

Dr. Marci Batiste

MAKING A SAFE EXIT

SAFETY PLANNING TIPS
FOR EXITING AN
ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

Sponsored by:



**Every 9 Seconds
a woman is
either abused or
assaulted in this
country.**

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DISCLAIMER This book is intended to be used as a practical guidance tool to provide points of consideration to individuals who desire to leave an abusive relationship or for those wishing to help loved ones experiencing abuse.

THIS IS NOT INTENDED TO BE VIEWED AS OR REPLACE LEGAL ADVICE. This book is based on a combination of my own personal experiences, many years of subject matter research, and more than a decade of frontline work with victims, survivors, and families who have experienced Domestic Assault and Intimate Partner Violence.

I am not an attorney. It is not intended as a legal advice or to replace counsel with licensed legal representation. While there are common characteristics among abusers this book does not reference any specific individuals.

Additionally, there is no implication of guilt or innocence, merely my personal experience and observations of various situations. I have made every effort to be thorough and provide accurate information. However, since I am not an attorney, all references to laws, legal remedies and the court systems are generalizations based on my own personal experience and research.

Escaping abuse is a very personal matter and should be pursued with the utmost of caution. What follows are a series of tips and recommendations that may be used when implementing an escape and safety plan.

Specific questions related to the state and federal laws for your situation should be directed to licensed legal professionals in your state.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800- 799-7233 (SAFE) can assist you in identifying legal and other resources in your local area. They may also be reached online at **Thehotline.org**.

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Introduction

Welcome to *Making a Safe Exit*. This resource is brought to you by Nine Seconds Corporation, a progressive nonprofit with a heart-centered mission to prevent domestic and relational violence. Our programs are developed *by survivors for survivors*, reflecting the real, lived experiences of team members, advocates, and volunteers who have either personally endured abuse or been profoundly impacted by it, whether as first-hand witnesses or through the tragic loss of a loved one.

Though each of our personal stories is unique, we share a common dedication: to help end the cycle of abuse. Our work is driven by one of the most frequently asked yet deeply misunderstood questions surrounding domestic violence: **“Why don’t you just leave?”** At Nine Seconds, we recognize it’s never as simple as walking out the door and into a new life.

As emphasized in the disclaimer, this book is **not** meant to replace advice from a licensed legal professional. Instead, it’s a practical tool designed to help victims, and their children break free from abusive environments, while acknowledging the complexity and risks involved.

Domestic and relational violence affects both heterosexual and LGBTQ+ communities at alarmingly similar rates, which is why the information, tips, and strategies shared here apply to anyone who feels threatened and needs a plan for a safe exit. In some instances, you may notice gender-specific references (e.g., “she,” “he,” or “they”),

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but these terms are used only for simplicity and are not intended to exclude any reader.

I write to you as a heterosexual woman and a survivor of domestic violence. My perspective is shaped by my own experiences, those are the shoes I walked in. Yet, as an organization, we see countless faces and hear countless stories of abuse from individuals of all genders, orientations, and backgrounds. Despite the tireless efforts of advocates worldwide, the number of domestic violence cases continues to rise. Factors such as work stress, financial strain, housing instability, substance abuse, mental health issues, and global crises like pandemics only add to the pressure in abusive households.

These realities remind us how urgent this work truly is. Escaping abuse is often a matter of life and death, and how you plan your exit can make all the difference in staying safe. Well-intentioned loved ones might say things like, “Just leave,” or “You can stay with me,” but it’s rarely that simple. This book aims to provide the “how” of leaving—safely and strategically—not just the “why” you should go.

Statistics tell us that many individuals, especially women, attempt to leave an abusive relationship multiple times before they can stay gone for good. Sadly, too many never get another chance. That’s why we created this resource: **to save lives**. If you are in a dangerous situation, we want to empower you with knowledge and tools to develop a plan that fits your unique circumstances—so you can protect yourself and those who stand by your side.

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In the pages that follow, we'll discuss five key points of consideration for crafting an escape plan. No two experiences of abuse are the same, and no two exit plans will look alike. Our hope is that this information gives you a head start, guiding you toward freedom while keeping safety at the forefront of every step you take. Remember: *you are not alone*. We're here to help you navigate this journey and break the cycle of violence—for the last time.

1

Where Will You Go?

Domestic violence and relational abuse are anything but simple. Perhaps the most challenging aspect is deciding to leave, permanently exit the home, and cut ties with your partner. It's a life-altering choice—one that must be made with utmost caution. Statistics show that 75% of women who die by domestic homicide lose their lives *after* they've left or while attempting to leave. This alone underscores the need for a well-thought-out safety plan and exit strategy.

That said, there are times when you may have no choice but to leave with only the clothes on your back. If that moment comes, take it. This book is about preparation, so if you do have to flee suddenly, some groundwork will already be in place. Ultimately, only you know the subtle signs that abuse is escalating. Trust your instincts and judgment; if you can sense things are getting worse, do not second guess yourself.

You Can Still Have Feelings for Your Abuser

A lot of times we don't want to admit that we still love someone who has been abusive. To do so, can open you up for ridicule or you may feel forced to defend your feelings.

Let me free you. What outsiders can't comprehend is the fact that the relationship is not comprised only of negative experiences. Just the opposite, part of the cycle of violence shows us that good times, even great times, come as part of the package. The memories of the happy times in conjunction with the apologies and the reassurance that it will never happen again can leave you feeling vulnerable or foolish about loving them.

It is a normal part of the process. It is normal to want to believe in the good. It's Ok, to think about it, but don't be distracted or deterred.

Loving an abuser sounds outrageous to someone with no experience, but even if you know you need to go, it's ok to acknowledge the existence of lingering feelings.

Abuse is ordinarily interspersed with moments of genuine warmth and love, it's complicated. Don't let those conflicting emotions stop you from protecting yourself.

The Big Question: "Where Am I Going to Go?"

For many survivors, the greatest hurdle in leaving is figuring out where to go. This section offers initial considerations to help you address that question, including advice on shelter, friends, family, and other resources.

Create a Code Word or Phrase

A crucial first step is establishing a discreet code word or phrase with people you trust completely. If you text or call them and use this code, they'll know to alert 911 immediately and report a domestic assault in progress. Keep these tips in mind:

- **Choose a unique phrase.** It should be easy to remember but not something you'd typically say in everyday conversation.
- **Share selectively.** If your children are old enough to understand, consider teaching them the code—but be cautious. Kids can be manipulated or may accidentally reveal the secret.

