

Domestic Violence Safety Planning

Whether a woman chooses to stay or leave an abusive situation, she can be encouraged to pursue safety by developing a safety plan. Having thought through a safety plan **before an abusive incident occurs** will prepare her to act in the event of a crisis. Carefully **planning a departure** from an abusive relationship can greatly reduce the risks involved in leaving. Every safety plan is unique to the individuals involved. Following are some options to consider.

Personal Safety Plan During the Relationship

1. Prepare a *flight kit* and put it in a safe, easily accessible place, preferably outside the home with a trusted neighbor or friend. This kit should include:
 - Money
 - Important documents:
 - ✓ Birth certificates
 - ✓ Social security cards
 - ✓ Health insurance documents and medical records
 - ✓ Bank account and credit card information
 - ✓ Passports
 - Extra keys to the house and cars
 - Clothing, toiletries, eyeglasses, prescription medications, children's favorite books or toys, etc.
2. Keep a list of important phone numbers, change for pay phones, and an extra set of keys close by at all times.
3. Have a cell phone or cordless phone in your home.
4. Tell two or three close friends or neighbors about the violence and ask them to call the police if they hear suspicious (violent) noises coming from the house.
5. Open a separate checking account and obtain a separate credit card under your name. Use a friend's address or post office box for these accounts. If you do not have access to funds, take small amounts from grocery money, sell a few clothes, or return purchased items that would not be noticed by your partner.
6. Make a plan for how to depart safely should you begin to feel at risk.
 - Teach your children their part in the plan.
 - Think up several plausible reasons for leaving at different times of the day.
 - Try to anticipate the need early enough so that you can slip away while the abuser is at work. If that is not possible, say you have to go to the store or offer to get something for the abuser.
 - Rehearse your departure—practice traveling from your house to your safe place.
7. Keep a journal of abusive incidents. Consider reporting any incident of physical or sexual abuse to the police. Being charged, convicted, and completing court-ordered treatment significantly increases the likelihood of positive change in your partner's behavior.

“Women who have divorced or separated from their abusers report being battered fourteen times as often as those still living with their partners. It is estimated that 73% of emergency room visits, and up to 75% of calls to the police for domestic violence incidents occur after separation.”

The Domestic Violence Sourcebook
Dawn Bradley Berry, pg. 7

Steps to Take If You Feel An Abusive Episode is About to Happen, But Are Unable to Leave

1. Move to a room with an outside exit (avoid bathrooms, kitchens, or other rooms with weapons).
2. Make sure that your children know what to do if they see or hear violence. Teach the older children to take the younger children somewhere close and safe (neighbors, 24-hour businesses, etc.), and how to call the police.

3. If an opportunity to leave occurs, take it! If you have to leave without the children, go to the neighbors and call 911, then return home as quickly as you can with the police.

Steps to Take After Leaving the Situation

1. Consider obtaining a **Civil Protection Order** and keep a copy with you at all times.¹ Give a copy to your employer, your children's schools, and the daycare facility.
2. Keep a journal and document any violations of the protection order or any harassment that occurs. Record the date and time of the incident, witnesses who were present, and what the violation or harassment entailed. Be as specific as possible. Contact law enforcement and report when violations occur. Ask for and write down the report number.
3. Contact utilities and other places where you have accounts (banks, insurance agencies, places where you have a credit card, etc.) and ask that they do not give out any information about you or about your account without the person inquiring having to supply a code word or show photo identification. This prevents the abuser from having someone call and identify themselves as you and either a) finding out information about you, or b) tampering with your accounts and services.
4. Increase security. Change door locks, and install deadbolts, steel/metal doors, a security system, smoke detectors, and/or outside motion sensors. Buy a dog.
5. Inform your employer of your situation (even keep a current photo of the abuser if your employer is not familiar enough with him to identify him). Ask that your calls be screened if possible.
6. Register your vehicle to another address if at all possible. Motor vehicle registries are a matter of public record and are an easy way to locate someone.
7. Change to an unlisted phone number. Make sure friends and relatives know that they are not to give your number to anyone. If someone is supposed to have your number, you will give it to them personally. Caller ID and an answering machine are options as well.
8. Seek out and follow alternate routes to work and other places you go frequently. Do not establish a predictable routine. Vary the times you leave and return home.
9. Change your residence and have mail delivered to a post office box rather than your physical address.
10. Check with the Social Security Administration about getting a new social security number.
11. Keep a list of emergency phone numbers handy.
12. Choose some people (neighbors) that you trust and ask them to call the police if your ex-partner is seen near your home or your children.
13. Let the people who care for (or pick up) your children know who is and who is not authorized to pick them up. Keep a photo of the abuser at your children's schools and/or daycare so they will know who he is if he shows up. If you have an order keeping the abuser from the children except during visitation, make sure the school and/or daycare has a copy, and instruct them to call 911 and then you if he tries to see them or pick them up.
14. Keep the phone number of a support person, crisis shelter, or counseling group close at hand for times when you need support and/or assistance.

*“Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy, now I will arise,” says the LORD; ‘I will set him in the safety for which he [she] longs.’”
Psalm 12:5*

Additional Resources

You Can Be Free, Ginny NiCarthy and Sue Davidson.
The Domestic Violence Sourcebook, Dawn Bradley Berry.
A Safe Place Ministries Quick Look—Protection Orders.
National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233.
www.safeplaceministries.com/

¹ Protection orders do not guarantee safety. Each individual needs to learn about protection orders and decide if obtaining one would increase or decrease the likelihood of being harassed or harmed by an abuser.