

Domestic Violence: Safety Plan Guidelines

One of the most important things you can do when developing your safety plan is to talk to a victim advocate who can help you fully consider safety issues, understand your legal rights, and identify community resources (e.g., shelters, sources of financial assistance, or food banks). You can locate a victim advocate through a local domestic violence agency, which provides services at no-charge to victims. The National Crime Victim Helpline (1-800-FYI-CALL) can also help you prepare a safety plan and find victim assistance within your own community.

The following safety suggestions have been compiled from safety plans distributed by state domestic violence coalitions from around the country. Following these suggestions is **not a guarantee of safety**, but could help improve your safety situation.

Personal Safety with an Abuser

- Identify your partner's use and level of force so that you can assess danger to you and your children before it occurs.
- Try to avoid an abusive situation by leaving.
- Identify safe areas of the house where there are no weapons and where there are always ways to escape. If arguments occur, try to move to those areas.
- Don't run to where the children are as your partner may hurt them as well.
- If violence is unavoidable, make yourself a small target: dive into a corner and curl up into a ball with your face protected and your arms around either side of your head, fingers entwined.
- If possible, have a phone accessible at all times and know the numbers to call for help. Know where the nearest pay phone is located. Know your local battered women's shelter phone number. Don't be afraid to call the police.
- Let trusted friends and neighbors know of your situation and develop a plan and visual signal for when you need help.
- Teach your children how to get help. Instruct them not to get involved in the violence between you and your partner. Plan a code word to signal that they should get help or leave the house.
- Tell your children that violence is never right, even when someone they love is being violent. Tell them that neither you nor they are at fault or cause the violence, and that when anyone is being violent, it is important to keep safe.
- Practice how to get out safely. Practice with your children.
- Plan for what you will do if your children tell your partner of your plan or if your partner otherwise finds out about your plan.
- Keep weapons like guns and knives locked up and as inaccessible as possible.
- Make a habit of backing the car into the driveway and keeping it fueled. Keep the driver's door unlocked and the other doors locked for a quick escape.
- Try not to wear scarves or long jewelry that could be used to strangle you.
- Create several plausible reasons for leaving the house at different times of the day or night.
- Call a domestic violence hotline periodically to assess your options and get a supportive, understanding ear.

Getting Ready to Leave

- Keep any evidence of physical abuse, such as photographs of bruises and torn clothing.
- Know where you can go to get help; tell someone what is happening to you.
- If you are injured, go to a doctor or an emergency room and report what happened to you. Ask that they document your injuries.
- Plan with your children and identify a safe place for them (for example, a room with a lock or a friend's house where they can go for help). Reassure them that their job is to stay safe, not to protect you.
- Contact your local battered women's shelter and find out about laws and other resources available to you before you have to use them during a crisis.
- Keep a journal of all violent incidents, noting dates, events, and threats made.
- Acquire job skills as you can, such as learning to type or taking courses at a community college.
- Try to set money aside or ask friends or relatives to hold money for you.
- Store some belongings with a friend or relative. Leave clothing, medications, your Social Security card, a credit card (if possible), citizenship documents, children's school/medical records, children's toys, insurance information, copies of birth certificates, money, and other valued personal possessions with them.

The Day You Leave

- Leave when it is least expected, for example, during times of agreement and calm.
- Create a false trail. Call motels, real estate agencies, schools in a town at least six hours away from where you plan to relocate. Ask questions that require a call back to your house in order to leave those phone numbers on record.

General Guidelines for Leaving an Abusive Relationship

- Make a plan for how you will escape and where you will go.
- Plan for a quick escape.
- Put aside emergency cash as you can.
- Hide an extra set of car keys.
- Pack an extra set of clothes for yourself and your children and store them at a trusted friend or neighbor's house. Try to avoid using next-door neighbors, close family members, or mutual friends.
- Take with you important phone numbers (of friends, relatives, doctors, schools, etc.) as well as other important items, including:
 - ✓ Driver's license
 - ✓ Regularly needed medication
 - ✓ List of credit cards (account number and date of expiration) held by self or jointly, or the credit cards themselves if you have access to them
 - ✓ Pay stubs
 - ✓ Checkbooks and information about bank accounts and other assets.

If time is available, also take:

- ✓ Citizenship documents (such as your passport, greencard, etc.)
- ✓ Titles, deeds, other property information, and tax returns
- ✓ Medical records
- ✓ Children's school records and immunization records
- ✓ Insurance information
- ✓ Copy of marriage license, birth certificates, will, and other legal documents
- ✓ Verification of Social Security numbers
- ✓ Welfare identification
- ✓ Valued pictures, jewelry, or personal possessions.

After Leaving the Abusive Relationship

If you are getting a restraining order and the offender is leaving:

- Change your locks and phone number.
- Change your work hours and route taken to work.
- Change the route you take to transport children to school.
- Keep a certified copy of your restraining order with you at all times.
- Inform friends, neighbors, and employers that you have a restraining order in effect.
- Give copies of the restraining order to employers, neighbors, and schools along with a picture of the offender.
- If available in your community, register with **VINE Protective Order™** to be notified immediately when the order is served, when hearings will be held, and when any amendments to the order are filed. Ask your victim advocate or sheriff's office about this service.
- Call law enforcement to enforce the order.
- Carry a charged cell phone preprogrammed to 911.

If you leave:

- Consider renting a post office box for your mail.
- Be aware that addresses are listed on restraining orders and police reports.
- Be careful to whom you give your new address and phone number.
- Change your work hours if possible.
- Alert school authorities about the situation.
- Consider changing your children's schools.
- Reschedule any appointments that the offender is aware of when you leave.
- Use different stores and frequent different social spots.
- Alert neighbors and request that they call the police if they feel you may be in danger.
- Talk to trusted people about the violence.
- Replace wooden doors with steel or metal doors.
- Install security systems if possible.
- Install a lighting system that turns on when a person is coming close to the house (motion sensitive lights).
- Tell people you work with about the situation and have your calls screened by one receptionist if possible.
- Tell people who take care of your children which individuals are allowed to pick up your children. Explain the situation to them and provide them with a copy of the restraining order.
- Call the telephone company to request caller ID. Ask that your phone be blocked so that if you call, neither your partner nor anyone else will be able to get your new, unlisted phone number.
- Receive ongoing support from domestic violence and mental health service providers.

All rights reserved.

Copyright © 2005 by the National Center for Victims of Crime. This information may be freely distributed, provided that it is distributed free of charge, reprinted in its entirety, and includes this copyright notice.