- **Maintain secrecy.** The goal is to get help without tipping off your abuser. So carefully evaluate who you decide to discuss your desire to leave with and even more cautions about who you share details of your plan with.

Identifying a Safe Place

One of the first decisions is determining where to go once you leave. Often, people default to staying with a friend or family member, which can be risky for two main reasons:

1. **Predictability.** Your abuser likely knows your close circle. Friends' and relatives' homes are usually the first places they'll look.
2. **Safety for Others.** Allowing you to stay might put your loved ones in danger if your abuser shows up.

If possible, choose someone your abuser doesn't know well or a location they are either unaware of or one that they aren't likely to suspect. You can also ask a trusted friend or relative to safeguard important documents like IDs, birth certificates, police reports, or court papers—even if you're not staying with them. These items will be essential for rebuilding your life once you leave.

Practical Logistics to Consider

When planning your exit, research the important details. Do not talk yourself out of taking the plan seriously and do not trick yourself into believing "this won't happen to me I can skip that step" or that your experience "isn't that bad."

As survivors, we hear stories, we exchange information and details of our experiences. The risk is that we begin to compare our situation to someone else who has a completely different set of circumstances. One thing I tell all of my trauma recovery clients is this, “Do not compare traumas and rate yours based on what someone else has gone through.”

With that, regardless of the details of your experience, keep the following top of mind as you are developing your strategy.”

1. Distance and Transportation

- Keep at least half a tank of gas in your car.
- If using rideshares, factor in waiting times.
- If relying on public transportation, know the routes and schedules.

2. Shelter Services

- **Admission Requirements:** Some shelters require police or social services referrals.
- **Length of Stay:** Crisis centers may allow only 24–48 hours; long-term programs may offer 30 days or more.
- **Curfew and Access:** Understand hours of admission and any rules that might conflict with work, school, or childcare.
- **Family Accommodations:** Check if children are permitted and if there are any age or gender restrictions.
- **Fees and Payment:** Determine if there is a cost and how payment is accepted. Using a shared bank card could alert your abuser.
- **Location:** Make sure you know how to get to the shelter safely.

3. Financial Planning

- If you can't use debit or credit cards without detection, consider stashing cash with a trusted friend.
- Longer distances might mean higher travel costs, so plan accordingly.

Do Your Research—and Stay Safe

Agencies and advocates are often eager to help. When you call or email them, be transparent that you're planning an exit from an abusive situation. They can guide you to local safe houses or other resources that might not be publicly listed.

Throughout this planning, be extremely careful about how you store or conceal any information you collect—phone numbers, addresses, and notes. If your abuser discovers you're preparing to leave, the violence could escalate rapidly. Even if you think you know your partner well, *never* underestimate how they might react.

Remember: **trust your gut**. Ultimately, no one else knows your situation better than you. Leaving an abusive relationship *is* complex and can be dangerous, but with preparation, you can improve your odds of a safer exit. Keep reading for detailed steps to assist in developing a personalized safety plan that addresses your unique circumstances.

2

Before You Go... Packing Your Safety Bag

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This level of forethought can feel like it is extreme or overkill but it's not.

In the previous chapter we talked about where you will go. This chapter focuses on setting the stage for when you actually make your move.

We are going to now focus on the things you will want to already have in place to increase your chances of not just escaping but decreasing the likelihood that you will go back.

We have all seen or heard the stories about people returning to abusive relationships. It actually is quite common, but a big reason is because they find themselves left without the necessary resources.

They don't have a place to stay. They don't have the things they need to take care of their kids in some cases and then find themselves feeling forced to go back. Not because they want to, or because they are 'in love' but out of basic necessity. If they go back there's a roof over their head, food, access to money, etc.

A sound safety plan is critical to the prevention efforts in remaining safe and staying out of harm's way. It provides the strength necessary to fight the urges and manipulation attempts because you already know your next moves.

Let's take a look at some of the things you can / should do before you go. Think of it like prepacking all of the things that you need to operate your day-to-day life for at least 2 -7 days. Preferably all in one bag. However, if you have children, you may find it easier to pack smaller bags and have one for you and one for each of the children.

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Again, I want to encourage you not to be intimidated. Just his process alone can be enough to keep people stuck. But going through this process can be the difference that prevents you from being forced into interacting with or having conversations with your abuser.

Let's begin...

Location of your bag: You don't want to risk it being discovered by your abuser. It is important to think about where you will keep your bag. For some, you may want to keep your bag at another location that you are sure you can get to relatively easily.

Keep your bag current: Update your bag as information changes. Documents, phone numbers, addresses etc.

Write down important phone numbers: I don't know about you, but personally and I'm sad to admit this, I don't remember anybody's phone number anymore. My brain used to be a rolodex for phone numbers, but technology has made me lazy. If you can relate to this and you also don't remember phone numbers having them written down is huge. This is also helpful if your phone dies or it is taken from you, or the service is turned off.

You may want to keep a list in your bag and also provide the list to a trusted friend or family member. Stashing a copy in your car may be another option.

Emergency numbers:

- Friends and family.
- Nearby hospitals

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- Primary care doctors, dentists, or other health providers
- Schools
- Employers
- Emergency Services (shelters etc.)

Back up phone: For some, they opt to get a backup phone. Something small and simple like a flip phone that is easy to conceal but can be activated quickly in case of emergency.

If you choose this route, you still run the same risks if you lose access to the phone so this **SHOULD NOT REPLACE THE WRITTEN CONTACT LIST.**

But it does potentially give you a backup communication option that You've got a backup way to communicate that isn't being tracked. And once you have the backup device, you can add those phone numbers to that.

True story, when I was assaulted, and I got out of the house. I had my phone in my hand, but I was so discombobulated and confused I called the one phone number that I knew from memory. That happened to be the number of a friend who had the same number for 20 plus years. It was literally the only number I could think of. I had my entire contact list, but my level of trauma was such that using it didn't even register with me. I can't express how important your emergency contact list is.

Get an extra driver's license or State issued ID: Laws vary from state to state but most will issue a new ID if you indicate yours has been lost. Once the new one is received, tuck it away in your safety bag.

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Again, depending on which state or country you live in and their rules you may need to go in person to get it issued. Other states allow you to order online and have it mailed for a small replacement fee.

