

Safety Plan

National Domestic Violence Hotline

Living with an Abuser

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

Leaving a Relationship

Preparing to Leave

Because violence could escalate when someone tries to leave, here are some things to keep in mind before you leave:

- Keep any evidence of physical abuse, such as pictures of injuries.
- Keep a journal of all violent incidences, noting dates, events and threats made, if possible. Keep your journal in a safe place.
- Know where you can go to get help. Tell someone what is happening to you.
- If you are injured, go to a doctor or an emergency room and report what happened to you. Ask that they document your visit.
- Plan with your children and identify a safe place for them, like a room with a lock or a friend's house where they can go for help. Reassure them that their job is to stay safe, not to protect you.
- Contact your local shelter and find out about laws and other resources available to you before you have to use them during a crisis. WomensLaw.org has state by state legal information.
- Acquire job skills or take courses at a community college as you can.

- Try to set money aside or ask friends or family members to hold money for you.

When You Leave

Make a plan for how and where you will escape quickly. You may request a police escort or stand-by when you leave. If you have to leave in a hurry, use the following list of items as a guide to what you need to bring with you. Our advocates can help you come up with a personalized safety plan for leaving.

1) Identification

- Driver's license
- Birth certificate and children's birth certificates
- Social security cards
- Financial information
- Money and/or credit cards (in your name)
- Checking and/or savings account books

2) Legal Papers

- Protective order
- Copies of any lease or rental agreements, or the deed to your home
- Car registration and insurance papers
- Health and life insurance papers
- Medical records for you and your children
- School records
- Work permits/green Card/visa
- Passport
- Divorce and custody papers
- Marriage license

3) Emergency Numbers

- Your local police and/or sheriff's department
- Your local domestic violence program or shelter
- Friends, relatives and family members
- Your local doctor's office and hospital
- County and/or District Attorney's Office

4) Other

- Medications
- Extra set of house and car keys
- Valuable jewelry
- Pay-as-you-go cell phone
- Address book
- Pictures and sentimental items
- Several changes of clothes for you and your children
- Emergency money

After You Leave

Your safety plan should include ways to ensure your continued safety after leaving an abusive relationship. Here are some safety precautions to consider:

- Change your locks and phone number.
- Call the telephone company to request caller ID. Ask that your phone number be blocked so that if you call anyone, neither your partner nor anyone else will be able to get your new, unlisted phone number.
- Change your work hours and the route you take to work.
- Change the route taken to transport children to school or consider changing your children's schools.
- Alert school authorities of the situation.
- If you have a restraining order, keep a certified copy of it with you at all times, and inform friends, neighbors and employers that you have a restraining order in effect.
- Call law enforcement to enforce the order and give copies of the restraining order to employers, neighbors and schools along with a picture of the offender.
- Consider renting a post office box or using the address of a friend for your mail (be aware that addresses are on restraining orders and police reports, and be careful to whom you give your new address and phone number).
- Reschedule appointments that the offender is aware of.
- Use different stores and frequent different social spots.
- Alert neighbors and request that they call the police if they feel you may be in danger.
- Replace wooden doors with steel or metal doors. Install security systems if possible.
- Install a motion sensitive lighting system.
- Tell people you work with about the situation and have your calls screened by one receptionist if possible.
- Tell people who take care of your children or drive them/pick them up from school and activities. Explain your situation to them and provide them with a copy of the restraining order.

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Safety During an Argument

- Stay in an area with an exit and avoid letting the other person get between you and the exit.
- Practice getting out of your home safely.
- Avoid rooms with weapons, such as the kitchen.
- Have emergency 911 phones hidden throughout the home. (Police or shelter requests free 911 phone by calling 866-290-7864 or email: requests@911cellphonebank.org)
- Tell trustworthy neighbors about the violence. Ask them to call the police if they hear or see any disturbance.
- Devise a code word or signal to use with your children, family, friends, and trustworthy neighbors when you need the police.
- Trust your instincts and judgment. You have the right to protect yourself until you are out of danger.

