

Preparing A Safety Plan

One of the most important things you can do when developing your safety plan is to talk to a victim advocate who can help you fully consider safety issues, understand your legal rights, and identify community resources (e.g., shelters, sources of financial assistance, or food banks). You can also locate a victim advocate through a local domestic violence agency, which provides services at no charge to victims. The following safety suggestions have been compiled from safety plans distributed by state domestic violence coalitions from around the country. Following these suggestions is not a guarantee of safety but could help improve your safety situation.

Personal Safety with an Abuser

- Identify your partner's use and level of force so that you can assess danger to you and your children before it occurs.
- Try to avoid an abusive situation by leaving.
- Identify safe areas of the house where there are no weapons and where there are always 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 your arms around either side of your head, fingers entwined.
- If possible, have a phone accessible at all times and know the numbers to call for help. Know your local battered women's shelter phone number. Don't be afraid to 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 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 cause the violence, and that when anyone is being violent, it is important to keep safe.
- Practice how to get out safely. Practice with your children.
- Plan for what you will do if your children tell your partner of your plan or if your partner otherwise finds out about your plan.
- Keep weapons like guns and knives locked up 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 the other doors 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.
- Call a domestic violence hotline periodically to assess your options and get a supportive, understanding ear.

Getting Ready to Leave

- Keep any evidence of physical abuse, such as photographs of bruises and torn clothing.
- 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 injuries.
- Plan with your children and identify a safe place for them (for example, 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 battered women's shelter and find out about laws and other resources available to you before you have to use them during a crisis.
- Keep a journal of all violent incidents, noting dates, events, and threats made.
- Acquire job skills as you can, such as learning to type or taking courses at a community college.
- Try to set money aside or ask friends or relatives to hold money for you.
- Store some belongings with a friend or relative. Leave clothing, medications, your Social Security card, a credit card (if possible), citizenship documents, children's school/medical

records, children's toys, insurance information, copies of birth certificates, money, and other valued personal possessions with them.

The Day You Leave ...

- Leave when it is least expected, for example, during times of agreement and calm.
- Create a false trail. Call motels, real estate agencies, schools in a town at least six hours away from where you plan to relocate. Ask questions that require a call back to your house in order to leave those phone numbers on record.

General Guidelines for Leaving an Abusive Relationship

- Make a plan for how you will escape and where you will go.
- Plan for a quick escape.
- Put aside emergency cash as you can.
- Hide an extra set of car keys.
- Take with you important phone numbers (of friends, relatives, doctors, schools, etc.) as well as other important items, including:
 - Driver's license
 - Regularly needed medication
 - List of credit cards (account number and date of expiration) held by self or jointly, or the credit cards themselves if you have access to them
 - Pay stubs
 - Checkbooks and information about bank accounts and other assets.

If time is available, also take:

- Citizenship documents (such as your passport, green card, etc.)
- Titles, deeds, other property information, and tax returns
- Medical records
- Children's school records and immunization records

- Insurance information
- Copy of marriage license, birth certificates, will, and other legal documents
- Verification of Social Security numbers
- Welfare identification
- Valued pictures, jewelry, or personal possessions.

After Leaving the Abusive Relationship

If you are getting a restraining order and the offender is leaving:

- Change your locks and phone number.
- Change your work hours and route taken to work.
- Change the route you take to transport children to school.
- Keep a certified copy of your restraining order with you at all times.
- Inform friends, neighbors, and employers that you have a restraining order in effect.
- Give copies of the restraining order to employers, neighbors, and schools along with a picture of the offender.
- If available in your community, register with VINE Protective Order™ to be notified immediately when the order is served, when hearings will be held, and when any amendments to the order are filed. Ask your victim advocate or sheriff's office about this service.
- Call law enforcement to enforce the order.
- Carry a charged cell phone preprogrammed to 911.

If you leave:

- Consider renting a post office box for your mail.
- Be aware that addresses are listed on restraining orders and police reports.
- Be careful to whom you give your new address and phone number.
- Change your work hours if possible.
- Alert school authorities about the situation.
- Consider changing your children's schools.

- Reschedule any appointments that the offender is aware of when you leave.
- 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.
- Talk to trusted people about the violence.
- Replace wooden doors with steel or metal doors.
- Install security systems if possible.
- Install a lighting system that turns on when a person is coming close to the house (motion sensitive lights).
- 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 which individuals are allowed to pick up your children. Explain the situation to them and provide them with a copy of the restraining order.
- If you have a home phone, request caller ID so you know when he is calling. And ask that your home landline phone number be blocked so that if you call, neither your partner nor anyone else will be able to get your new, unlisted phone number. With cell phones, be cautious about your location setting if you don't want your location to be known. You may need your phone records for documentation for legal needs.
- Receive ongoing support from domestic violence and mental health service providers.

