

Special Issue:  
Cook Ministries

# THE HUGBOOK

Support and Resources  
for Those Experiencing  
Domestic Violence

Project & Writing  
Tai-Hsin Hsu

Site Supervision  
Karen Cook

Academic Mentorship  
Dr. Stephen Pavela



**ISSUE NO.01**

December 2025



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## 00. BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- A note to you
- How to use this handbook
- If you are in immediate danger

## 03. SAFETY TOOLS

- Your personalized safety plan...22
- Gun & medication safety...24
- Digital privacy & device safety...24
- Stalking & tracking awareness...25
- Packing a "go bag"...26

## 01. I NEED

- Basic Safety & Daily Life...01
- Emotional & Mental Health...10
- Legal & Documentation...12
- Family & Dependents...15

## 04. UNDERSTANDING ABUSE

- What is abuse...28
- Power & Control Wheel...29
- Why leaving is hard...31
- Trauma responses...32

## 02. I AM

- Immigration & Status...17
- Male...19
- Disability...20
- Youth & Minors...21

## 05. REFERENCES & KEY RESOURCES

- Reference List...33
- Key Resources...33

# 00.BEFORE YOU BEGIN

## IF YOU ARE IN IMMEDIATE DANGER

Call 911, NOW.  
and RUN.

## A NOTE TO YOU

First of all, it's NOT your fault.  
If you feel in danger, then you really are in danger. Please trust your instincts.  
If you need help, then seek help. You are not alone.  
Thank you for making the first step.

## HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This is a comprehensive resource handbook for domestic violence survivors, and we provide an offline text version of resources centered on Alabama. You can look at the table of contents and turn to the section with the same color as the number to find the resources you need.

This book may not list every resource, but it can at least give you a direction.

If you are planning to leave, please refer to the "Moving / Leaving Safely" and "Safety Tools" sections. Leaving (or planning to leave) may cause the abuse to escalate. If you plan to leave, please make a careful and detailed plan and make sure you have all available resources.

This book is designed to look like a mini travel magazine as a form of "camouflage," so survivors can read it safely, but survivors should still prioritize their own safety over gathering information.

**A LIST OF THE MOST COMMONLY USED RESOURCES CAN BE FOUND ON THE FINAL PAGE.**

# 01. I NEED...

## BASIC SAFETY & DAILY LIFE

- I need a place to sleep
- I need a shower/hygiene
- I need food
- I need transportation
- I need to store or retrieve my belongings
- I need to charge my phone / I need internet access

## EMOTIONAL & MENTAL HEALTH

- I need someone to talk to
- I need counseling / therapy



## LEGAL & DOCUMENTATION

- I need legal help
- I need a Protection From Abuse Order (PFA)

## FAMILY & DEPENDENTS

- I need help with my children
- I need help with my pet

# **BASIC SAFETY & DAILY LIFE**

## **I NEED A PLACE TO SLEEP**

### **ALABAMA'S EMERGENCY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTERS**

Due to space limitations, not all shelters are listed. If you cannot find a shelter in your area, please call 211 or 888-421-1266 for assistance.

- Jefferson / St. Clair / Blount
  - YWCA Central Alabama 24/7:(205) 322-4878
  - One Place (Greater Birmingham and Jefferson County) Mon-Thu 8:30-4:30 Fri 8:30-1:00 (205) 453-7261
  - First Light (Female homeless only) 24/7: (205) 323-4277
  - Pathways (Female& Kids homeless only) Mon: 8-5 Tue-Fri: 7-5 Sat: 7-3 Sun:9-3 (205) 322-6854
- Shelby / Coosa / Clay / Chilton
  - SafeHouse of Shelby County 24/7:(205) 669-7233
- Tuscaloosa County/ Bibb / Fayette / Lamar
  - Turning Point 24/7:(205) 758-0808
- Cullman County/ Winston
  - Victim Services of Cullman 24/7:(256) 734-6100
- Madison County (Huntsville) / Morgan (Decatur) / Limestone
  - Crisis Services of North Alabama 24/7: (256) 716-1000
- Etowah/ Calhoun County (Anniston / Oxford) / Cleburne
  - 2nd Chance, Inc. 24/7: (256) 547-6888
- Montgomery / Autauga / Elmore
  - Family Sunshine Center 24/7: 1-800-650-6522 or (334) 263-0218

### **IF NONE OF THE ABOVE PHONE NUMBERS CAN BE REACHED**

Please consider spending time in a hospital emergency room. There is air conditioning, lighting, and security staff, and it is safer than being alone outside.

### **MALE SURVIVORS MAY FACE SITUATIONS WHERE HOUSING IS NOT AVAILABLE**

The above organizations all provide referral services, but if you truly cannot find housing), please consider: The Firehouse Shelter (205) 252-9571; Shepura Men's Center (205) 324-4673.

### **A FINAL PROTECTION ORDER**

May grant you temporary exclusive use of the home and order the abuser to leave, even if the home is in their name or jointly owned. Discuss this option with your attorney or prosecutor (Ala. Code § 30-5-7(c) (2024)).

# BASIC SAFETY & DAILY LIFE

## I NEED A SHOWER/HYGIENE

The previously mentioned "I need a place to sleep" organizations usually allow people to use the shower and laundry facilities without staying overnight. Please call to check. Also, many gyms, such as Planet Fitness, have shower facilities. A basic monthly membership that costs only \$15–20 allows you to use them, and they usually stay open until late.

## ORGANIZATIONS IN ALABAMA THAT PROVIDE SHOWERS OR HYGIENE KITS

- **Birmingham Area:**
  - Pathways (Women's Day Center) 9-3 365days (205) 322-6854 — Serves women & children; provides laundry and shower facilities, clothing, and hygiene kits.
  - Christian Service Mission (205) 397-9999 — Provides hygiene kits.
  - Bundles of Hope Diaper Bank (focused on women's menstrual products and diapers) (205) 607-2112
- **Huntsville / North AL:**
  - Downtown Rescue Mission (256) 536-2441 — Distributes supplies.
- **Mobile / South AL:**
  - Catholic Social Services (Mobile) (251) 434-1500 — Distributes supplies.
  - Dumas Wesley Community Center (251) 479-0649 — Distributes supplies.
- **Montgomery / Central AL:**
  - Friendship Mission (334) 281-2395 — Distributes supplies.



# BASIC SAFETY & DAILY LIFE

## I NEED FOOD

### DRINKING WATER

- If it is daytime, public libraries, sports fields, and schools open to the public all have free drinking fountains.
- If it is nighttime, ask the staff at fast-food restaurants or gas-station convenience stores. They are usually willing to provide free drinking water. If you need hot water, gas station convenience stores can usually provide it for free.

### MEALS

Soup kitchens provide free hot meals (usually lunch). Below are some hot-meal distribution locations:

#### **Jefferson County (Greater Birmingham)**

Pathways Day Center | 209 19th St N, Birmingham (205) 322-6854

- Daily 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM. Women and children only.

Firehouse Ministries | 626 2nd Ave N, Birmingham (205) 252-9571

- Daily lunch 11:30 AM (open to the public). Daily dinner 7:00 PM (residents first). Men only.

Community Kitchens (Southside) | 1180 11th Ave S, Birmingham (St. Andrew's Church) (205) 251-3569

- Daily lunch 12:30 PM – 1:30 PM.

Community Kitchens (Woodlawn) | 5712 1st Ave N, Birmingham (Grace Episcopal Church) (205) 251-3569

- Daily lunch 12:30 PM – 1:30 PM.

Church of the Reconciler | 112 14th St N, Birmingham (205) 324-6402

- Sunday breakfast 9:30 AM. Weekdays: snacks/coffee at irregular hours.

#### **Tuscaloosa County**

Tuscaloosa Community Soup Bowl | 1711 23rd Avenue, Tuscaloosa (205) 752-2421

- Daily lunch 11:00 AM – 12:45 PM.

#### **Madison County**

Rose of Sharon Soup Kitchen | 723 Arcadia Circle NW, Huntsville (256) 536-2970

- Tuesday–Friday lunch 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM.