If you have mailed, DO NOT MAIL IT TO YOUR HOME ADDRESS where your abuser may find it or the envelope it came in. This could raise suspicion. So back to that trusted friend or family member. This is another way they can help.

Secure your passport: If you've got a passport, make sure that that is someplace secure. Keeping it in your safety bag. On a daily basis I keep mine in a safe, but if I was trying to escape from an abusive situation, that's not the that's not the place where it should be. Because it's not easily accessible.

Packing your safety bag is all about making it easy to leave as quickly as possible if necessary.

Cash on hand: When you make your exit it is extremely helpful to have at least a small amount of cash on hand. If possible, try to have an average of \$200.00-\$300.00 per person. But there are no hard rules. Some people may have considerably more, others will have less. Just do the best you can. Try to have at least \$100 to cover a meal and an inexpensive hotel or a transportation. The more people who are leaving the more it will cost.

Legal Documents: Consider child custody issues in this phase. If custody is an issue or could become one you want to be prepared in advance.

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If you've been through a divorce or if you're going through a divorce, you've got temporary custody a copy of that paperwork should be in your bag. This is huge because you the last thing you want is for your abuser to call the police on you saying that you've kidnapped your own children, and you have no proof that the children should legally be with you.

Birth Certificates: Make sure you've got the birth certificates for you and your children. Certified copies or the original documents are preferred but a copy is better than nothing at all.

Immunization/Allergy Records: For the safety of you and the children, it may be necessary to choose a new school. If that is the case, you will likely need proof of immunization records. Having a copy in your safety bag will eliminate the need to request them from their doctor's office, which can cause a delay in obtaining the information.

Insurance documents: This may include life insurance, medical insurance, or car insurance. Keep copies of all insurance cards and policy documents in your bag. For most insurance documents copies are sufficient.

I would also add the provider name, policy numbers, coverage limits on your Writing Emergency Contact sheet with the phone numbers.

I know this sounds extreme at this point but leaving is stressful. You want to reduce or eliminate the need to recall things as much as possible. That way if you need it, boom, you got it. This is true under any context or circumstance,

even more so in the case of a grab and go type of situation or.

Medical Records / Medications: In addition to insurance documents some may need copies of various medical records. If you take medications daily, you will want at least a day or two in your bag until you can get in contact with your doctor. I can't stress this enough. If you leave on a Friday, and your doctor's office doesn't open until Monday you will want to have enough to get you by for a few days.

Housing documents: This may include lease agreements or mortgage documents that prove ownership or possession of property. You may need these in case you're trying to get back into your property because somebody could claim you had abandoned it or had no right to access it. Your documents will provide the proof and secure your rights.

For apartments check with your leasing office and find out what the rules are concerning domestic violence. Laws across the country vary but many now have domestic violence clauses. You will want to know what the requirements are in advance. For instance, some may require documentation of domestic violence such as a police report or written proof from a physician or social service provider.

Again, this is about making sure you know all of this in advance, so you are as prepared as possible

Spare keys: You run out of the house, you don't have a key to get back in, have a spare key in your safety bag. Also, if you're going to go to somebody else's house, a friend, a family member, a coworker, ask them if you can get a spare

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copy of their house key. This protects you in the event you need to escape in the middle of the night at a time when they're not home.

This also applies to car keys. Keep a spare car key in your bag in case you can't reach your primary set of keys.

Clothes: At least two to three sets of clothes for you and each of your children. Again, depending on ages and numbers of kids they may each have their own bag for their clothes.

Include pajamas, under clothes, and a couple of outfits. If you're transitioning between seasons, you might want to throw a jacket in there or a winter coat. This can be made easier in warmer climates because the clothes are typically less bulky but if you have seasons, you may need to update your bag periodically as seasons shift.

If you have kids: keep in mind that this will be stressful on them as well. Try to include familiar or meaningful items for them in their bags. This may be a blankie or stuffed animal, game, book, photos etc.

For your kids, if it's something that they use on a daily basis, that they're going to miss it may not be possible to snag in advance. But be aware of this.

You understand what's going on, they don't understand what's going on. So, your efforts to make the transition as easy on the kids as possible will serve double duty to reduce some of pressure on you to comfort them.

Personal mementos: These are for you. Do not underestimate the emotional toll that leaving behind items

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that have a great deal of personal value to you. Some things may have a monetary value such as jewelry or other personal items. Also consider items that hold great sentimental value. For example, baby pictures of your children, family photos that are irreplaceable but mean a lot to you. Some other examples may include significant vacations or events, diplomas, certificates, or awards.

By securing these items you can prevent your abuser from emotionally hijacking you with sentimental items.

Remember domestic violence is primarily about control and abusers will go to great lengths to try to resume their position of power. So, a frequent strategy is to convert anything that is meaningful to you into a tool of manipulation. They know that they mean a lot to you and will use them to hurt you. They will use them to try to bargain with you in hopes that you will agree to meet up or return home to get them. If that doesn't work, they will destroy them as a way to 'punish' you.

Be realistic and conservative with the items you choose. These should be only the most important or meaningful items, and they should be able to be easily stored and packed.

Another option, in lieu of packing the original item(s) and to save space, is to take photos or scan them so that you have digital copies.

Store Your Bag(s) in a safe location

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Packing your safety bag allows you to make sure you have the things that you need for yourself and for your children in advance while you're still able to think clearly.

Storing it in an accessible location ensures you have access to it when you need it. Be certain you store your safety bag somewhere that you'll have access to it, but your abuser is not going to be able to find it.

For this step it is important for you to think through household routines and select your hiding location carefully.

For example, storing in the trunk of your car and your abuser opens the trunk for some reason and discovers the bag. Instantly the situation escalates, or they keep quiet but begin plotting their own next move.

If you work away from home and have an option to keep your bag at work may be a good solution. Just remember you need to be able to access it at any time.

Safety First

Remember that the goal of all of this is to make the process of extricating yourself from this dangerous relationship as safe as possible. We want you to live to tell the story.

There is nothing wrong in sharing what is going on and asking for help. Yes, I know it can feel embarrassing or dehumanizing. I know this firsthand. But guess what? The goal is to live through it.

What I realized was that my bruised ego was a small price to pay to stay safe and keep my loved ones safe. Keep this

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in the forefront of your mind as you try to escape and prevent further abuse from happening.