Safety When Preparing to Leave

- Establish your independence. Open savings and credit card accounts in your name only and specifically instruct institutions that your partner is not to have access.
- Leave money, extra keys, copies of important documents, extra medicine and clothes with someone you trust so you can leave quickly.
- Determine safe people you can stay with and plan leaving with.
- Review and rehearse your safety plan.
- Keep a packed bag at a trusted relative's or friend's home.
- Plan where you will go if you have to leave.

Safety After He Leaves

- Change the locks on your doors. (Landlords are legally obligated to change locks within 24 hrs if you are experiencing DV).
- Install locks on your windows. (Renters check with your landlord first.)
- Discuss and practice a safety plan with your children for when you are not with them.
- Inform your children's schools or caregivers who has permission to pick up your children.
- Inform neighbors and landlord that your partner no longer lives with you and to call the police if they see him or her near your home.

Safety with a Restraining Order

- Keep your protective order on you at all times, and give a copy to a trusted neighbor, friend or family member.
- Call the police if your abuser violates the protective order.
- Think of alternative ways to keep safe if the police do not respond right away.
- Inform family, friends, neighbors and health care providers that you have a restraining order in effect.

Safety on the Job and in Public

- Decide who at work you will inform of your situation, include building security.
- Provide a photo of your abuser for quick identification.
- Screen your telephone calls.
- Devise a safety plan for leaving work, such as exiting through the back door.
- Have someone escort you when leaving and wait with you until you are safely en route.
- Use a variety of routes to go home.
- Rehearse what you would do if something happened while going home, such as picking a safe place to go to.

- Create a safety routine when you arrive home: checking your house and property, checking in with someone to let them know you are safe, etc.

Your Safety and Emotional Health

- Identify who you can rely on for emotional support and call our Crisis Line at 866-469-8600.
- If you have to communicate with your abuser, determine the safest way to do so and avoid being alone with them.
- Advocate for yourself and your needs. Find people and resources you can safely and openly talk to and ask for help. You are not alone, and you do not have to go through this by yourself.
- Look into counseling and support groups that directly address your experiences and needs.
- Find ways to care for yourself: exercise, make time to relax, create a safe environment, do things you enjoy, get as much support as you can.

Internet and Computer Safety

- Remember that all computer and online activity may be monitored.
- Abusers may monitor your emails and internet activity, if you are planning to flee to a particular location, don't look at classified ads for jobs and apartments, bus tickets, etc. for that place.
- It is safer to use a computer in a public library, at a trusted friend's house, at an internet cafe, or any other public terminals.
- Abusers may also track your activity and whereabouts through your cell phone; if you think there a chance this may be happening, take your phone into your provider, Apple store, or Best Buy Geek Squad and have it thoroughly checked.
- If your phone has been compromised and you get a new one, do NOT update your phone from the cloud.

Checklist: What You Should Take When You Leave

Legal Papers

- Restraining order/stalking order
- Lease, rental agreement, house deed
- Car registration
- Health and life insurance cards
- Divorce papers
- Custody papers

Other

- House and car keys
- Medications
- Valuables, photos, etc.
- Address book
- Phone card/safety cell phone
- Clothes, blankets, small toys for children
- Clothes, hygiene necessities, etc. for yourself

Identification

- Driver's license
- Children's birth certificates
- Social security card
- Self-sufficiency/disability identification

Papers

- Medical records for you and your children
- Work permits/green card
- VISA

These items should be put together and stored in a safe place, such as at work or a friend's house.

You may take anything that belongs to you alone or to you and your partner together. You can withdraw money you have in a joint bank account with your partner. You may not take anything that belongs only to your partner, and you may not destroy property that belongs to both of you.

If you do not take these things when you leave, you can come back to get what you need when your partner is at work. Or you can ask the police to escort you back to your house to get some of your things, such as clothing. The police probably cannot force your partner to let you in without a court order.