Downtown Rescue Mission | 1400 Evangel Dr NW, Huntsville (256) 536-2441

- Daily lunch 11:30 AM. Daily dinner 5:00 PM. Please enter through the "Dining Hall" entrance.

Salvation Army (Huntsville) | 2114 Oakwood Ave, Huntsville (256) 536-5576

- Daily dinner around 5:00 PM.

#### **Calhoun County**

The Soup Bowl | 1516 Moore Ave, Anniston (256) 236-6794

- Monday–Saturday lunch 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM.

#### **Mobile County (Mobile / Southern Coastal Area)**

One Meal Mobile | Beckham Field, MLK Jr. Ave & Warren St Park

- Daily dinner 4:00 PM. Pet-friendly.

Waterfront Rescue Mission | 279 N Washington Ave, Mobile (251) 433-1847

- Daily dinner 4:00 PM. Primarily serves men.

#### **Montgomery County**

Friendship Mission | 3561 Mobile Hwy, Montgomery (334) 281-2395

- Daily dinner around 4:00 PM. Primarily men.

# BASIC SAFETY & DAILY LIFE

## I NEED FOOD

### MISSED A MEALTIME?

Food banks/food pantries may be a good option. They usually have microwave meals or ready-to-eat items you can use in emergencies. But please note that these places often require ID, and sometimes proof of address (such as a utility bill). They often also carry baby food/pet food and hygiene products — ask the staff on site.

### FOOD BANKS

#### **Jefferson County (Greater Birmingham)**

Greater Birmingham Ministries (GBM) | 2304 12th Ave N, Birmingham (205) 326-6821

- Monday–Friday 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM. Appointment required.

Christian Service Mission | 3600 3rd Ave S, Birmingham (205) 397-9999

- Monday–Thursday. Call to confirm hours.

Catholic Center of Concern | 712 4th Court West, Birmingham (205) 786-4388

- Monday–Thursday 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM. ID required. Primarily provides emergency food boxes.
- Salvation Army (BHM Area Command) | 2015 26th Ave N, Birmingham (205) 328-2420
- Daily—must line up and register on site.

#### **Tuscaloosa County**

Temporary Emergency Services (TES) | 1705 15th St, Tuscaloosa (205) 758-5535

- Monday–Friday 9:00 AM – 3:30 PM. ID required.

Catholic Social Services (West AL) | 608 37th St E, Tuscaloosa (205) 759-1268

- Monday/Wednesday/Friday 9:30 AM – 11:30 AM. Appointment required.

#### **Madison County**

The Manna House | 2110 S Memorial Pkwy, Huntsville (256) 503-4848

- Monday/Wednesday/Thursday 4:00–6:00 PM. Walk-up distribution.

Huntsville Assistance Program (HAP) | 1001 Monroe St SW, Huntsville (256) 539-2320

- Monday–Friday 9:00 AM – 1:30 PM (closed Wednesdays).

#### **Calhoun County**

Interfaith Ministries | 1431 Gurnee Ave, Anniston (256) 237-1472

- Monday–Thursday 9:00 AM – 2:00 PM. Provides food boxes and clothing vouchers.

Community Enabler Developer | 104 E Blue Mountain Rd, Anniston (256) 237-6144

- Appointment required.

#### **Mobile County**

Catholic Social Services (Mobile) | 188 S Florida St, Mobile (251) 434-1500

- Monday–Friday 8:45 AM.

Feeding the Gulf Coast (Headquarters) | 5248 Mobile South St, Theodore (251) 653-1617

- Call them — they will tell you the closest mobile distribution site for that day.

#### **Montgomery County**

Mercy House | 2412 Council St, Montgomery (334) 676-3040

- Provides multiple daytime services, including the distribution of household groceries.

Montgomery Community Action | 1066 Adams Ave, Montgomery (334) 263-3474

- Appointment required.

# BASIC SAFETY & DAILY LIFE

## I NEED FOOD

### LITTLE FREE PANTRY / BLESSING BOX:

These are also useful options. They are small outdoor boxes filled by community volunteers (so they may sometimes be empty). They are open 24 hours and require no ID.

#### **Jefferson County (Greater Birmingham)**

- Avondale UMC 4220 3rd Ave S, Birmingham, AL — outside the church
- Beloved Community Church 131 41st St S, Birmingham, AL
- Grace Episcopal Church 5712 1st Ave N, Birmingham, AL
- Trinity UMC 1625 Oxmoor Rd, Homewood, AL
- All Saints Episcopal 110 W Hawthorne Rd, Homewood, AL
- East Lake UMC 7753 1st Ave S, Birmingham, AL — roadside
- Vestavia Hills UMC 2061 Kentucky Ave, Vestavia Hills, AL
- Crestwood Pharmacy 5502 Crestwood Blvd, Birmingham, AL

#### **Madison County**

- The Manna House 2110 S Memorial Pkwy, Huntsville — basket placed at entrance
- Latham UMC 109 Weatherly Rd SE, Huntsville — edge of parking lot
- Epworth UMC 2102 Epworth Dr NE, Huntsville — red outdoor box

#### **Tuscaloosa County**

- University Lutheran Church 911 5th Ave, Tuscaloosa
- Forest Lake UMC 1711 4th Ave, Tuscaloosa

#### **Mobile County**

- Central Presbyterian 1260 Dauphin St, Mobile
- Dauphin Way UMC 1507 Dauphin St, Mobile

#### **Lee County**

- Auburn UMC 137 S Gay St, Auburn
- Opelika Public Library 1100 Glenn St, Opelika



# BASIC SAFETY & DAILY LIFE

## I NEED TRANSPORTATION

- If you escape your home in an emergency, you can call 911 and request police transport to the nearest agency.
- Most shelters, such as One Place or YWAC, can provide free bus tokens or arrange transportation for survivors who need to go to court, hospitals, or other essential locations. Please ask the staff at the agency.
- Volunteers from faith-based organizations may also offer similar services.
- If the abuser owns more than one vehicle and you have none, a final protection order may grant you temporary use of one of their vehicles. Talk with your attorney or prosecutor to see whether this can be requested in your case (Ala. Code § 30-5-7(c) (2024)).
- Low-cost public transportation systems are also available, usually costing \$1–3 per ride, with no change given. Check routes by using Google Maps under the “Transit” option.
- **Please do not rely on public transit as an escape tool**—these systems often experience delays or skipped stops. However, they can be useful as regular transportation before you are able to save enough money for a car (note: most pets must be in carriers).

### **Jefferson County**

- MAX Transit (bus system covering downtown and nearby suburbs)
- Birmingham On-Demand (also called MAX On-Demand; microtransit system with an app)

### **Mobile County**

- The Wave Transit (citywide bus system)
- RideMICRO (microtransit system serving specific zones; app available)

### **Montgomery County**

- The M (city bus system)
- The M Microtransit (microtransit system; app available)

### **Baldwin County**

- BRATS On-Demand (microtransit system; app available; mileage-based fare)

### **Tuscaloosa County**

- Tuscaloosa Transit (The Trolley)

### **Madison County**

- Orbit Transit (city bus system)

### **Lee County**

- Tiger Transit (primarily campus service)
- Lee-Russell Public Transit (public bus service)
- L-R On-Demand (microtransit system; phone reservation at (334) 749-9092)

### **Calhoun County**

- ACTS (The Trolley)
- Blount County
- BCAT (phone reservation 24 hours in advance; (205) 973-0423)

### **Etowah County**

- The Trolley (DART)
- ECATS (phone reservation 24 hours in advance; (251) 867-0584)

### **St. Clair County**

- Public Transit (phone reservation 24 hours in advance; (205) 338-1352)

# BASIC SAFETY & DAILY LIFE

## I NEED TRANSPORTATION



### LONG-DISTANCE TRANSPORTATION

- Shelters may provide vouchers or one-way tickets for long-distance travel. Options include:
- Greyhound (multiple Alabama stations)
- Megabus (select routes)
- Amtrak (Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, Anniston)
- Domestic flights from airports (BHM, HSV, MGM, MOB)

### TRAVELERS AID

- Travelers Aid of Greater Birmingham provides transportation assistance for people in emergency situations who need to leave the Birmingham area.
- Call (205) 322-5426 or apply online:  
<https://www.travelersaidbhm.org/travelers-assistance>

# BASIC SAFETY & DAILY LIFE

## I NEED TO STORE OR RETRIEVE MY BELONGINGS

- Returning home to retrieve or store belongings can be **dangerous**; abusers may escalate when they realize the survivor is coming back. Please do not return alone—seek assistance from a shelter advocate, police, or a trusted friend.
- You can contact the police department in advance (using the non-emergency numbers below), explain your situation, and request a “civil standby” (police escort). If circumstances allow, the police may send an officer to accompany you while you retrieve your belongings. They will not intervene in disputes—their role is only to ensure that no one becomes violent. Due to officers’ workload, the entire process may allow for only about 30 minutes.