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Domestic Violence Personalized Safety Plan

Name: _____ Date: _____

The following steps represent my plan for increasing my safety and preparing in advance for the possibility for further violence. Although I do not have control over my partner's violence, I do have a choice about how to respond to him and how to best get myself and my children to safety.

STEP 1: Safety during a violence incident.

Women cannot always avoid violent incidents. In order to increase safety, battered women may use a variety of strategies.

I can use some of the following strategies:

1. If I decide to leave, I will _____.
(Practice how to get out safely. What door, windows, elevators, stairwells, or fire escapes would you use?)
2. I can keep my purse and car keys ready and put them *(location)* _____ in order to leave quickly.
3. I can tell _____ about the violence and request that she or he call the police if she or he hears suspicious noises coming from my house.
4. I can teach my children how to use the telephone to contact the police, the fire department, and 911.
5. I will use _____ as my code with my children or my friends so they can call for help.
6. If I have to leave my home, I will go to _____.
 - a. *(Decide this even if you don't think there will be a next time.)*
7. I can also teach some of these strategies to some or all of my children.
8. When I expect we're going to have an argument, I'll try to move to a place that is low

risk, such as _____. (Try to avoid arguments in the bathroom, garage, kitchen, near weapons, or in rooms without access to an outside door.)

9. I will use my judgment and intuition. If the situation is very serious, I can give my partner what he wants to calm him down. I have to protect myself until I / we are out of danger.

STEP 2: Safety when preparing to leave.

Battered women frequently leave the residence they share with the battering partner. Leaving must be done with a careful plan in order to increase safety. Batterers often strike back when they believe that a battered woman is leaving a relationship.

I can use some or all of the following strategies:

- A. I will leave money and an extra set of keys with _____, so I can leave quickly.
- B. I will keep copies of important documents or keys _____.
- C. I will open a savings account at _____, to increase my independence.
- D. Other things I can do to increase my independence, include:
_____.
- E. I realize that if I am on the same phone plan as my husband, he may be able to find out my outgoing and incoming phone numbers and texts, where they originated from, and how long the call was. This includes domestic abuse hotline numbers and abuse help agencies. To keep my phone communications confidential, I must either use a friend's phone or have my own phone plan.
- F. I will check with _____ and _____ to see who would be able to let me stay with them or lend me some money.
- G. I can leave extra clothes or money with _____.
- H. I will sit down and review my safety plan every _____ in

order to plan the safest way to leave the residence.

- I. _____ (*domestic violence advocate or friend's name*) has agreed to help me review this plan.
- J. I will rehearse my escape plan and, when appropriate, practice it with my children.

STEP 3: Safety in my own residence.

There are many things that a woman can do to increase her safety in her own residence. It may be impossible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step by step.

Safety measures I can use:

- A. I can change the locks on my doors and windows as soon as possible after separating from an abuser.
- B. I can replace wooden doors with steel / metal doors.
- C. I can install security systems, including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, an electronic system, etc.
- D. I can purchase rope ladders to be used for escape from second-floor windows.
- E. I can install smoke detectors and fire extinguishers for each floor of my house / apartment.
- F. I can install an outside lighting system that activates when a person is close to the house.
- G. I will teach my children how and when to call me and _____ (*name of friend, etc.*) in the event that my partner takes the children.
- H. I will tell the people who take care of my children which people have permission to pick up my children and that partner is not permitted to do so. The people I will inform about pick-up permission include:
 - a. _____ (*name of school*)
 - b. _____ (*name of babysitter*)
 - c. _____ (*name of teacher*)
 - d. _____ (*name of Sunday-school teacher*)
 - e. _____ (*name[s] of others*)
- I. I can inform _____ (*neighbor*)

and _____ (*friend*) that my partner no longer resides with me and that they should call law enforcement if he is observed near my residence.

J. Anything else unique to my situation?

STEP 4: Safety with an Order of Protection.

Many batterers obey protection orders, but one can never be sure which violent partner will obey and which will violate protective orders. I recognize that I may need to ask law enforcement and the courts to enforce my protective order.

- A. The following are some steps I can take to help the enforcement of my protection order:
- B. I will keep my protection order _____ (*location*). *Always keep it on or near your person. If you change purses, that's the first thing that should go into the new purse.*
- C. I will give my protection order to law enforcement departments in the community where I work, in those communities where I visit friends or family, and in the community where I live.
- D. *There should be county and state registries of protection orders that all law enforcement departments can call to confirm a protection order.* I can check to make sure that my order is on the registry. The telephone numbers for the county and state registries of protection orders are: _____ (county) and _____ (state).
- E. I will inform my employer; my minister, Rabbi, etc.; my closest friend; and _____ that I have a protection order in effect.
- F. If my partner destroys my protection order, I can get another official copy from the clerk's office even though I may have multiple photocopies.
- G. If law enforcement does not help, I can contact an advocate or an attorney and file a complaint with the Chief of Police Department or the Sheriff.
- H. If my partner violates the protection order, I can call 911 or law enforcement and report the violation.