3

Making It Out Alive

Thus far, we have discussed deciding where you are going to go and the importance of packing a safety bag, along with some recommendations of some items that should be included.

Now let's move the discussion to a critical point in the conversation. The ultimate goal for this book and all of the work is to make sure you are able to get out of the relationship alive and to increase your ability to remain safe while you begin to rebuild your life and establish a new normal.

This is about developing your physical escape plan/route. Physically getting you (and your children/loved ones) out safely and effectively. While we are discussing this in the context of domestic violence these same principles can be applied to other safety hazards such as fire, carbon monoxide or other dire emergencies.

It is important to begin thinking about these things ahead of time even if you're not quite ready to leave but you know you will need to eventually. Even if you stay in you need to be as safe as possible.

This heightened awareness and planning is also applicable when you travel or stay in hotels or with others. Think of it along the same lines as when you board a plane. EVERY TIME they give a safety speech; they tell you how to fasten your seat belt and then provide a visual demonstration even though most of us are well versed in how seat belts work and often already have them on by the time the announcement begins. Safety over everything.

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Your personal safety plan should be viewed in much the same way. It may feel redundant, but it is about awareness.

If you are in your own home, you likely know this information instinctively, but do not consciously think about it. As you are strategizing your exit, you need to keep this in the forefront of your mind and continuously be thinking about ways to make the exit as quick and safe as possible.

Layout: You want to be clear about all aspects related to the layout of your house or apartment. Familiarize yourself with potential exits. Include doors and windows. Be cognizant of location, accessibility, and lighting conditions. Particularly if you will be escaping in the middle of the night or early morning hours before the sun comes up.

- Are you in a single-family home or an apartment?
- What size is your home?
 - How many rooms to go through to get to an outside exit?
- Single story or multi-story structure
 - For Multi-story houses/apartments consider what floor you are and identify exits on each floor.
 - How will you get down if it is too high to jump?
 - Can you use bed sheets?
 - Can you get/use an emergency ladder?
 - Are your children able to escape with you unassisted?
 - If not, how will you get them out with you?

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- What about your safety bag/bags? Can the children escape and carry their own bag?

This exercise is designed to provide you with awareness of the fastest path to freedom. So, it may seem extreme to think about it this deep, considering what type of house you have, and what floor you are can be the difference between life and death.

Let me give you a personal example of how this works. In my apartment in Arizona, I live on the 2nd floor. I have 4 windows and one door. Only two windows are large enough to escape from. To get to the door from the primary bedroom I need to go down a narrow hallway and to reach the front if the danger/abuser/fire is in the front. My best exit option is my bedroom window.

If I am in my office, kitchen or living room the front door is the closest door, and it opens directly to the outside. However, if there is a threat anywhere outside of my office, I would need to use my office window which also opens directly outside, but there is no landing or balcony. So, I need to have provisions in place in the event this escape route must be used.

As long as I can make it out the front door there is a small balcony and a walkway that lead to the external stairs. If I can get down the stairs, I'm safe. If I can't access the stairs, then I would need to jump either from the balcony or the walkway. If I jump from the balcony directly in front of my front door, I'm landing on concrete or I'm hitting my head on concrete and metal stairs, so I would technically need to

go down a little ways on the walkway leading to the stairs and jumped down because that's it's like rocks and bushes and I don't.

Hopefully, this gives you a visual of how to do your layout assessment.

Accessibility: It is important to note how easily you will be able to access the exit point and what will be necessary to get out.

- Is the door/window typically kept locked?
- What type of lock is used?
- Will you need a key?
- How does the lock work?
 - Is it a chain lock that makes noise?
 - A padlock with a combination or key?
 - Is there an alarm system?
 - Are you able to disarm it?
 - Is the system monitored?
 - Is it visible on your abusers phone?
 - If the alarm goes off who is notified?

If you are considering an escape, and you will be relying on a specific door or window, is there a way that you can keep it unlocked without it being detected?

Remember, at this point we are considering this information as it relates to your own home, these same things apply if you are visiting or living somewhere else, even temporarily. Access to this information can become a bit more difficult when you are someplace outside your normal environment. When you are someplace that you're unfamiliar with it can seem like shooting in the dark but it

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all about exiting safely. It will require you to become very intentional and more observant of your surroundings. You can practice out in public. For instance, if you go into a restaurant, find out where the nearest exit is and practice planning how you would escape.

As stated earlier, this information can be invaluable and used in conjunction with any emergency escape plan regardless of the reason. In fact, the American Red Cross recommends that everybody have an exit strategy for exiting their home. That is because overall, with all of the disaster work that the Red Cross responds to their biggest annual need is actually house fires. So, this process is going to help you in either case.

Which is a great way to incorporate your children into the exit planning and safety strategy. You can teach them using fire safety as the reason for it. It also makes a built-in excuse in the event that your abuser becomes suspicious. It is EMERGENCY FIRE SAFETY PLANNING.

The getaway:

Once you get out how will you get away?

If you are driving, where are your keys kept?

Away from home: Let's say you're on vacation, right? You rent an Air BnB, or a hotel and you find yourself in an abusive situation with a volatile partner. You need to be doing these same assessments in every environment you're in, whether it's a hotel, whether it's a restaurant, whether it's whatever you need to be thinking about these things.

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In my case, I was driving in the car with my abuser as a passenger when he began an escalating verbal attack. I could sense a physical attack was imminent. In minutes I had to determine the best course of action that could potentially get me to safety.

At the time I was living in a large two-story home with a 2-car garage. I knew my surroundings; I knew the entrance and exit points. While driving I silently devised my exit plan in my mind while I was driving. The plan worked, I reached my house, got out of the car and into the house which I had deemed would be safety since he did not have a key. I had overestimated his strength while in a rage and underestimated the strength of the door frame on my home.

After a few attempts he kicked in two doors and proceeded to attack me and hold me hostage while he beat me repeatedly over a period of several hours.

The attack took place in the living dining room area nearest the front door. He made numerous attempts to beat and drag me to the back of the house near the kitchen and back sliding doors. I knew I could not let that happen because of the knives and other weapons that would be within reach. Additionally, I had a swimming pool, the potential also existed for him to get me out the door and drowned me or to turn on the stove and burn me. I also knew that there was no way to exit the backyard without running a great distance and scaling a 6-foot cinder block fence because my gate was bolted and padlocked from the other side.