### Birmingham Metro Area

- Birmingham Police: (205) 328-9311
- Jefferson County Sheriff: (205) 325-1450
- Hoover Police: (205) 822-5300
- Bessemer Police: (205) 425-2411
- Shelby County Sheriff: (205) 669-4181

### Mobile / Gulf Coast

- Mobile Police: (251) 208-7211
- Mobile County Sheriff: (251) 574-8633
- Baldwin County Sheriff: (251) 937-0202

### Tuscaloosa / West Alabama

- Tuscaloosa Police: (205) 349-2121
- Tuscaloosa County Sheriff: (205) 752-0616

### Other Areas

- Search online: Google “[Name of your city] police non-emergency number.”
- Dial 311: In some larger cities, dialing 311 connects you to city services who can route your call.
- Call 911 (with caution): If you cannot find a non-emergency number, you may dial 911 and immediately say:
  - “This is a non-emergency call. I need to request an officer for a civil standby.”
- If you need to store belongings overnight while living in shelter, self-storage units may be the most feasible option. Please pay with non-traceable methods such as cash. Public Storage often offers a first month for \$1 promotion, which may be a useful low-cost option.
- **Please remember to carry your essential documents (including passport, ID, protective order), cash/credit cards, and medications with you at all times.**
- **Always prioritize your own safety. No belongings are worth risking your life to retrieve.**

### Huntsville / North Alabama

- Huntsville Police: (256) 722-7100

### Madison County Sheriff: (256) 722-7181

- Decatur Police: (256) 341-4600

### Montgomery / Central Alabama

- Montgomery Police: (334) 625-2651
- Montgomery County Sheriff: (334) 832-4980
- Auburn Police: (334) 501-3100

# BASIC SAFETY & DAILY LIFE

## I NEED TO CHARGE MY PHONE / I NEED INTERNET ACCESS



- Places like libraries, community service centers, airports, and hospitals usually provide free outlets and Wi-Fi, and libraries and some community centers also offer computers.
- If it is after business hours, please consider university libraries, airports, and hospitals with emergency rooms.
- Best Buy, Target, and Walmart allow you to buy a disposable phone (also known as a burner phone) with cash and without providing identification, and the price is usually under 100 dollars. You can also consider getting a prepaid card at the places mentioned above to prepare a new phone number that does not require identity verification.
- Apps like “Burner Phone” and “Google Fi” (which offers free Wi-Fi trials) also provide anonymous phone number services, but be aware that downloading and paying may allow the service provider to have your payment information.

# EMOTIONAL & MENTAL HEALTH

## I NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO

- If you are not in a crisis and do not have severe emotional distress, but feel lonely, anxious, or need someone to listen, try the free 24/7 "Warm Line" phone service. Trained peers are willing to listen to you. Wings Across Alabama: 1-844-999-4647 (1-844-99-WINGS)
- If your phone, tablet, or laptop might be monitored by the abuser, avoid online forums or chats. Use a safe device (a library computer, a friend's phone, or a shelter device).

### ONLINE PEER SUPPORT AND COMMUNITIES

- Bloom by Chayn: Anonymous 1:1 chat service and self-paced recovery courses.
- Pandora's Project: Message boards and chat rooms for survivors of DV and sexual violence.
- AfterSilence.org: Peer support forums specifically for sexual assault survivors.
- 1in6.org: Peer support for male sexual violence survivors.
- MaleSurvivor: Resources and discussion forums for male survivors.
- isurvive.org: Volunteer-driven forums for adult survivors of child abuse.
- SurvivorForum: A discussion space for adult (18+) survivors of childhood sexual abuse.
- RAINN's Youth HelpRoom: Moderated online group chats for youth (14–24) survivors.
- LGBTQ National Help Center (non-crisis chat & phone): 1-888-843-4564 | glbthotline.org
- Trans Lifeline (peer-run, non-crisis support): 1-877-565-8860

  

- Please note: **Peer support is NOT therapy**—peer listeners cannot give you any form of treatment, legal advice, or alternative recommendations, but this kind of listening can help you feel that you are not alone.



# EMOTIONAL & MENTAL HEALTH

## I NEED COUNSELING / THERAPY

- **Crisis support:** **988 Lifeline** is free, 24/7, confidential, and available by call, text, or online chat. Multiple languages are supported. If you are feeling overwhelmed, please use this resource.
- When people experience something unusual or frightening (a traumatic event), the brain goes into protective mode. You may feel numb, blank, angry, guilty, ashamed, or constantly on edge. You may have memory gaps or feel disconnected. These are common trauma responses (see "Trauma Responses" in Section 04: Understanding Abuse). But if these reactions start interfering with your daily life, please consider talking to someone.
- Important Safety Warning: Avoid Couples Counseling: If you are in an abusive relationship, **do NOT go to couples counseling** (joint therapy) with your partner. Abuse is about power and control, not "communication." The abuser may manipulate the session, deny your experience, or punish you afterward for what you say.
- **You are not required to talk about your trauma right away. You can go at your own pace.**

### SAFE, LOW-COST, OR FREE COUNSELING OPTIONS:

- Oasis Counseling for Women & Children (205) 933-0338 | UAB Community Counseling Clinic (205) 996-2414 | Gateway (205) 510-2755
- Open Path Collective [openpathcollective.org](http://openpathcollective.org)

If you live in another county, you can also contact your local Community Mental Health Center, which typically accepts Alabama Medicaid and offers sliding-scale services.

- **Nationwide Hotlines You Can Use From Anywhere in Alabama**

SAMHSA Mental Health Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357) | RAINN (Sexual Assault Hotline): 1-800-656-HOPE | StrongHearts Native Helpline: 1-844-762-8483 | Trevor Project (LGBTQ youth): 1-866-488-7386 | Text "START" to 678678

### HOW TO START COUNSELING

- Call or email the provider.
- Ask about:
  - sliding scale (income-based fees)
  - self-pay rates
  - telehealth availability
  - whether they accept your insurance
- Ask: **"Do you have experience with domestic violence and trauma-informed care?"**
- If the therapist feels dismissive, judgmental, or unsafe, it is okay to switch providers.

#### Types of Trauma Therapy (Plain-Language Explanation):

- **Trauma-Focused CBT (TF-CBT):** Helps you understand and process trauma memories and emotions.
- **EMDR:** An evidence-based method for treating PTSD; many DV survivors find it helpful.
- **Somatic or Body-Based Therapy:** Helps with hypervigilance, tension, and physical symptoms of trauma.

### SAFETY AND PRIVACY TIPS

- If the abusive partner still monitors your phone, mail, or insurance:
- Ask the provider not to leave voicemail if it is unsafe.
- Ask to disable appointment reminders that may appear on your phone.
- Ask the clinic not to send mail to your home address.
- If using insurance, be aware the abuser may see EOB statements (Explanation of Benefits).
- If this is a risk, self-pay or sliding-scale therapy may be safer.
- Consider telehealth if leaving home is unsafe.

# LEGAL & DOCUMENTATION

## I NEED LEGAL HELP

- If you need legal help, start by asking your shelter or advocacy agency — many have on-site legal partners or trusted referral agencies.

