-out** our free Learning Hub. Modules are also available via the Schlifer Clinic's YouTube account.

**Explore** the Petal Forward tool for survivors and share it with trusted networks and clients.

**Fill out** our feedback form to let us know how we did today.

Contact us at [RISA@schliferclinic.com](mailto:RISA@schliferclinic.com)





# Q&A

Please share any questions, comments, or concerns.



