Intimate partner violence: risk assessment and safety planning

What CRPO's manual asks when a client may be experiencing intimate partner violence: the risk factors it lists, no single profile, a safety plan built with the client, when to consider breaching confidentiality, and the standards it touches.

Study aid, not legal advice. Last verified against the official sources linked below on 11 November 2026.

1 What it is

- Behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes **physical, sexual or psychological harm**, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours (the World Health Organization's definition, as Ontario gives it).
- It covers violence by **current and former** spouses and partners.

2 Risk assessment: what CRPO says

- Structured tools to identify **red flags** indicating risk of harm.
- They are **not infallible**: they depend on the client feeling safe enough to be honest.
- Harm can occur even when someone is considered **low risk**.

3 Factors in the person causing harm

- **History of abuse**; escalation of violence; criminality.
- Age or declining physical, cognitive or mental health; access to **firearms**; substance use.
- **Attitudes** supporting violence. (CRPO's list, drawn partly from the Department of Justice Canada; not exhaustive.)

4 Factors in the person harmed

- Concerns about **future violence**.
- **Barriers** in accessing support.
- A biological child with a **different partner**.
- Assaulted by the partner while **pregnant**.

5 No single profile

- Intimate partner violence can be experienced by persons of **any gender**, sexuality, race, religion or class; there is no single profile of a perpetrator either.
- CRPO: examine **your own biases** about who may be harmed or causing harm.

6 The safety plan

1. Immediate **escape or intervention** plans, depending on the risk.
2. **Safe environments** at home, at work and in the neighbourhood.
3. Guidance for an **active violent incident**.
4. When **confidentiality** might be breached, and the client's preferences: a trusted person or service they would accept as an intervenor.

7 Breaching confidentiality? Weigh

- The **level of risk** to the client or a third party.
- The **nature** of the risk.
- The client's **wishes** about intervention, as the safety plan may set out.
- The **options** available, such as crisis response or police-partnered services.

8 The law behind it

- **PHIPA s. 40 (1)**: you may disclose without consent if you believe on reasonable grounds it is necessary to eliminate or reduce a significant risk of serious bodily harm. No statute requires it; get advice on a duty to warn.
- If **a child** may be in need of protection, the duty to report under the CYFSA (s. 125) applies, whatever the adult client wishes.

9 Fit the plan to the person

- Build each plan from the client's circumstances, **not a uniform approach**.
- CRPO's example, citing Women and Gender Equality Canada: **Indigenous women** often face fewer culturally appropriate resources, inaccessible services, distrust of law enforcement and a perceived lack of confidentiality in the justice system.

10 Your part, and the standards

- Know **evidence-based tools**, document safety planning, and educate the client about risks **without influencing** their decisions.
- Competence and referral when a case is too complex (Standards **1.9 and 2.1**).
- When the duty to report means breaching confidentiality (**1.3 and 3.1**).
- Sharing with the circle of care, with the client's permission (**3.3**).

11 What CRPO has not published

- CRPO has **no tools of its own**; its manual lists outside resources such as the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment training program.
- The manual says CRPO is developing a **practice guideline** on intimate partner violence; check its policies and guidelines page.

In danger: 911. Otherwise, assess with the client, plan with the client, and breach confidentiality only for the risk, after weighing it.

Official sources: CRPO, Professional Practice and Jurisprudence manual: Risk Assessment and Safety Planning and PHIPA, 2004 and Ontario: Intimate partner violence. Condensed from Mandatory Reporting and the Limits of Confidentiality and Client-Therapist Relationship. Independent study aid, not legal advice, not affiliated with CRPO or COMPASS.