## HERE ARE SOME LEGAL AID ORGANIZATIONS YOU CAN CONTACT:

### **Jefferson County**

- One Place Metro Family Justice Center | 1135 14th Ave S, Birmingham (205) 453-7261
- Legal Services Alabama (BHM Office) | 1820 7th Ave N, Suite 200, Birmingham (205) 328-3540

### **Madison County**

- Legal Services Alabama (Huntsville) | 125 Holmes Ave NW, Huntsville (256) 536-9645
- Crisis Services of North Alabama | (256) 716-1000 24/7 hotline

### **Mobile County**

- Legal Services Alabama (Mobile) | 104 St. Francis St, Suite 700, Mobile (251) 433-6560
- Penelope House Court Advocacy | (251) 342-8994

### **Montgomery County**

- Legal Services Alabama (Montgomery) | 2567 Fairlane Dr, Suite 200, Montgomery (334) 832-4570
- One Place Family Justice Center (MGM) | 530 S Lawrence St, Montgomery (334) 262-7378

### **Tuscaloosa County**

- Legal Services Alabama (Tuscaloosa) | 2315 9th St, Suite 3A, Tuscaloosa (205) 758-7503

### **Dallas / Wilcox / Perry**

- Legal Services Alabama (Selma) | 801 Alabama Ave, Suite 250, Selma (334) 872-2355

### **Lee County (Auburn / Opelika)**

- Legal Services Alabama | 866-456-4995

Here is a website that can help you understand the related laws: <https://www.womenslaw.org/laws/al>



# LEGAL & DOCUMENTATION

## I NEED A PROTECTION FROM ABUSE ORDER (PFA) (AL CODE § 30 (2024))

### BEFORE YOU START: IMPORTANT NOTES

- PFAs are free and you do NOT need a lawyer to file.
- Who can you file a PFA against?
- A current or former spouse
- Someone you live(d) with
- Someone you share a child with
- Someone you are dating or used to date
- A current or former intimate partner
- A qualifying family/household member
- If the abuser is not currently living in Alabama, you may need to file for protection in the state where the abuser lives. This can be complicated and may create safety risks (for example, requiring travel to that state or providing a mailing address). Please speak with an attorney or a domestic violence advocate before taking action.
- You don't have to go alone — One Place (1135 14th Ave S, Birmingham, AL) has advocates who can help you fill out the forms and often file them electronically so you don't have to handle everything at the courthouse by yourself.
- Prepare printed evidence:
- Courts usually require printed copies. Prepare three sets: For the judge, For yourself, For the abuser/their attorney
- Include: photos of injuries, screenshots of threats, police report numbers, medical notes, and any documentation of past abuse

### STEPS:

#### Step 1: Go to the Courthouse

- Where:
  - Go to the County Circuit Court in the county where the abuse happened or where you currently live.
  - You can ask the security officers at the courthouse entrance for protection so you do not run into the abuser. They can guide you through a different entrance, provide a separate waiting area, or offer other safety measures.
- Office: Circuit Clerk's Office
- Bring:
  - Your ID
  - Information about the abuser (address, workplace, vehicle details)
  - Printed evidence (3 copies of each item)

# LEGAL & DOCUMENTATION

## I NEED A PROTECTION FROM ABUSE ORDER (PFA) (AL CODE § 30 (2024))

### STEPS:

#### Step 2: File the Petition

- Tell the clerk you want to apply for a Protection From Abuse Order (PFA).
- Be sure to request the following:
  - Ex Parte (Emergency Order)
  - Let the judge issue a temporary PFA the same day.(May take 3 work days)
  - Pet Protection (If you have one.)
  - Confidential Address (Especially if you are in a shelter or safe-location hotel)
- Child-related protections you can request:
  - Temporary custody
  - Temporary decision-making authority
  - Restrictions on abuser contact with children
  - Supervised visitation
  - Safe exchange locations
  - Preventing the removal of children from Alabama
  - Blocking access to the children's school/medical records

#### Step 3: Judge Review

- A judge will review your petition the same day or the next day.  
If they believe you are in danger, you will receive a Temporary PFA.

#### Step 4: Service of Process

- The Sheriff's Office must serve the abuser.
- The order is not active until this happens.
- You can call the Sheriff's Office to check the status.

#### Step 5: Final Hearing

- Held about 14 days later. You must attend.
- Bring:
  - Your printed evidence (all 3 sets)
  - Your safety advocate (if you have one)
  - Your attorney, if possible
- If granted, a Final PFA may include:
  - Temporary custody
  - Temporary exclusive use of the home
  - Temporary use of a vehicle
  - No-contact rules
  - Children protections
  - Pet protections



#### Step 6: Enforcement - If the Abuser Violates the Order

- Keep a copy with you at all times: Keep one in your purse, one in your car, and give copies to your children's school or daycare.
- Call 911 immediately: If the abuser contacts you or comes near you, call 911. Tell the operator: "I have a Protection From Abuse Order, and it is being violated."
- Violation is a crime: In Alabama, violating a PFA is a Class A Misdemeanor (and can be a felony upon repeated violation), meaning they can be arrested immediately.

# FAMILY & DEPENDENTS

## I NEED HELP WITH MY CHILDREN

Caring for children while experiencing abuse can feel overwhelming.

By reading this section and trying to protect your children, you are already a good enough parent. This chapter provides some information in hopes of reducing your burden.

## WHAT MAY BE DANGER SIGNS?

Abuse of children is not limited to physical harm. If any of the following situations appear, they may be warning signs:

- The abuser threatens or intimidates you by saying they will harm the children, or threatens the children directly.
- The children witness or hear abusive behavior.
- The abuser refuses to provide food, medical care, or neglects the children.
- The abuser destroys the children's belongings (school bags, dolls, etc.) or pets.
- The abuser touches the children inappropriately (or kisses and does other things that make you feel uncomfortable — trust your instincts).

## HERE ARE SOME IMPORTANT THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- Most domestic violence prevention agencies provide services that include both you and your children, and these services are confidential. They will not contact the abuser (even if the abuser is a co-parent).
- Alabama law requires certain professions (teachers, medical personnel, child welfare staff, etc.) to report concerns about child safety. This rule is meant to better protect children. But sometimes, when the child welfare system intervenes before you are fully ready, it can catch you off guard. Therefore, when asking for help, you may first ask: "Are you a mandatory reporter? I want to understand what you must report before I share anything."
- **Before a court order is in place, both parents have equal rights.** Therefore, you taking the children to leave is not kidnapping; and the other party hiding the children is also not kidnapping (it is considered a civil dispute). This is why applying for a protection order and requesting Temporary Sole Custody should be a priority.
- Try to make a safety plan together with your children (see the "Your personalized safety plan" section).
- Based on the children's age and abilities, teach them:
  - How to dial 911
  - Where the safe room is (a room with a door and no weapons)
  - Which adults they can trustYou do not need to tell them the details of the abuse. You only need to help them understand how to stay safe.
- If you need to leave, the entire process may be complicated. Domestic violence prevention agencies can help you with planning, understanding custody issues, and other concerns. Please try contacting them for guidance.

## HELPFUL SERVICES (LOCATED IN ALABAMA)

- Alabama Domestic Violence Hotline – 1-800-799-7233
- Parenting Assistance Line (PAL) – 1-866-962-3030
- Department of Human Resources Child Abuse/Neglect Reporting Line – 1-800-652-6514
- Childcare Resources (205) 252-1991 [ccr-bhm.org](http://ccr-bhm.org)
- Pathways Early Learning Center (205) 322-6854 [pathwayshome.org](http://pathwayshome.org)

# FAMILY & DEPENDENTS

## I NEED HELP WITH MY PET

- Leaving with a pet can raise safety risks, especially if the abuser uses the animal to track or control you. These steps can help:
  - Check the collar and harness for trackers
  - If the abuser purchased your pet's collar, harness, or "smart tag," inspect it carefully for:
    - GPS collars (Fi, Whistle, Tractive, etc.)
    - AirTags or Tiles hidden inside the collar or clipped underneath
    - Small GPS devices sewn into harness pockets or attached near metal rings
- If you find a device:
  - Do not bring it with you to a safe location
  - Disable it (remove battery) or leave it in a public place
  - Then travel to your next location without the device
- Be cautious with vet clinics; abusers often know your pet's regular veterinarian.

If possible:

- Switch to a new clinic after leaving
- Ask the new clinic not to share any information with anyone else
- Avoid posting vet check-ins online
- Update microchip information
- Pet microchips do not have GPS, but they contain your contact information.