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I knew my best option to get out alive was to remain in the front of the house nearest 2 doors and windows. I clung to the stair railing for dear life, literally. I made several failed attempts that resulted in my hand and arm being slammed in the door only to then be pulled and dragged across the floor until I could grasp the railing again. Eventually I was wrestle my way free and escape out the front door.

The point in sharing this is to demonstrate how critical your awareness of your surroundings is. I got out alive, in part, because I knew for sure which room gave me the best chance for escape and which options would pose additional threats/risks.

Apply these same concepts to your workplace in the event that your abuser comes to your job. This is especially important if you have successfully escaped from the home and the workplace is the one place they know where and when to find you. Domestic & Relational Violence is often a precursor to Workplace Violence. Often people assume that if they have escaped the home, they are safe and forget their workplace. Abusers typically know your schedule and they know that if they can't gain access to you or find you anywhere else, more than likely you will be at work.

All the same awareness's you must have for home you need for your workplace, and then some....

At work consider the following:

- Is there building security?
 - Is security armed?
 - What is the patrol frequency?
 - Does patrol include parking structures?

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- Are you in an open parking lot or a parking garage?
- How far away do you have to park?
- What is the lighting situation in the parking lot/garage if you arrive or leave when it is dark outside?
- Does the parking lot/garage have security or secure access?
 - Is it below ground?
 - Do you park on an upper floor?
 - Can someone escort you to and from your vehicle? (even in daylight depending on the volatility of the situation with your abuser).
- Do you access your job from an elevator or stairwell?
- How many entrances and exit options are there?
 - Are exits locked or alarmed at certain times?
 - Alarmed exits can be a great deterrent to prevent an abuser from trying to follow you out an armed door once the alarm sounds.

I know I have said it before, and I will continue to say this. I know this is a lot to process and consider. Making a safe exit can be done incrementally depending on how much time you have to plan. But when it comes to getting out alive, we I think of executing the plan in bite sized pieces.

As the saying goes, How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.

That's how we deal with domestic violence prevention. Also, one bite at a time, one small piece, one situation at a time. We control what we can control. But with an awareness of all the things that go into making a safe exit. It is important to start thinking in these contexts no matter

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where you're at, if you're at a holiday party, at someone else's house, at work, or at the movies. Your vigilance and commitment to this process can make all the difference for you, and those who are around you. Like I mentioned previously, never UNDERESTIMATE YOUR ABUSER.

This is why our motto is It's just not that simple...

We understand the complexities of abuse and if leaving an abusive relationship was safe and simple everyone would do it. Nothing about domestic violence is simple. Certainly, exiting a relationship is not simple. It's one of the most dangerous times, and that's why we have to do the planning ahead of time before it's an emergency.

A 'grab and go,' where you run out of the house in a hurry, should be considered only as a last resort. Even in those instances if you have been following some of the planning strategies in this book it will help you exit as quickly and safely as possible. Additionally, these strategies should also help you stay safe once you've gotten out.

But also practice your exit strategy, and practice being vigilant and observant outside the home. Practice your plan with your children if you have them.

Practice matters! You want your exit plan to be instinctive. For example, I used to work at a bank where over a short period of time I was robbed at gunpoint four times. We did robbery training every single year. The training prepared me to know what to do before, during and after a robbery. What it did not do such a good job of, was preparing me for the emotional elements that come with being robbed. I was not prepared for the conflicting combination of fear and

adrenaline that accompanied being robbed at gun point. Additionally, being frozen and unsure how to respond to an erratic gunman who is shaking a weapon in my face and screaming instructions. At times I was unable to make out what was said which exacerbated the situation and caused confusion to an already terrifying and chaotic situation.

But I knew what NOT to do, because we had rehearsed it.

When I became a bank manager, we incorporated live mock robberies into our training to prepare the employees for the adrenaline and emotion. Even though staff knew it was a mock set up, the adrenaline still kicked in, emotions still rose up, fear was still prevalent. It gave them an opportunity to experience a more realistic scenario. They were able to identify how difficult it could be to effectively follow robber instructions and adhere to the safety procedures, including getting an adequate description of the robbers both with and without the guns.

As the violence escalates it is natural to rely on instincts, that is why practice and training ahead of time becomes life or death. What you hope for in an emergency situation is that the training will become the instinct you rely on rather than the emotions.

Safe Exits with children:

911 protocol:

If you have small children teach them about 911 in detail. It is important that they are prepared for what will happen when they call. They need to understand what it's for as well as when and how to use it.

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- Teach them what the 911 operator's job is
- Educate them about the types of questions they will be asked.
- Make sure they know their address
- The types of questions they will be asked
- Explain why they need to stay on the line or at least not hang up after they have called.

Emergency HELP WORD, SAFE WORD, ESCAPE WORD:

This will depend in large part on the age and reliability of your child(ren). They will need to be old enough to understand the use of the words, remember them, and be able to know when it is appropriate time to use them.

HELP WORD: Means CALL 911 for help. *When it is safe to do so. Use caution to do this if the abuse is likely to be transferred to the child as punishment for trying to make the call.

The goal of the HELP WORD is that when a child hears that word used in an argument or fight, they will know what to do. They will know how to call 911 and exactly what to tell the dispatcher.

SAFE WORD: If anyone other than you comes to get them from school, daycare, events, practices etc. they must provide the SAFE WORD. If the person (even the other parent) does not give them the Safe Word, they are to run to teacher or another supervisory adult.

- One caveat, if you are implementing a safe word for pickups, it is recommended that you notify the schools, daycares, or other care takers. This allows them to

know when and how to intervene. Up to and including calling 911.

ESCAPE WORD: This word tells your child to RUN! Leave the house and wait at a designated safe place that you have identified in advance. Perhaps a neighbor's house or some other nearby location until you come and get them.

- Once they are safe, they should call 911 themselves or have an adult call.
- If the child calls, they need to be able to tell the 911 operator where they are located or put an adult on the phone to explain.

Again, making sure your child is capable of such responsibility. It is best if it is a place where someone will be background, and I wrote disaster contingency plans.

Stress plays a huge role in the effectiveness of the use of emergency words and PRACTICE MATTERS.

When I was attacked by my abuser, even as an adult, with many years of emergency preparedness, disaster response training, my first instinct was not to call 911. To compound it his final words to me were that he was going to come back to my house and kill me. I believed him. I did not call 911.

