



When Leaving is the Safest Step: Planning for Separation from Intimate Partner Violence

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Leaving an abusive relationship is never easy, and often, it is the most dangerous time for someone experiencing intimate partner violence. For many victims, deciding to leave is not about willpower or courage; it's about timing, safety, and access to the right support.

This is why safety planning is essential. A well-considered plan doesn't guarantee safety, but it significantly increases the chances of a safer transition. It empowers survivors to think ahead, gather resources, and navigate separation with strategic care.

At the heart of any safety plan is **trusting your instincts**. If you feel something isn't right, it likely isn't. Many survivors describe a persistent feeling of walking on eggshells, constantly monitoring their partner's moods or reactions. These feelings are valid. Your body and intuition often recognize danger before your mind fully can. Listen to that wisdom.

Creating a safety plan means identifying where you can go, what you'll need, and who you can trust. Pack a small bag with essential items: identification, medications, important documents, emergency cash, and keys. Keep it somewhere safe; perhaps with a friend or tucked away in a secure location. If children or pets are involved, include their needs in your preparations.

Technology can be both a tool and a risk. Abusers often track phone use, social media, or shared accounts. Use a safe device when searching for support services. Clear your search history and change your passwords, especially for email, banking, and social apps. Turn off location-sharing features and be cautious of apps that may reveal your whereabouts.

Survivors don't have to do this alone. **Support is available!** Whether it's through a friend, victim services, a local shelter, or a confidential helpline. In Canada, a good starting point is **211 or your local Victim Services site**. By calling or visiting 211 online, you'll be connected to relevant community services in your area, including victim services, shelters, legal aid, counselling, and crisis support. The service is free, confidential, and available 24/7 in multiple languages.

Once separation begins, continue protecting your privacy. Consider changing your phone number, updating your address with care, and notifying your workplace and children's schools discreetly. Ask them to keep your information private. If you're concerned for your safety, explore options like restraining orders or supervised custody arrangements. Advocacy organizations can help with this process and walk with you every step of the way.

Above all, **know that leaving is not failure. It is survival**. Every step you take toward safety is an act of strength. And while the journey may be hard, you are not alone. Across Canada, individuals and organizations are working tirelessly to ensure that survivors of intimate partner violence are supported, believed, and protected.

You deserve to feel safe. You deserve to be free from harm. And when you are ready, support is here. They will not tell you what to do, but walk with you as you reclaim your safety, dignity, and peace.

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