Once you're safe:

- Update the phone number and address
- Ensure nothing links back to the abuser
- Add an alternate emergency contact you trust

## LIVING IN SHELTERS?

Always call first to confirm pet policies.

The following organizations participate in pet-related safe-housing programs (Safe Havens for Pets).

On-site

- Calhoun, Etowah, Talladega, Cleburne: 2nd Chance, Inc. (256) 236-7233
- Mobile, Washington, Clarke: Penelope House (251) 342-8994 (Female only)
- Baldwin, Escambia, Monroe: The Lighthouse (251) 947-6008
- Lee, Chambers, Macon, Tallapoosa: Domestic Violence Intervention Center (DVIC) (334) 749-1515

Off-site

- Jefferson, St. Clair, Blount: YWCA Central Alabama (205) 322-4878
- Lauderdale, Colbert, Franklin: Safeplace, Inc. (256) 767-6210
- Russell: Crisis Center of Russell County (334) 297-4401

Financial Assistance for Temporary Pet Housing

- RedRover offers several types of support:
- Domestic Violence Safe Escape Grant: Helps pay for up to 45 days of temporary pet boarding for survivors who cannot find a pet-friendly shelter. Application: <https://redrover.org/relief-dv/dv-safe-escape-grants/>

Urgent Care Grants: Provides emergency veterinary assistance for pet owners facing financial hardship.

- Application: <https://redrover.org/relief/urgent-care-grants/>

Local Resources

- Sugarbelle Foundation provides pet food, supplies, and limited assistance to owners experiencing financial difficulties. Application: <https://www.sugarbellefoundation.org/application-for-pet-supplies.html>

# 02. I AM...



**IMMIGRATION & STATUS**

**MALE**

**DISABILITY**

**YOUTH & MINORS**

**LGBTQ+**



# IMMIGRATION & STATUS

- Your visa status does NOT affect your ability to apply for a Protection From Abuse Order (PFA), divorce, or related rights. U.S. law protects the right of every person within the country (and U.S. citizens abroad) to live free from abuse.
- If the abuser is a U.S. citizen (8 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(1)(A)(iii), 2024) or a lawful permanent resident (green card holder) (8 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(1)(B)(ii), 2024), and the survivor's visa or immigrant status is tied to the abuser (including parents, children, or spouses of the abuser), the survivor (no matter which gender) may still apply for a green card independently. The abuser does not need to know, participate, or sign anything.
- If the abuser is NOT a U.S. citizen or green card holder, but the survivor experienced domestic violence while inside the United States, the survivor may qualify for a U visa after reporting the abuse and cooperating with law enforcement. A U visa provides lawful status and work authorization (8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(U), 2024).
- In the same situation, if the abuse is connected with labor exploitation or human trafficking, the survivor may qualify for a T visa (8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(T), 2024).
- These protections apply even if the survivor's visa has expired or they entered the U.S. without inspection ("undocumented").

**ALL OF THESE IMMIGRATION PETITIONS USE USCIS'S HIGH-CONFIDENTIALITY PROCESSING, MEANING THE SURVIVOR'S ADDRESS, PHONE NUMBER, AND PERSONAL INFORMATION ARE NOT DISCLOSED TO THE ABUSER, AND THE ABUSER'S CONSENT OR SIGNATURE IS NEVER REQUIRED (8 U.S.C. § 1367, 2024).**

- You may also ask legal aid organizations or the court whether an "Address Confidentiality Program (ACP)" is available.
- This program allows survivors to use a safe substitute address for court and government paperwork so they do not need to use their real address.
- ICE is NOT allowed to conduct arrests in "sensitive locations" such as hospitals, places of worship (churches, mosques, etc.), or domestic violence shelters (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2021). Domestic-violence personnel—police, social workers, and shelter staff—typically will not ask about immigration status and will not refuse help based on immigration concerns, because immigration status does not change the fact that abuse occurred.
- If you are undocumented or your visa has expired, and you are detained by ICE, you may still qualify for a form of protection called "VAWA Cancellation of Removal" (8 U.S.C. § 1229b(b)(2)). It can stop your deportation and may allow you to receive lawful permanent residence (a green card).
- The only limitation involves certain federal or state cash or food assistance programs, which may be restricted to U.S. citizens or specific qualified immigrants. However, emergency medical care, shelters, domestic-violence counseling, and legal aid are not restricted by immigration status.

# IMMIGRATION & STATUS



## GLOSSARY

- Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Self-Petition (self-filed green card application)
- Applies when: The abuser is a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident.
- U Visa(Lawful status and work authorization)
- Applies when: The abuser is not a citizen or green card holder, and the survivor is willing to cooperate with police regarding domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or similar crimes.
- T Visa(May lead to eligibility for a green card later)
- Applies when: The abuser is not a citizen or green card holder, and the abuse is connected with labor exploitation or human trafficking, such as forced work, financial control, or restricted movement.

## SOURCE

- Local source: HICA <https://hicaalabama.org/en/home>
- Nationwide source for South Asia individuals(Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka among others)Maitri.org 9-3 weekdays, (888) 862 - 4874 <https://maitri.org/get-help-today>
- VAWA: <https://www.hud.gov/VAWA#close>

# MALE SURVIVORS

(In this section, “men” and “women” refer to biological sex. This is because most domestic violence organizations, legal classifications, and research studies typically use biological sex as the basis for discussion.)

## YOU ARE NOT AN UNCOMMON CASE. YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

Society often expects men to “be strong, endure hardship, and avoid showing vulnerability,” which makes it difficult for many men to acknowledge or seek help, especially under the stereotype that “domestic violence survivors are women/children.” (Hine et al., 2020) In reality:

- 1 in 6 men has experienced sexual assault or sexual abuse at some point in their lives.
- About 30% of men have experienced intimate partner violence or stalking.
- Homosexual men: 26%; Bisexual men: 37%; Heterosexual men: 29% (Basile et al., 2011)

## MANY MALE SURVIVORS FEEL CONFUSED BECAUSE THEIR PARTNERS DO NOT ENGAGE IN “SEVERE PHYSICAL BEATINGS.”

- Biting, scratching, and spitting are all forms of domestic violence.
- Psychological, emotional, and social control or humiliation are also domestic violence. (For example: publicly accusing you of infidelity on social media, extreme jealousy, preventing you from contacting your children, etc.)

In public health and social service fields, it is true that resources and research specifically focusing on male survivors are relatively limited. But this does not mean the harm you experienced is any less real. Experiencing domestic violence is never your fault. No one deserves to be treated this way.

## ABOUT RESOURCES:

In Alabama, and most parts of the United States, protective orders, legal assistance, domestic violence hotlines, and financial aid are not restricted by gender. Any domestic violence survivor can request help.

Although shelters specifically for men are less common, most agencies (including women’s shelters) can still provide:

- Hotel vouchers
- Referrals to other agencies
- Legal services
- Safety planning
- Crisis support

Therefore, you can safely reach out to any domestic violence-related organization for assistance. The resources listed in this book are equally applicable to male survivors.

Here are some resources specially for Male Survivors:

- National Coalition For Men:<https://ncfm.org/>
- 1in6 (for male survivors of sexual abuse and assault):<https://1in6.org/>
- Male Survivor (support for male sexual violence survivors):<https://malesurvivor.org/>

# DISABILITY SURVIVORS

Women with disabilities face a 40% higher risk of experiencing domestic violence compared to women without disabilities. This is not the fault of individuals with disabilities; rather, this population often has more difficulty recognizing that they are being subjected to abuse, and they also tend to rely more heavily on caregivers.

## **IF YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED ANY OF THE FOLLOWING, YOU MAY BE FACING FORMS OF ABUSE THAT ARE SPECIFIC TO SURVIVORS WITH DISABILITIES AND ARE OFTEN DIFFICULT TO IDENTIFY:**

- Removing or destroying mobility aids (such as wheelchairs, walkers, etc.)
- Refusing to allow the survivor to use prescribed medications or blocking access to them.
- Coercing the survivor to not follow medical instructions (taking an overdose or not taking medications).
- Forcing the survivor to wear unclean underwear, diapers, or other clothing.
- Preventing the survivor from accessing food, medical care, and other resources (Medical Neglect).
- Inappropriate touching while assisting the survivor with bathing or dressing.
- Using the survivor's physical or mental condition to gaslight or demean them (e.g., "No one will believe what a person with schizophrenia says," "You cannot live on your own without me," etc.)