STEP 5: Safety on the job and in public.

Each battered woman must decide if and when she will tell others that her partner has battered her and that she may be at continued risk. Friends, family, and co-workers can help to protect women. Each woman should carefully consider which people to invite to help secure her safety.

I might do any or all of the following:

- A. I can inform my boss, the security supervisor, and _____ at work.
- B. I can ask _____ to help screen my telephone calls at work.
- C. When leaving work, I can _____.
- D. If I have a problem while driving home, I can _____.
- E. If I use public transit, I can _____.
- F. I will go to different grocery stores and shopping malls to conduct my business and shop at hours that are different from those I kept when residing with my battering partner.
- G. I can use a different bank and go at hours that are different from those I kept when residing with my battering partner.

STEP 6: Safety and drug or alcohol use.

Most people in this culture use alcohol. Many use mood-altering drugs. Much of this is legal, although some is not. The legal outcomes of using illegal drugs can be very hard on battered women, may hurt her relationship with her children, and can put her at a disadvantage in other legal actions with her battering partner. Therefore, women should carefully consider the potential cost of the use of illegal drugs. Beyond this, the use of alcohol or other drugs can reduce a woman's awareness and ability to act quickly to protect herself from her battering partner.

Furthermore, the use of alcohol or other drugs by the batterer may give him an excuse to use violence. Specific safety plans must be made concerning drugs or alcohol use.

If drug or alcohol use has occurred in my relationship with my battering partner, I can enhance my safety by some or all of the following:

- A. If I am going to use, I can do so in a safe place and with people who understand the risk of violence and are committed to my safety.
- B. If my partner is using, I can _____ and / or _____.
- C. To safeguard my children, I might _____.

STEP 7: Safety and my emotional health.

The experience of being battered and verbally degraded by partners is usually exhausting and emotionally draining. The process of building a new life takes much courage and incredible energy.

To conserve my emotional energy and resources and to avoid hard emotional times, I can do some of the following:

1. If I feel down and am returning to a potentially abusive situation, I can _____.
2. When I have to communicate with my partner in person or by telephone, I can _____.
3. I will try to use “I can ...” statements with myself and be assertive with others.
4. I can tell myself, “_____”
5. whenever I feel others are trying to control or abuse me.
6. I can read _____ to help me feel stronger.
7. I can call _____ and _____ for support.
8. I can attend workshops and support groups at the domestic violence program or _____ to gain support and strengthen relationships.

STEP 8: Items to take when leaving.

When women leave battering partners, it is important to take certain items. Beyond this, women sometimes give an extra copy of papers and an extra set of clothing to a friend just in case they have to leave quickly.

Money: Even if I never was employed, I can take money from jointly held savings and checking accounts. If I do not take this money, he can legally take the money and close the accounts.

Items on the following list in **bold** font are the most important to take with you. If there is time, the other items might be taken, or stored outside the home. These items might best be placed in one location, so that if I have to leave in a hurry, I can grab them quickly. When I leave, I should take:

- * Identification for myself
- * My birth certificate
- * School and vaccination records
- * Checkbook, ATM card
- * Keys – house, car, office
- * Medications
- * Welfare identification
- * Passport(s), divorce papers
- * Medical records – for all family members
- * Lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage payment book
- * Bank books, insurance papers
- * Address book
- * Pictures, jewelry
- * Children’s favorite toys and / or blankets
- * Items of special sentimental value
- * Children’s birth certificates
- * Social Security cards
- * Money
- * Credit cards
- * Driver license, registration
- * Copy of protection order
- * Work permits, green cards

Telephone numbers I need to know:

Police / sheriff’s department (local) – 911 or

Police / sheriff’s department (work) _____

Police / sheriff’s department (school) _____

Prosecutor’s office _____

Battered women’s program (local) _____

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-SAFE (7233) 800-787-3224 (TTY)

www.thehotline.org

County registry of protection orders

State registry of protection orders

Work number _____

Supervisor’s home number

I will keep this document in a safe place and out of reach of my potential attacker.

Review date: _____

Produced and Distributed by: ⁱⁱ



ⁱ National Center for Victims of Crime. <https://victimsofcrime.org/>. This safety plan can no longer be found on this site.

ⁱⁱ (Ibid.,).