

What Does Safety Mean?

To survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault, safety means freedom from violence or abuse. But what does safety mean to people facing issues in addition to violence, such as alcohol or drug addiction, mental health concerns, disabilities or social oppression? Here are some examples of what people may need, in addition to freedom from violence, in order to feel safe:

For a person in recovery from substance abuse or addiction: Having a network of people who support recovery and sobriety. Being in an environment free of constant triggers or pressure to drink alcohol or use illicit drugs.

For a person with mental health concerns: Being able to talk about one's feelings and issues, or one's own view of reality, without fear of being discounted or acquiring yet another label. If on medication, having a reliable source of affordable refills, so one doesn't have to worry about running out.

For a person with disabilities: Full accessibility to any needed services. Freedom from bullying or exploitation. Being taken seriously rather than discounted. Being seen as a full-fledged human being capable of making one's own decisions.

For a person who has experienced societal abuse or oppression: Being in an environment where diversity is respected. Freedom from being bullied, discounted or discriminated against because of one's race, sexual orientation or other difference. Freedom to talk about one's feelings, issues or view of reality without being stereotyped.

For a person facing intergenerational grief/historical trauma: Having one's own customs, values and beliefs respected and honored. Freedom to practice one's own customs or hold one's own values and beliefs without pressure to conform to the dominant culture.

For a person living in poverty: A reliable source of income, either from employment or public assistance. Knowing that one can access enough resources to meet basic needs.

For a person who is homeless: A place to keep one's belongings without fear of them getting stolen. A place to sleep without fear of arrest or of being harassed. Privacy for such things as taking a shower or changing clothes.

For a person being exploited by the commercial sex industry: Being able to talk about what's going on in one's life without fear of arrest or stigma. Being able to choose where one works, or with whom to have a sexual relationship. Freedom from exploitation.

For a person who is or has been incarcerated: Freedom to come and go from one's place of residence without constant monitoring. The ability to discuss problems or challenges without fear of "getting violated" (an interesting turn of phrase that means getting sent back to jail or prison for violating probation or parole).