All of the above behaviors are considered abuse under legal and public health definitions.

## **PLEASE REMEMBER:**

- Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), you have the right to request auxiliary aids or services from law enforcement or shelters (such as sign language interpreters or other communication assistance devices).
- In your To-Go bag, prepare medical documentation (or medical records), a list of medications you are currently taking, and the names and model numbers of the assistive devices you are currently using.
- If you are in a situation where you cannot contact the outside world, try seeking help from medical professionals. By law, they are required to report (Code of Alabama § 38-9-2).

## **HERE ARE SOME RESOURCES FOR SURVIVORS WITH DISABILITIES:**

- Alabama Adult Protective Services Division Hotline: 1-800-458-7214
- Domestic Violence Hotline (TTY): 1-800-787-3224
- Alabama Centers for Independent Living Voice/TDD Phone: 205.251.2223

# YOUTH & MINOR SURVIVORS

## WHO IS AN ADULT IN ALABAMA?

Situation	Legal Status
19 years old or older	You are an adult. You can make all decisions.
18–19 years old AND legally emancipated by a court	You are treated as an adult.
Under 19 without emancipation	You are still a minor.

## WHEN MINORS CAN SAY “YES” TO MEDICAL CARE (CONSENT)

You can say “yes” to any kind of medical, dental, or mental health care if any of these are true:  
If you...Are 14 years old or older/ Have graduated from high school/ Are or was married/ Are pregnant

No matter how old you are, you can agree to these health services: Pregnancy testing/ Pregnancy-related care (not including abortion)/ Testing or treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs/STD)/ Help for alcohol problems/ Help for drug or substance use problems/ Testing or treatment for illnesses the law requires reporting

## MANDATORY REPORTING

Before you talk to an adult about abuse, it is important to know that some adults — such as teachers, counselors, doctors, and nurses — are required by law to report abuse to child protective services (DHR). Reporting is meant to protect you, but it can sometimes lead to quick involvement from authorities or changes at home that you may not feel ready for.

You can call confidential hotlines. These services are designed to keep you safe. While most hotline advocates are mandatory reporters, they cannot report you if they do not know who you are or where you are.

### Safety Tips:

- Ask First: You can start the call by asking, “Are you a mandatory reporter? I want to know if this call is private.”
- Stay Anonymous: You do not have to give your real name. You can use a nickname or say, “I am asking for a friend.” You can also ask, “Do you need my real name?” before you answer any personal question.
- Protect Your Location: You do not have to share your address or school name. Only give this information if you want someone to come help you right away.

## SAFE RESOURCES:

- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE) | Text “START” to 88788 | Chat at [thehotline.org](http://thehotline.org)
- Love is Respect (for Teens): Text “LOVEIS” to 22522 | Call 1-866-331-9474
- Crisis Text Line: Text “HOME” to 741741
- UTalk (by Crisis Center Birmingham): Text or Call: (205) 328-5465 3 PM-9 PM

# 03. SAFETY TOOLS



**YOUR PERSONALIZED  
SAFETY PLAN**

**DIGITAL PRIVACY & DEVICE  
SAFETY**

**STALKING & TRACKING  
AWARENESS**

**GUN & MEDICATION SAFETY**

**PACKING A “GO BAG”**

# YOUR PERSONALIZED SAFETY PLAN

## LOCAL SUPPORT FOR SAFETY PLANNING (ALABAMA FOCUS)

One Place Metro Alabama Family Justice Center | (205) 453-7261

- 1135 14th Avenue South, Birmingham, AL 35205

YWCA Central Alabama | (205) 322-4878 (HURT)

- 309 23rd Street North, Birmingham, AL 35203

SafeHouse | (205) 669-7233 (SAFE)

- 262 Yeager Parkway, Pelham, AL 35124

## STAYING SAFER WHILE STILL LIVING WITH THE ABUSER

- Keep your phone charged and with you.
- Avoid arguments in rooms with weapons (kitchen, garage, bathroom).
- Stay near exits when possible.
- Identify safe rooms without sharp objects or hard tools.
- Avoid items that can be grabbed (scarves, long necklaces, or anything that could be used for choking).
- If you must move around the home, create distance by placing objects (tables, furniture) between you and the abuser.
- During an escalation, avoid rooms with: guns or knives, tools (garage, basement), medications (bathroom), water or slippery floors (bathroom)
- If you are escaping, focus on getting away safely—not retrieving belongings.
- Prepare your car for quick escape (Back into the driveway, keep the gas tank as full as possible, and store your keys somewhere you can grab quickly).
- Child Safety & Role-playing:
  - Teach children that their primary job is to stay safe, not to protect you. Tell them explicitly: "Do not try to get in the middle of a fight."
  - Practice emergency scenarios: Role-play as a 911 operator so they know what to say (name, address, "someone is hurting my mom/dad").
  - Identify a "safe spot" in the house or a neighbor's house where they should run to immediately if arguing starts.
- Signals for Neighbors/Friends: Establish a visual signal with a trusted neighbor that means "Call 911": Turning a specific room's light on and off rapidly. Throwing a specific object (like a toy or book) out of a front window. Hanging a specific cloth or item in the window.

# YOUR PERSONALIZED SAFETY PLAN

## PLANNING TO LEAVE

- Pack a go bag and store it outside the home (see “Packing a go bag” below).
- Choose safe times to leave (when the abuser is at work, out of town, etc.).
- Practice the route in your mind.
- Have a backup plan (in case car keys or phone are taken).
- Know where you will go first (friend, shelter, public place).



## OTHER NOTES TO CONSIDER (OPTIONAL BUT RECOMMENDED)

- If you live in a rural area, police or support services may take longer to arrive. Plan a safe place to wait, and avoid being alone with the abuser even if you have a protection order.
- If you live in a very small community, local shelters may not truly be “anonymous.” You may want to consider a shelter in a different town or county.
- If you use a local shelter, try to park in gated or indoor areas, or use a car cover if possible, so your vehicle is not easily recognized.
- If you do not have access to a car, ask the police/sheriff, local faith organizations, or domestic violence agencies about transportation assistance. Many can provide or arrange safe rides.
- If you attend a federally funded school and the abuser is also a student, the school is legally required to offer certain protections and support. If the abuser is not a student, the school may not be obligated—but it can still be a resource, so it is worth asking.

# GUN & MEDICATION SAFETY

## IF YOU CURRENTLY LIVE WITH THE ABUSER:

- Note where weapons are stored (guns, kitchen knives, heavy tools).
- If safe to do so, store sharp tools in locked drawers or out of immediate reach.
- If possible and safe, store ammunition separately from the firearm.

# DIGITAL PRIVACY & DEVICE SAFETY

## PROTECT YOUR ACCOUNTS

- Change passwords regularly (email, banking, insurance, phone carrier).
- Check if your accounts (iCloud, Google, Samsung) are logged in on someone else's device.
- Use iPhone Safety Check or Google Security Checkup to quickly remove unwanted access.

## REDUCE TRACKING RISKS

- Turn off location sharing on apps and social media.
- Review "Find My" or similar tracking features on your phone — and on your children's tablets/watches.
- Look for unfamiliar apps (some stalkerware appears as calculators or system tools).

## STAY SAFE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- Delay posting photos or updates until hours or days after you leave a location.
- Turn off location tags in your camera and apps.

## OPTIONAL: CHECK WHAT INFORMATION ABOUT YOU IS PUBLIC

- Try searching your own name online (add your city or state if your name is common) to see what personal details appear.
- Old school records, club memberships, or political donation lists sometimes publish names without permission. You can contact the site administrator to request removal.
- Most social media platforms allow you to hide your profile or make it unsearchable. Check the "Privacy Settings" section and switch to private or restricted visibility.