In retrospect, after my adrenaline and the imminent risk had been eradicated, I believed that I should have, for a long time I struggled with that thought. Once I learned more about trauma and the effects on the body, I understood I did what I could do in that moment. The goal of escape is always to survive. I did that. But even with that, it is a

complex set of circumstances, but I could write another whole book about why I didn't.

But as it relates to the information contained in this book, these strategies have been used and found to be helpful in the exit planning process.

Everything we do is because we've been there, and our strategies are designed by survivors for survivors.

MEET UP SPOT:

This is to be used if you get separated during your escape. You designate a nearby meeting place. This is where your kids and you will each go if you get separated.

This can be the same place they go when using the ESCAPE WORD and the same guidance applies. Then they need to know what to do when they get there.

- Call 911
- Scream for help
- Bang on doors

This information has to be drilled into your children.

Exiting with individuals who have cognitive, mobility, or audible disabilities:

Make sure you make appropriate allowances in the planning process for their safety in your exit plan. Getting out alive includes you and everyone who you're responsible for, and so you have to include them in the process.

In some cases, you may have been forced to leave them temporarily until you can get assistance to come back for

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them. The point here is to HAVE A PLAN in place for what you need to do, so you are not attempting to resolve it in the heat of the moment.

Also include them in the plan to the degree that it is safe to do so without compromising the overall plan. You have to include them in the rehearsals. It's not a one and done.

Your Safe Exit plan is a living plan. You should constantly be reviewing and updating it as things change.

I repeat.... Practice, practice, practice. If it is just you, practice. If your plan involves others, include them in the practice. You're constantly practicing it, you're constantly keeping it top of mind, and you're constantly making sure that your children and anyone else who you are responsible for knows this information.

4

Mobile Safety

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This next section is about mobile device safety. We live in a mobile environment; with everything we want or know is accessible in the palm of our hands.

Typically, on our cell phone we use our phones to pay bills. We use them to call people to take pictures, to take videos, to record special events, to hold information. We literally carry a mini-PC in our pocket. When Bill Gates started Microsoft, the goal was to have a computer in every home. We have far exceeded that. Not only do we have it in our homes, but we also have it in our pockets and in our purses.

The blessing when it comes to Domestic & Relational Violence is that you have access to the phone and the ability to call for help when you need it. On the flip side, because it stores so much data, it also can also be tracked very easily and by extension you can be tracked. Where you are, what you inquire about etc.

As it relates to your mobile safety. Let's take a look at some way to keep yourself safe by keeping the information on your device secure.

Diving right in, the number one thing is if you were in a volatile situation and abusive relationship, consider accessing and storing Exit Planning information using a secondary device or back up phone.

You can get them in convenience stores, supermarkets, and chain stores. Keeping the device a secret is crucial. Once you set it up, immediately turn the device and all notifications to silent.

When it is not in use, keep it charged and turned off.

As recommended in Chapter 2 – keep it in your safety bag.

But when we're talking about your primary phone, I want you to be thinking in terms of a worst-case scenario mindset when you access or store information in your phone (or on your computer). Consider what someone can do with the information?

Consider who owns your phone:

Do you own it or does the individual that you're trying to leave own it? If your abuser owns the phone or the plan is theirs, they can gain access to all of your information. Additionally, they can shut it off anytime they want. You have no control, no say so over it. If you have the means, it is important you are using a phone that you own.

If that is not an option, getting an inexpensive backup phone becomes even more important.

Consider your use of passwords: Even if the phone or the plan is in your name, but you access it on your computer at home a lot, or if you use just a blanket login and password for everything, they can gain access using your login credentials.

Change passwords frequently and do not store the login on your computer. Biometrics and facial recognition can be forced so an actual password is the most secure.

The goal is to limit the amount of risk exposure.

Limit who knows you have a backup phone and limit who you give the number to. That information should only be shared on a must need to know basis. Definitely do not

share this information who are bonded to or easily manipulated by your abuser.

You can use it for schools, medical personnel if necessary but be really restricted in who you give that phone number to, because the last thing you want is for that information to become public information. The backup phone is just for safety purposes. It's for emergency planning. It's for your safe exit plan.

Code name for call access. The phone is the first-place people want to gain access to if they suspect anything suspicious. Because it is perceived that in this day and age, that is where all of the secrets are kept. Even if there are no secrets to keep. Therefore, it makes sense to incorporate that access into the safety plan process.

The following scenario can be implemented for people that are included in the safety plan process and who may need to contact you by phone. It is particularly helpful with an abuser who restricts your access to the phone or who monitors conversations.

People on your safe list should be instructed what to do if they call your phone and anyone other than you answers. They should know not to ask for you unless that person answering provides the code name.

So, what this would look like in a scenario would be as follows: If you were on my safe list and called my phone, and I didn't answer. Instead of saying who is this or asking for me, you would ask "Is Stephanie (for example) available?" Well, my name clearly isn't Stephanie causing the person on the other end of the phone who is unaware

of the safety plan to think they have dialed the wrong number. They would say so and end the call. This would tell you that an unauthorized person had answered and that there may be cause for concern.

However, if the person picking up is ME or someone who is on the safe list and aware of the safety plan, they will respond with, “this is Stephanie” and you both know it is ok to proceed to talk freely.

If the person who answered your phone says there's no Stephanie here. Then as the caller you would know to hang up. If I see, I missed a call then I would know I need to call you and follow up.

Use lock codes. Some phones allow you to do facial recognition, others can use a fingerprint. They're great, but they can also be used when you're unconscious, so you need to be aware of that.

Using a pin code. Most phones will now allow you to do up to 6 digits. Make sure it is like any other pin that you use for day-to-day things such as ATM pin numbers. For your phone lock use a pin code that is at least 6 digits if you can, something unrelated to you or your life if possible. Avoid using common dates such as birthdays or anniversaries.

Try converting a word to numbers for example: FINGER is 6 digits on the phone keypad you would use the number that corresponds to each letter. F=3, I=4, N=6, G=4, E=3, and R=7. Which would give you a pin code of 346437.

Why is securing this access so important if you don't have any 'secrets' per se? Phones can be used to track your

movements and store that data in the phone, giving someone the ability to learn where you have gone and use that data to give insight as to what you may be planning. In addition, knowing who you are talking to can place added risks on you and others who may be trying to provide assistance to you.

