

## **SAFETY PLANNING GUIDE**

Safety planning for someone involved in an abusive relationship is a necessary and important step. Planning can be used while you are still with your abuser or after the relationship has ended. While still in an abusive relationship, your safety is of primary importance.

### **SAFETY PLAN GUIDELINES**

1. Safety Plan: Protecting Myself If I Stay & During an Incident
2. Getting Ready to Leave & Guidelines for Leaving an Abusive Relationship
3. After Leaving the Abusive Relationship
4. Financial Considerations Whether Staying, Leaving, or Separated
5. Maintaining Cell Phone and Internet Safety

These 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 to improve your safety situation.

### **1. SAFETY PLAN: PROTECTING MYSELF IF I STAY & DURING AN INCIDENT**

- 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 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 pay phone is located. Know the phone number to your local battered women's shelter. 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 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 tell 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.
- Call a domestic violence hotline periodically to assess your options and get a supportive understanding ear.

## 2. GETTING READY TO LEAVE

- Keep any evidence of physical abuse, such as pictures.
- 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 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 incidences, noting dates, events and threats made, if possible.
- 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.

### **General Guidelines for Leaving an Abusive Relationship**

- You may request a police stand-by or escort while you leave.
- If you need to sneak away, be prepared.
- Make a plan for how and where you will escape.
- Plan for a quick escape.
- Put aside emergency money as you can.
- Hide an extra set of car keys.
- Pack an extra set of clothes for yourself and your children and store them at a trusted friend or neighbor's house. Try to avoid using the homes of next-door neighbors, close family members and mutual friends.
- 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
  - Credit cards or a list of credit cards you hold yourself or jointly
  - 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 and other property information
  - Medical records
  - Children's school 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

You may also create a false trail. Call motels, real estate agencies and 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 phone numbers on record.

### 3. AFTER LEAVING THE ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

#### **If 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 taken 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.
- Call law enforcement to enforce the order.

#### **If you leave:**

- 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.
- Be careful to whom you give your new address and phone number.
- Change your work hours, if possible.
- Alert school authorities of the situation.
- Consider changing your children's schools.
- 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.
- Talk to trusted people about the violence.
- 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 who can pick up your children. Explain your situation to them and provide them with a copy of the restraining order.
- 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.

#### 4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS WHETHER STAYING, LEAVING, OR SEPARATED

Being in a relationship with someone who dominates your finances makes it difficult for you to reach your future goals, whether it is starting up a business, investing your money to create more wealth or simply gaining control of your own money. The first step is to gain control over the money that you have and earn— ideally you have the last word on how to spend your money. If your partner dominates your finances, the following may apply to you:

- Bad credit in your name
- Debt in your name
- You cannot open a bank account due to credit, debt, fraud
- Abuser spends your income
- Financial control endangers your opportunities for future investments (buying a house, sending kids to school, etc.)

Consider making copies of the following documents so you have the information needed to gain control of your money:

##### **Banking Documents:**

- Bank certificates of deposit
- Brokerage account statements
- Credit card accounts
- Loan documents and statements
- Mortgage applications and repayment records
- Pay stubs for the last six months for you and your spouse
- Tax filings and refunds
- Business financial statements
- Employee benefit records including stock options and bonuses
- Statements of all retirement accounts
- Records of debts
- Records of business partnerships

##### **Legal Documents:**

- Birth certificates
- Marriage certificate

- Passports
- Social Security card
- Wills and trust documents
- Pre- and post-marital agreements
- Previous divorce settlements
- Records of any pending legal actions
- Records of inheritance
- Driver's license or state identification card
- Adoption papers for any adopted children
- Protection orders and temporary protection orders

**Property Documents:**

- Title documents
- Mortgage agreements and payment records
- Appraisal documents
- Vehicle registrations
- Insurance policies
- Deeds
- Pictures of the furnishings and personal items in your home
- Copies of any existing wills
- Health Records:
- Health, life and disability insurance policies
- Medical expense records
- Records of prescriptions for drugs and eyeglasses
- List of doctors and their telephone numbers

**Expense Documents:**

- Household bills (utilities, rent/mortgage)
- Education records
- Childcare contact information
- Children's after-school activities information
- Church and charitable donation records

## 5. MAINTAINING CELL PHONE AND INTERNET SAFETY

**WARNING:** *Taking all of the actions on this page may not prevent an abuser from discovering your email and Internet activity.*

If you are browsing the internet from your home, computer, your abuser might track your activities. The safest way to find information on the Internet is to go to a safer computer. Some suggestions would be your local library, a friend's house or your workplace. Other safety suggestions: Change your password often, do not pick obvious words or numbers for your password, and make sure to include a combination of letters, special characters, and numbers

for your password. You may also want to browse your computer or phone in “private” or “incognito” mode where your browsing history is not recorded. Choose this mode on your search settings.

#### **How an Abuser Can Track Your Activities:**

- **Email:** If an abuser has access to your email account, he or she may be able to read your incoming and outgoing mail. Even if you believe your account is secure, make sure you choose a password he or she will not be able to guess.
- If an abuser sends you threatening or harassing email messages, you can print and save them as evidence of this abuse. These messages may also constitute a federal offense.

#### **Erasing Your Tracks:**

- **History/cache file:** If an abuser knows how to read your computer's history of cache file (automatically saved web pages and graphics), he or she may be able to see information you have viewed on the Internet.
- You can clear your history or empty your cache file in your browser's settings.

#### **Cell Phone Safety:**

- Check your cell phone settings. There are cell phone technologies your abuser can use to listen in on your calls or track your location. Your abuser can use your cell phone as a tracking device if it has GPS, is in “silent mode,” or is set to “auto answer.” Consider turning it off when not in use or leaving it behind when fleeing your abuser.
- Get your own cell phone. Consider purchasing a prepaid cell phone or another cell phone that your abuser doesn't know about. Some domestic violence shelters offer free cell phones to battered women. Call your local hotline to find out more.
- Pictures or images on cell phones can be “geotagged.” This means that if you post a picture/image that you took from your cell phone the location of where the picture was taken can be easily tracked by an abuser.
- To disable GPS location services: Go to settings and disable the GPS location setting. However, this does not necessarily deactivate your GPS location setting. If you want to deactivate your GPS locator completely, then turn off your phone, remove the battery and wrap your phone in aluminum foil. This is the only way to truly deactivate your GPS locator on your cell phone.