# STALKING & TRACKING AWARENESS

## TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

- If the abuser appears in multiple places “by coincidence,” assume you may be tracked.
- Do not travel alone if you feel watched.

## CHECK FOR TRACKING DEVICES

- Look for unfamiliar items in your bags, coat pockets, chargers, or attached to your keys.
- Check your car (under seats, wheel wells, bumpers).
- Ask a trusted friend or mechanic if you are unsure.
- Turn off Bluetooth if you suspect a Bluetooth tracker like an AirTag or Tile.



## WATCH FOR DIGITAL TRACKING

- Review shared phone plans, shared accounts (iCloud/Google), and smart-home devices.
- If children share devices with the abuser (tablets, watches), their location features may also reveal your location.

## IF YOU FIND A TRACKING DEVICE

- Do not carry it with you to a new location or to the police station (it reveals your route).
- Disable it (e.g., remove the battery) or leave it in a public place, then go somewhere safe.

## DOCUMENT EVERYTHING

- Keep a simple log with date, time, and location whenever the abuser shows up or contacts you unexpectedly.
- This record can be important for safety planning and protection orders.

# PACKING A “GO BAG”

- These items can make the first 24–72 hours safer and easier if you need to leave quickly.
- Take what is realistic and safe for you—not everything will be possible for everyone.

## NOTE:

- Back up all essential documents to a secure cloud account first.
- Identification and legal documents are often extremely difficult—or impossible—to replace.
- If you cannot prepare a full go bag, please try to take Category 1 (Identification & Documents) and Category 2 (Money/Financial items), especially cash. These are the most difficult items to obtain later.
- Before leaving, make sure your phone is fully charged and your car has a full tank of gas. If you do not have a car, plan ahead for safe transportation (a friend, taxi, bus route, etc.).
- Store your go bag somewhere the abuser cannot access but you can retrieve quickly, such as: a trusted friend's home, your workplace, the trunk of your car, or another secure location outside your home
- Please remember: if an abuser finds the go bag, it may escalate the situation.
- In many situations, once you leave home, you may not be able to return safely.
- If you must return to get belongings: choose a time when the abuser is not home, ask police or a trusted friend to accompany you, and enter and leave quickly. Avoid unnecessary conversations or delays

## 1. IDENTIFICATION & IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

**Cloud-backup copies or paper copies stored separately from originals**

**Store all paper documents in a Ziploc or other waterproof bag**

- Passport, ID, driver's license
- Visa/immigration papers
- Social Security cards
- Birth certificates (yours & children's)
- Children's immunization card / Blue Card
- Marriage, divorce, custody, or court documents
- Copies of protection orders/police reports
- Medical documentation & photos of injuries
- House or vehicle titles, insurance papers



## 2. MONEY & FINANCIAL ITEMS

- Cash
- Prepaid debit cards / non-traceable payment cards
- A prepaid/backup phone (not linked to your main account)
- Credit card or bank card in your name only
- Checkbook (optional)
- Coins (laundromat, vending machines, bus fare)

# PACKING A “GO BAG”

## 3. MEDICATION & HEALTH ESSENTIALS

- Daily prescriptions
- Emergency meds (asthma inhaler, heart meds, seizure meds, etc.)
- Glasses/contacts
- Basic hygiene items (toothbrush, toothpaste, soap or wipes)
- Menstrual products (a few days' supply)
- Diapers & wipes (if you have children)

## 4. FOOD & WATER

- Energy bars or shelf-stable snacks
- Empty water bottle (refill anywhere)

### DO NOT PACK WEAPONS.

Pepper spray, knives, or sharp items are prohibited in many shelters and may be confiscated. Non-weapon safety tools (whistle, flashlight) are safer and allowed.

## 5. CLOTHING & PERSONAL ITEMS

- Several days of clothing for you (and children, if needed)
- Comfortable shoes
- A few small sentimental items (only what fits safely)
- Folding rain poncho (for warmth and weather protection)
- A few disposable masks (optional—can help prevent illness and add privacy in crowds)

## 6. KEYS & TECHNOLOGY

- Spare house key & car key
- Phone charger & power bank
- USB drive with encrypted document copies
- Password list (email, banking, insurance) written on paper, store separately from your ID for safety.

## 7. CHILDREN'S ITEMS

- Formula & bottles
- Diapers, wipes
- One small comfort item (toy or blanket)

## 8. SAFETY ITEMS

- Emergency contacts list (written, not only digital)
- Small notebook & pen
- High-decibel whistle
- Transit cards/bus passes

## 9. PET'S ITEMS

- Proof of rabies vaccination
- Leash and collar/harness
- Several days' worth of pet food
- Microchip registration or other proof of ownership
- If you have a small animal, bring a carrier — this often increases the chances that shelters or temporary housing will allow the pet to stay with you

# 04. UNDERSTANDING ABUSE



**WHAT IS ABUSE?**

**POWER & CONTROL WHEEL**

**WHY LEAVING IS HARD**

**TRAUMA RESPONSES**



# WHAT IS ABUSE?

85% of abusers are men. But this does not mean that only women experience domestic violence. Domestic violence can happen to anyone, regardless of gender, age, income, education level, religious belief, or ethnicity. It also exists among gay, bisexual, and transgender partners (United Nations, n.d.).

1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men in the United States have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence, which is about 10 million people. This is a common problem, and you are not alone (Huecker et al., 2023).

**Domestic violence is defined as: within a family (including blood relatives, intimate or partner relationships, so boyfriends and girlfriends, parents and children, spouses, and even grandparents and grandchildren are included), one person abuses their power over another person.** These behaviors include physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence (verbal or controlling behaviors, such as verbal insults or controlling freedom of movement), stalking and harassment, and both actions and intentional inactions (such as a caregiver purposely not providing food).

Incidents rarely happen on their own, and they usually escalate step by step, starting from verbal humiliation (such as “you don’t know how lucky you are to be with me,” “you don’t deserve happiness,” etc.), social isolation (stopping the person from meeting or contacting friends or family, using excuses to ask them to move away), economic control (asking them to quit their job, demanding that their spending must be approved), to threats to personal safety (beating if they do not obey), physical violence (pushing, grabbing, pinching, hitting, etc.) or sexual violence (including sexual acts when the person is not ready), and even actions that put the person’s life in danger (United Nations, n.d.).

Domestic violence does not only affect the victim. Children who witness domestic violence also suffer long-term effects. They may develop more anxiety, PTSD, and other mental health problems in the future. They are also more likely to struggle with peer relationships, have academic problems, and even abuse or neglect their own children.

## **BELOW ARE SOME SIGNS THAT YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. IF YOU HAVE THESE SIGNS, PLEASE SEEK HELP IMMEDIATELY (UNITED NATIONS, N.D.):**

- Do you feel afraid of the other person?
- Do you try your best to avoid doing things that make them angry?
- Do you always do what the other person wants instead of what you want?
- Does the other person blame you for their negative emotions (shame, anger, etc.) or actions?
- Does the other person “teach you a lesson” after arguments, or stop you from leaving?
- Does the other person humiliate you in front of others? Do they tell you that without them you are nothing?
- Does the other person use any level of violence against you?
- Does the other person make you feel like there is “no way out”?

# POWER & CONTROL WHEEL

This is the concept from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, MN. It is a list of common control tactics used by domestic violence offenders. The innermost circle is the goal: power and control. The white inner circle shows the eight control tactics often used by abusers, which are the “ropes of captivity,” making the victim afraid or unable to leave. The black outer circle of physical and sexual violence is the “gun” — the white control tactics gain their power because the abuser can activate the black outer circle of physical and sexual violence at any time. This makes the abuser’s control methods even more effective. At the same time, because the white inner circle exists, the abuser does not need to use the black outer circle all the time. The two parts work together, and in the end they achieve the core goal of “power and control.”



