

## Developing a Safety Plan

When considering leaving an abusive relationship one must have a well thought out plan. It might take several attempts before she can leave permanently. Even when a woman decides that leaving might be in her best interest, there are many emotional, physical, and financial issues, combined with danger, that make leaving difficult. Additionally, leaving does not guarantee that the violence will end. Because of this danger, it helps to be prepared. Safety planning can help women prepare to safely leave their batterers and it empowers them to know that they have options other than living with abuse.

The following guide can help an abused women in making a safety plan. It is strongly recommended that anyone thinking of leaving an abusive relationship and/or making a safety plan should do so in consultation with a trained domestic violence counselor.

There is no one best way to protect yourself from future harm by your abuser. Many women involved in a domestic violence situation find it's helpful to make a safety plan. While you are working on a safety plan, remember, you don't have to figure it all out on your own. To help make a decision about what is best for you, it can be helpful to talk to a local domestic violence advocate or hotline counselor who has experience working with victims of domestic violence and who knows how to work with the different systems (police, courts, shelters, etc.) that can make things easier for you. They are familiar with your community and can help you make a safety plan that meets your individual needs.

Remember that you always have a choice. If you are in a dangerous situation, there is help available for you if you need it. If you write out a safety plan, be sure to keep it in a place where your partner won't find it.

### Plan Ahead

Make a safety plan when you can think things through. That way, if you need to get out quickly, you'll know where to go and what options are available to you.

### Decide how you would get out

- Decide on a pathway if you have to leave at night. Think of public places you can access 24 hours a day. Know the route to police stations, hospitals, fire stations and 24 hour convenience stores in your area.
- If you leave by car, make sure you lock the car doors immediately.
- Consider making a plan for each room in your home. What can you do to get out of the basement or upper floors of your home?
- Know which doors lock in your home.
- If you live in an apartment building, think of all the ways to get out safely. Is there a fire escape that could get you safely to the ground? Is there a stairwell you could use?

Communicate with someone who can help and decide where you would go. This may be difficult especially if your partner has isolated you; however, it is important to confide in a domestic violence advocate or hotline counselor who has been trained to help you.

- An advocate or domestic violence hotline counselor can help you figure out which friends and relatives might be able to help you.
- An advocate or hotline counselor can help you figure out alternatives if you have to leave at a time when your friend is not available.
- If you don't have a car, think of a safe place, close to your home, where your friend could pick you up.
- You may want to plan a code word or phrase to use on the telephone with a friend if you need to access help when your abuser is present. Tell your friend that when you say "----" it means you're in trouble and you need them to dial 911 for you.
- If you feel comfortable, tell your neighbors about the violence and ask if they will call the police if suspicious noises are coming from your home.

### **Plan**

- Keep your Order of Protection on you at all times.
- Keep your purse and keys in a safe place, in case you have to leave quickly.

### **Important documents**

Keep important documents together in a safe place – a domestic violence hotline counselor or advocate can help you decide where. These documents and other necessities could include:

- Order of Protection
- ATM Card
- Money/cab fare
- Checkbook
- Credit card
- Welfare ID
- Coins to use in a payphone
- Driver's license and car registration
- Social security card
- Your partner's social security number
- Medical records
- Address book
- Insurance policies
- Important legal documents
- Police records
- Record of violence
- Baby's things (diapers, formula, medication, etc.)
- Children's school and immunization records
- Birth certificates
- Medications
- Clothing

- Eye glasses
- Lease
- Pictures
- Anything of sentimental value
- Non-perishable snack for children (juice, crackers, etc.)
- Valuables such as jewelry or pottery that you can sell if needed

**Memorize or keep a listing of important telephone numbers**

- National Domestic violence Hotline (1-800-799-SAFE) and your local domestic violence hotline.
- Domestic Violence Unit at your local police department.
- Local hospital.
- You can dial 911 for free from most telephones. If you are in immediate danger, you should always call 911.

**How to keep your children safe**

- Make sure your children know how to dial 911 in an emergency situation.
- Teach your children how to call the police or fire department.
- Instruct your children on where to go in an emergency.

**How victims can assist themselves**

- Develop a support system with friends and family members.
- Start your own savings account and have the statements sent to a friend or relative's house.
- Keep a journal and document the abusive behavior (keep it in a safe place where the abuser can't find it).
- Try to avoid arguments with abuser in areas with potential weapons.
- Review your safety plan frequently. Revise as things change.