Turn off your location: If you have your location on, turn it off. The location tracking on your phone is helpful with directions but it also contains geo tagging in your camera settings on your phone which means wherever you are your location information is embedded into the photograph so when/if you upload that picture to a social media site like Facebook or Instagram, whatever that information is linked to the picture can be downloaded and accessed by anyone.

Download a spyware tracker: There are apps available for downloading to your device that will alert you if someone adds spyware or tracking software to your phone/tablet/laptop. Once it is identified you can choose to delete it. Spyware is designed to remain hidden and run undetected in the background system of your device.

Use a Virus Protection There's a bunch of different ones, and some offer free versions. You just have to do some research.

Change passwords frequently: This goes for phones, computers, and all of your social media. Platforms. Do not write them down. We all know this but most of us still do it. If you do, then don't keep them where they can be easily discovered.

Secure children's devices: All of the same access available through your devices are also accessible through kids tablets. A well-known tactic is to place a child's tablet or cell phone in a vehicle maybe under a seat or in the trunk with the shared location turned on. This essentially turns the child's device into a tracker. The child thinks they have lost their device, but in fact it is being misused as a tracking device to monitor your movements and/or to find you once you have escaped.

Keep in mind these are just some best practice recommendations to keep you as safe as possible while you're developing your safe exit strategy.

Try the library computers to do your DV research instead of using your cell phone. That way you can do your research for legal services, shelter services, housing etc.

If you have to use your primary devices to do research, make sure you have Google Chrome and do the search in incognito mode. You can also turn off search tracking in your settings.

If you're gonna stay safe and protect your mobile safety, you must begin by implementing some precautions.

Lastly, once you have escaped safely and you own your phone plan, you can do a factory reset on your phone and change your number.

This will erase any stored data in there and make it more difficult to reach you. But remember to back up anything that you will need to move forward such as contact information, addresses, photos, and other key information

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to protect the data. The factory reset, clears everything out of the device and restores all of the settings back to the factory settings.

I know some of this may seem a little bit extreme and possibly somewhat overwhelming. Domestic violence is an extreme circumstance that can end in grave danger, even death.

That is the sole purpose of this book, to give you some best practices to think about that you may have never considered for the simple fact as, they are extreme measures.

Goal #1 to keep you alive, safe, and make sure you are able to tell the story as a survivor.

5

Protecting Your Digital Identity

Your digital footprint, your online footprint, and you'll hear different terms for it for, but basically, it's the electronic tracking of everywhere you go online, the sites you visit, and what types of things you look for. The data gets compiled, analyzed, and sold to marketers, advertisers, and search engines like Google, YouTube, and Bing.

They use your digital identity and footprint to give you product recommendations, screen what news articles you get, how your social feeds are managed etc. Every time you logon they know if you are a Mac or PC, Apple or Android, Phone, laptop, desktop. Are you at home, school, or the office? Every move we make online is tracked and managed in a way that gives them information to manage us . There is really no getting around it.

But for our purposes, we are not fighting Google or Amazon, we are trying to keep you safe from your abuser while you develop your Safe Exit Plan.

But the fact that there is so much tracking happening it is important for you to have a broad understanding so that you can protect yourself as much as possible. It doesn't matter why or how you logon or how careful you are, you're going to leave some sort of a digital footprint.

In the case of domestic violence, it's really about minimizing the amount of information that you put out there that an abuser can track down and find you once you have made it out of the relationship. So, you want to reduce that, that digital footprint. In the last chapter we talked a bit about mobile awareness primarily as it relates to how you use your phone and what you are accessing.

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Now we are going to move the conversation more toward your actual computer devices like your desktop, laptop, and tablets. Much of the information is applicable to both since your phone is just a smaller computer.

Think about all of the things you rely on digital services. For example, I do all my banking online. I've applied for loans and credit cards online. I transfer money online between financial institutions via wire transfer, PayPal, or reloadable cards like Green Dot. I access my credit scores and my bank statements online. We utilize online services to send, share, and sign mortgage documents, lease agreements, and client contracts. We store personal, business, and private client files online. Some are on the provider servers; others are in the 'cloud' like Google Drive or Microsoft One Drive. Still others are retained on the hard drive of the device or a backup storage device. At this point even my grocery shopping and other personal shopping is done online as well. All have access levels, login credentials, and varying levels of security.

I use online social sites to connect with and communicate with friends and family. I think I pretty much have used all of them either presently or in the past.

Use of Social sites, like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and several online dating apps and sites all leave massive digital footprints. The way they are all run it is hard to even tell who you are sharing your information with. For example, if you say, I only have Facebook, I don't use Instagram. Well guess what... Facebook owns Instagram in fact they also own WhatsApp. So those other sites, even though you have never logged in, or set up a user account,

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they also have your access to all of the digital footprint info that FB has. Just like Google owns YouTube.

I have also hosted podcasts, mailing lists, blogs, and digital newsletters. Each of these become another access point and additional information for my online footprint. If someone likes, comments, or tags you in something on social media they are not only adding you to their footprint, but they are also adding themselves to yours.

As you can see, it is nearly impossible to live in today's connected society and not have any digital footprint. This awareness is important from the standpoint of DV and RV prevention so that you understand how it works and can begin to be more selective about what services you access and how you access them.

Once you leave an abuser you want to limit as much personal identifying information that can be found online as possible. The last thing you want after investing a bunch of time and effort in escaping a situation is for that person to be able to easily find you and track you down and discover your whereabouts.

You have to be diligent about managing your online presence. Your online footprint, simply changing the name on your Facebook is not gonna be enough. Likewise, just changing your password on a couple of accounts is not going to be enough either. While both of those things are recommended it will require a more intensive approach to all of them.

Making a safe exit and staying safe after you exit means severely limiting your digital footprint. You need to begin controlling the things that you can control.

Here are some ways that you can do that.

Get a Private Mailbox (PMB) or PO Box: It sounds weird when we're talking about digital footprints, to start talking about physical postal mailing address. But this is key because you want to remove your actual physical address where you live from anything that you access online as well as any personal or business financial records. You can get a virtual mailing address or visit a UPS Store or the Post Office. I recommend the UPS store for a personal mailbox because you get an actual street mailing address that looks like one you would see for an apartment. There are many organizations that do not accept PO Boxes and will still require that you provide an actual street mailing address. By using a PMB you will be given an actual street address that meets this requirement.

This also gives you a place to have documents and packages sent without disclosing your home address. In most cases they will even sign for packages and hold them for you until you can pick them up.