# POWER & CONTROL WHEEL

## THE 8 CONTROL TACTICS:

- Emotional Abuse: Humiliating and degrading. "You're too stupid, no one wants you."
- Isolation: Limiting work, activities, or social contact. "People outside are dangerous, you should stay at home."
- Minimizing, Denying, Blaming: Hitting you but saying it was just a joke, or blaming you for forcing them to do it. Denying or downplaying your feelings. "It's your fault you made me hit you." "It's just a small joke. You are overreacting."
- Intimidation: Yelling loudly, breaking things. "Next time I'll break you." "You should be grateful I'm still rational."
- Using Children: Using children to threaten you. "If you leave me, I'll make sure you never see the kids again."
- Economic Abuse: Not allowing you to have property or controlling your money. "I'll keep your paycheck for you." "You just need to focus on taking care of the kids. You can't work and you can't make decisions."
- Male Privilege: Demanding you listen to them. "I'm a man, I'm the head of the household." (In LGBTQ+ relationships, the person in the dominant position may say similar things.)
- Coercion & Threats: Threatening self-harm or harming you. "If you leave me, I will kill myself," (or sending you self-harm photos) "I'll make sure ICE arrests you."

The complexity of domestic violence tactics is hard to explain with one chart or list, but the Power & Control Wheel can give people a relatively clear view of common domestic violence tactics and their purpose.



# WHY LEAVING IS HARD ?



"The door is right there, why doesn't she just leave?"

This is a very common question, and it is also a question filled with blame, as if someone who does not leave is "asking for it" and choosing to stay in danger. But this is not the truth.

Many survivors do not realize at the beginning that they are being abused. Abusers rarely announce directly: "I'm going to start abusing you!" (Steiner, 2012).

Instead, the process is usually slow and hidden — like a frog being boiled in warm water.

"It often begins with words that sound caring, romantic, or reasonable:

- "I love you so much, let's move somewhere where no one else can bother us." — social isolation
- "You're so stupid, how could you live without me?" — emotional humiliation
- "I just want to protect you." — controlling actions, money, or social connections

These behaviors build up little by little. When more obvious forms of abuse appear — threats, physical harm, sexual violence — the victim may already be cut off from friends, family, transportation, and financial resources.

"Therefore, the question is never: "Why doesn't the victim leave?" but rather: "What makes leaving so difficult or dangerous?"

Abusers often create conditions that make it hard for survivors to escape. Finding it hard to leave is not weakness or failure — it is the result of systemic abuse at work. When survivors finally realize the danger, they are often already trapped, monitored, or feeling isolated and helpless.

This is why safety planning and outside support are so important.

**YOU DO NOT HAVE TO CARRY THIS ALONE.**

# TRAUMA RESPONSES



According to SAMHSA's definition, trauma is the result of a person experiencing physical, emotional, or life-threatening harm (SAMHSA, n.d.). These traumatic events may be long-term or single incidents. People have different reactions after trauma.

Common reactions include:

- Physical reactions (nightmares, trouble sleeping, muscle tension, being easily startled, unexplained pain, fatigue, etc.)
- Emotional reactions (easily getting angry or crying, feeling numb or empty, guilt or shame, fear or anxiety, etc.)
- Cognitive and behavioral reactions (difficulty focusing, memory gaps, confused thoughts, hypervigilance, wanting to run away or disappear, repeatedly checking door locks, etc.)

These reactions come from the brain's protection mechanism. They are common and natural, and for many people, these reactions gradually lessen over time.

But if the symptoms continue, or if the following signs appear, it may mean PTSD is developing: ongoing distress, intrusive memories or flashbacks, sleep problems, depression, and so on.

PTSD can be seen as a "normal" response to an "abnormal" event (Pill et al., 2017), except the reaction becomes too intense, lasts too long, and affects your daily life. Without intervention, PTSD may further lead to severe depression or other mental health problems (Peace River Center, n.d.).

**If you feel these reactions are making it hard to do daily tasks, if you cannot sleep normally for several days, feel unsafe around others, or often experience panic, please seek help while paying attention to your safety (this is not your fault).**

For related support resources, please see the "Emotional & Mental Health" section.

# 05. REFERENCES & KEY RESOURCES



# REFERENCES

Alabama Coalition Against Domestic Violence. (n.d.). Domestic violence resources in Alabama. <https://www.acadv.org/>

Alabama Department of Human Resources. (n.d.). Adult Protective Services. <https://dhr.alabama.gov/adult-protective-services/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2008). Physical and mental health conditions among survivors of intimate partner violence—United States, 2005. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 57(5), 113–117. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/wk/mm5705.pdf>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). National intimate partner and sexual violence survey (NISVS). <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/11637>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). Preventing intimate partner violence. <https://www.cdc.gov/intimate-partner-violence/>

National Indigenous Women's Resource Center. (n.d.). Violence against Native women with disabilities. [https://www.niwrcc.org/sites/default/files/images/resource/fact\\_sheet\\_pdfs.pdf](https://www.niwrcc.org/sites/default/files/images/resource/fact_sheet_pdfs.pdf)

Office on Women's Health. (n.d.). Violence and abuse: People with disabilities. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. <https://www.apa.org/topics/disabilities/women-violence>

Rimal, R. N., & Pokharel, S. (2022). Male victims of domestic violence: Understanding barriers to reporting. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(3–4), 1–20.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8980445/>

The Trevor Project. (n.d.). Get help now. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help/>

Trans Lifeline. (n.d.). Hotline. <https://translifeline.org/hotline/>

UAB Medicine. (n.d.). LGBTQ+ services. According to SAMHSA's definition, trauma is the result of a person experiencing physical, emotional, or life-threatening harm (SAMHSA, n.d.). These traumatic events may be long-term or single incidents. People have different reactions after trauma.

## LEGAL REFERENCES

8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(U) – U Visa

8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(T) – T Visa

8 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(1)(A)(iii) – VAWA Self-Petition (Spouses of U.S. citizens)

8 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(1)(B)(ii) – VAWA Self-Petition (Spouses of LPRs)

8 U.S.C. § 1367 – Confidentiality protections for VAWA, T, and U applicants

Ala. Code § 12-15-301 – Mandatory reporting for minors

Ala. Code § 26-14-1 et seq. – Child abuse reporting

Ala. Code § 30-5-1 et seq. – Alabama Protection from Abuse Act (PFA)

Ala. Code § 38-9-2 – Mandatory reporting for elder and disabled adult abuse

Guidelines for Enforcement Actions in or Near Protected Areas (DHS Memorandum No. 110-04, updated Oct. 27, 2021).

# KEY RESOURCES

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE

- Who: Everyone. (Available in 170+ languages).
- What: The safest first step if you are unsure what to do.
- Call: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
- Text: "START" to 88788
- Chat: thehotline.org

## 2-1-1 CONNECTS ALABAMA

- Who: Everyone in Alabama.
- What: A statewide directory for social services. Call this if you need food pantries, utility assistance, or general homeless shelters that are not listed here.
- Call: Dial 2-1-1 (Free call)
- Website: 211connectsalabama.org

## ONE PLACE METRO FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER

- Who: All survivors (Male, Female, LGBTQ+, Immigrants).
- What: The best place to start during business hours. You can file for a Protection Order (PFA), talk to police, meet a social worker, and get forensic exams all in one building.
- Address: 1135 14th Ave S, Birmingham, AL 35205
- Phone: (205) 453-7261 (Mon-Fri, 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM)

## YWCA CENTRAL ALABAMA

- Who: Women (Shelter); Men & Families (Hotel Vouchers).
- What: The primary gateway for housing.
- For Men/LGBTQ+: Ask specifically for "Hotel Vouchers".
- For Pet Owners: Ask about the "SafePet Program" (partnership with GBHS for fostering).
- 24/7 Hotline: (205) 322-4878

## THE FIREHOUSE SHELTER

- Who: Men (Male-identifying).
- What: The most accessible shelter for men in BHM. Provides meals, showers, and safe overnight stay.
- Address: 626 2nd Ave N, Birmingham
- Phone: (205) 252-9571

## LEGAL SERVICES ALABAMA (LSA)

- Who: Low-income survivors needing civil legal aid (Divorce/Custody).
- Phone: 1-866-456-4995

## CRISIS CENTER BIRMINGHAM

- Who: Everyone.
- What: 24/7 Hotline for sexual assault, domestic violence, and suicide prevention.
- Crisis Line: (205) 323-7777
- UTalk (Youth): (205) 328-5465 (Text/Call, 3 PM - 10 PM)