Now I will warn you, it is recommended that you individually update your addresses and do not do a postal forward to a PMB. It is more work to do it one by one, but it is easier to change the address if you decide you no longer want something sent to the PMB.

I know the USPS forward is more convenient, but this is not about convenience, it is about safety and can mean the

literal difference between life or death for you and those you love.

Passwords: Again, avoid having them all be the same if you can help it. Mix them up using both upper- and lower-case letters numbers and a symbol or two. Most companies will accept 8 characters, but some require more, and others will accept more characters even if they do not require something that long.

Of example one of my banks requires 16 digits, a mix of upper, lower, at least one number and two symbols.

It took a minute before I found one that I could both use and remember. But now, believe me that is probably the one password I never forget.

Another trick is to convert a short phrase into a password. For example, convert the phrase I Love Dogs! into alpha numeric and add a symbol. So, it may look like 4L683d647! or maybe IloveD647!

The point here is to make it a difficult combination for someone to guess. This is especially important if you are going to insist on still using the same password on everything.

Don't write them down. You can use a digital password keeper to store them all but if you go that route, be certain that you use a master passcode that is a minimum of 16 digits and includes special characters, letters, numbers, and a combination of upper- and lower-case letters. When you are considering the long passwords, phrases can help you remember them. Trying something like Summer Is My

Favorite Season. It doesn't really mean anything to anyone else, the likelihood of someone guessing it is pretty slim and even though there are no numbers or special characters in there. It's random. You can get as creative as you want with it.

It just can't be anything that your abuser is going to know, as it will make it easier to guess. Avoid favorite things like sports teams, food, movies, songs, musicians, or family members etc.

So, for me, I would never have a password with the Steelers in it or my kids names because those would be obvious things to begin guessing.

Turn on notification alerts: This will send you a text anytime someone attempts to change a password or fails multiple login attempts.

Turn on Multi-factor authentication: This will require a text or email approval for any sign in from an unknown device or location. Even if it is on the same device. For example, when I was living in Alaska for a few months, any time I tried to access my online accounts I would have to do an approval because I was attempting to access from a different state that I normally used, which was Arizona

As you begin putting these new things in place, be mindful of your timing. If you randomly just of a sudden change passwords that your abuser once knew, or they are suddenly required to get sign on approvals it may raise a red flag.

In this case I would begin with just the alerts / notifications so that you can begin monitoring when or how often they attempt to gain access to your information.

Eventually you will need to make the changes but timing matters. You know your situation best, so be aware of what's going on and the uniqueness of your circumstances. Before you go in and actually do it.

Avoid shared devices: This isn't always possible but avoid it as much as you can. If you must use the same device as your abuser, delete any searches that will raise red flags from the search history. Do not delete the whole history as that can raise alarm as well.

In these instances, using a public computer at the library or one of a trusted friends would be safer because it decreases your abusers ability to retrieve sites you have accessed or view saved information.

Beware of cookies: As discussed previously everything you do is tracked and stored. Those little alerts that pop up and talk about this site uses cookies. Well, the cookies is simply another word for tracking. It's a tracking mechanism that they say allows the page to load faster the next time you access it, but it will also begin prefilling any information or search boxes that were previously accessed on the site.

That's why if there are certain sites you access all the time it will prefill things like names, addresses, emails etc. based on what has been input previously.

For example. If I go to Google search bar and type in the number 9, it immediately prefills 9seconds.org. It predicts

that is what I must want because that is a frequent site I visit.

Delete your cache and cookies: After you have completed using your computer. Go to your tool bar and delete the stored cache and cookies.

Typically deleting cookies will also delete any auto stored passwords as well as search history.

Depending on your device type and the web browser you use (Microsoft Explorer, Chrome, Mozilla, or Firefox are the most common) you use the cache and cookie storage location and procedures vary. A quick google search for “how to clear cache and cookies on [insert browser name]” should provide you with device and platform specific instructions.

6

National Resource Hotlines

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Hopefully, this book has provided you with some useful information that will help you plan for your safe exit and stay free and safe once you leave.

For local resources in your area, you may contact anyone of the 24-Hour National Emergency Hotlines.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: The National Domestic Violence Hotline Online: www.thehotline.org or by phone: 1.800.799.7233 or TEXT “START” to 88788

SEXUAL ASSAULT: National Sexual Assault Hotline online: www.rainn.org Telephone 1.800.656.4673.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING: National Hotline for Human Trafficking Online: www.humantraffickinghotline.org or by phone at 1.888.373.7888 or TEXT [233733](https://www.humantraffickinghotline.org/text)

SUICIDE PREVENTION: Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Online: www.988lifeline.org or by phone or text at dial 988

Please add these numbers to your phone or include them on the list in your safety bag.

Breaking free from domestic violence demands more than courage—it requires strategy, preparation, and expert guidance. Every nine seconds, someone faces domestic violence, and the most dangerous moment in their journey is often the decision to leave. With 75% of domestic homicides occurring during or after attempted exits, having a comprehensive safety strategy isn't just helpful—it's vital.

MAKING A SAFE Exit transforms well-meaning advice like 'just leave' into actionable, life-saving strategies. This essential guide provides the critical 'how' that's missing from conventional wisdom, empowering you to:

- Create a secure, strategic exit plan
- Protect yourself and your support network
- Navigate complex safety decisions
- Access vital resources and support systems.

This isn't just a book—it's a pathway to freedom, carefully crafted to address the intricate challenges of domestic violence survival. Whether you're contemplating leaving, supporting someone who is, or working in advocacy, these evidence-based strategies and tools provide the foundation for a safe, sustainable transformation.

MAKING A SAFE Exit stands as your comprehensive blueprint for breaking free and rising strong—because your safety isn't just about leaving, it's about leaving alive and thriving.

Break Free. Rise Strong. Live Powerfully.



Dr. Marci Batiste is a trailblazing consultant, speaker, and advocate dedicated to supporting frontline providers who care for those in need. As Principal Consultant and Trainer at The Compass for Change, she empowers organizations to develop trauma-informed, people-first cultures that value employees and improve client outcomes. With three decades of corporate leadership and over a decade in behavioral health, she champions the Gold Standard for ethical leadership, care, and workplace excellence. Dr. Marci is also the Founder of Nine Seconds Corporation, a nonprofit fighting domestic violence, and remains passionate about transforming organizations to improve the human condition.