

CREATING A SAFETY PLAN - INTRODUCTION

It is important to know that although you do not have control over your (ex) partner's violence, it is possible to increase your own, as well as your children's, safety when being subjected to this abuse. Creating a safety plan involves identifying action steps to increase your safety, and to prepare in advance for the possibility of further violence. This information package offers many suggestions and ideas that we hope you will find useful. However, don't try to do everything right away. Take it a step at a time, and start with the ideas that seem most doable for you.

In creating a safety plan it is important to remember that:

- Although you cannot control your (ex) partner's violence, it may be possible to increase your own and your children's safety.
- A safety plan is needed whenever the possibility of abuse is identified.
- This safety plan information is specifically designed for actions that you can take.
- This safety plan information also includes actions you can take to increase your children's safety.
- It is important to become familiar with and to review and/or revise your safety plan regularly. Abusive situations and risk factors can change quickly.

I. AN EMERGENCY ESCAPE PLAN

The Emergency Escape Plan focuses on the things you can do in advance to be better prepared in case you have to leave an abusive situation very quickly.

The following is a list of items you should try to set aside and hide in a safe place (e.g. at a friend's or family member's home, with your lawyer, in a safety deposit box):

A) Take a photocopy of the following items and store in a safe place, away from the originals. Hide the originals someplace else, if you can.

- passports, birth certificates, immigration papers, for all family members
- school and vaccination records
- driver's license, vehicle registration and insurance
- medications, prescriptions, medical records for all family members
- welfare identification
- work permits
- divorce papers, custody documentation, court orders, restraining orders, marriage certificate
- lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage payment book
- bank books
- insurance papers
- address/telephone book (list of important numbers, also update numbers in cell phone if you have one & keep phone on you at all times)
- picture of spouse/partner
- health cards for yourself and family members
- all cards you normally use – e.g. credit cards, bank cards, phone, Social Insurance

B) Keep the following items handy, so you can grab them quickly:

your wallet and/or purse with:

- all the cards you normally use
- keys (car, house, etc.)
- cell phone and charger (remember to keep cell phone charged and make sure it has minutes)
- some emergency cash money – e.g. for a payphone if cell minutes run out, for a taxi to a safe place

an emergency bag(s) with:

- all of the items in section A (if you have two bags, the originals and copies can be split between them)
- spare keys (car, house, etc.)
- cosmetic case from Liberty Lane with lipstick tube and mirror
- some emergency cash money – e.g. for a payphone if cell minutes run out, for a taxi to a safe place
- copy of safety plan
- other items to consider: immediate need items (e.g. diapers, change of clothes), special toys or comforts for children, jewellery, small saleable objects, items of sentimental value, list of items you would like to take if you get a chance to come back to your home later

Open a bank account in your own name and arrange that no bank statements or other calls be made to you. Or, arrange that mail be sent to a friend or family member.

Save and set aside as much money as you can - out of groceries if necessary.

Plan your emergency exits.

Plan and rehearse the steps you will take if you have to leave quickly and learn them well.

Consider getting a safety deposit box at a bank that your partner does not go to.

The Police may bring you back to the home later, to remove additional personal belongings, if it is arranged through the local division. Take the items listed above as well as anything else that is important to you or your children. When you leave, take the children if you can. If you try to get them later, the police cannot help you remove them from their other parent unless you have a valid court order.

II. CREATING A SAFER ENVIRONMENT

There are many things a woman can do to increase her safety. It may not be possible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step by step. Here are a few suggestions:

1. AT HOME

- Get your Emergency Escape Plan in order and review it often.
- Create a telephone list with numbers of local police, nearest women's shelter, assaulted women's help line, crisis help line, family members, counselors, children's friends. Keep a copy of the list on your cell phone and in your emergency bag(s).
- Make arrangements with friends, family and or a Transition House so that you can stay with them if necessary.
- If possible, try to predict the next likely violent episode and be prepared.
- Teach the children to let you know when someone is at the door, before answering the door.
- Create a code word with your children and/or friends so they know to call for help.
- Plan your emergency exits (*see previous page*), teach your children and know them well.
- Teach your children their own Safety Plan (*see page 9*).
- Change the locks on the doors and windows. Install a peephole in the door. Change the locks on your garage and mailbox.
- Keep your restraining order near you at all times.
- Make sure that the school, day care, and police have a copy of all court orders, including restraining orders, custody and access orders, as well as a picture of the abusive partner.
- If you have call display on your phone, be careful about who can get access to the stored numbers – e.g. last number dialed, etc.
- Have your telephone number unpublished, as it is harder to track than when it is unlisted. Block your number when calling out.

- Consider moving your furniture around differently as this is something your (ex) partner may not anticipate, and cause him/her to bump into it and give you warning that he/she is in the house. Also put your kitchen utensils and knife block in the cupboards so they are not as accessible.
- If you live in an apartment, check the floor clearly when getting off the elevator. Look in mirrors and be aware of doorways in hallways. Speak to security, or make an anonymous call, requesting safety in your building.
- Purchase rope ladders to be used for escape from upper floors.
- If you have a balcony, consider putting wire around it.
- Replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors if possible.
- Install smoke detectors and fire extinguishers for each floor.
- Consider the advantages of getting a guard dog.
- Install an outside lighting system that lights up when a person is coming close to your house.
- Keep windows and doors locked. Do whatever you can to install security systems, including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, an electronic system, etc. – anything to provide added security.
- Keep your vehicle in good repair and make sure there is always gas in it. Park the vehicle in the position that is easiest to get out of the driveway for a quick exit.
- Be aware of any unusual packages, etc. Do not investigate them, call the police.
- Require identification from service / sales people before letting them in.

2. IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

- Be extra vigilant when you are out and about.
 - Let someone know when you're leaving your house and when you'll be home. Consider checking in with someone at least once a day so they know to get help if they can't reach you.
 - Carry your keys in your hands.
 - Get a remote or keyless entry car door opener.
 - Walk with someone to your car.
 - Scan the parking lot.
 - Walk around your car, look under the hood and check if anything has been tampered with and check brakes. Remember to keep your car seats forward, so you know if someone is hiding in the car.
 - If your (ex) partner is following you, drive to a place where there are people to support you – e.g. a friend's house, police station.
 - Consider parking across the street instead of in underground parking.
 - Keep a sign in your car saying "call police."
 - If you are walking, take a route that is populated. (*Example of when you should check in with someone.*)
 - Change the patterns of when and where you travel.
 - If you see your (ex) partner on the street, try to get to a public place – e.g. a store. Also call attention to yourself and request help if need be.

- Tell your neighbours that you would like them to call the police if they hear a commotion in your home – e.g. fighting, screaming.

- Tell people in your neighbourhood that they should call the police if your (ex) partner is seen near your home. You may wish to give them a photo and description of him/her and of their car.

- Tell people who take care of your children which people have permission to pick up your children. Make sure your children know who is allowed to pick them up.

- Make sure custody issues are taken care of in the legal system.

- Ask your neighbours to look after your children in an emergency.

- Try to stay away from places that your (ex) partner frequents.

- Use different grocery stores and shopping malls, and shop at hours that are different from when you were living with your abusive partner. Use a different bank or branch, and take care of your banking at hours different from those you used with your abusive partner.

- Change your doctor, dentist and other professional services you would normally use.

- Do not put your name in your apartment building directory.

3. AT WORK

Each woman must decide for herself if and/or when she will tell others that her partner is abusive and that she may be at risk. Friends, family and co-workers may be able to help protect women. However, each woman should consider carefully which people to ask for help. If you are comfortable, you may choose to do any or all of the following:

- Tell your boss, the security supervisor, and other key people or friends at work about your situation.
- Ask to have your calls screened at work. It would also help to have these calls documented.
- Discuss the possibility of having your employer call the police if you are in danger from your (ex) partner.

III. AN EMOTIONAL SAFETY PLAN

The experience of being abused and verbally degraded by partners is usually exhausting and emotionally draining. The process of surviving and building a new life requires much courage, and incredible energy. To conserve your emotional energy, and to support yourself in hard emotional times, there are a number of things you can do:

- Attend as many counselling sessions as you can.
- Take part in social / community activities to reduce feeling isolated.
- Take a part-time job to reduce isolation and to improve your finances.
- Enroll in school to increase your skills.
- Join support groups of other women to gain support and strengthen your relationships with other people.
- Take time for yourself to read, meditate, play music, etc.
- Spend time with people who make you feel good and provide support.
- Take care of your sleep and nutritional needs.
- Keep a personal journal to write about your feelings, especially when you are feeling low or vulnerable. Keep it in a safe place or burn it.
- Take time to prepare yourself emotionally before entering stressful situations like talking with your partner, meeting with lawyers, or attending court.
- Try not to overbook yourself - limit yourself to one appointment per day to reduce stress.
- Be creative and do whatever makes you feel good.
- Write something positive about yourself everyday - your own personal affirmations.
- Do not find your comfort in excessive use of alcohol or food - it only serves to increase your depression.
- Avoid excessive shopping and impulse buying.
- Join a health club or start an exercise program. It will increase your energy level and increase your sense of well being.
- It's OK to feel angry, but find positive and constructive ways to express your anger.
- Remember that you are the most important person to take care of right now.

IV. A CHILD'S SAFETY PLAN

This plan was developed to help mothers teach their children some basic safety planning. It is based on the belief that the most important thing that children can do for their mothers and their families is to get away from the area of violence! They cannot stop the abuse, although they often try by distracting the abuser or directly interfering in the abusive episode. It is important to tell the child that the best and most important thing for them to do is keep themselves safe.

Children who experience woman abuse can be profoundly affected. It is very traumatic for them to be faced with violence directed at them or at someone they love. Personal safety and safety planning are extremely important and necessary for children whose families are experiencing violence. Children should learn ways to protect themselves. There are several ways to help you develop a safety plan with your children.

- Stress these key messages with your children:
 - They should not feel responsible for the abuse. It is not their fault.
 - You love them and want them to keep themselves safe.
 - It is not their responsibility to make sure that you are safe.
 - They are not expected to stop the abuse. Other adults can do that.
 - They should not distract the abuser or get involved in the abusive episode.
 - The most important thing they can do is to get out of the way and get help if they can.
 - There are people who can talk to them to help them deal with the pain of seeing their mother or others being abused.

- Have your child pick a safe room/place in the house, preferably with a lock on the door and a phone. The first step of any plan is for the children to get out of the room where the abuse is occurring.

- Teach your children how to call for help. Teach them how to contact police at the emergency number. It is important that children know they should not use a phone that is in view of the abuser. This puts them at risk. Talk to your children about using a neighbour's phone or a pay phone if they are unable to use a phone at home. If you have a cell phone, teach your children how to use it.

- Teach your children how to make a collect call to you and to a special friend if your (ex) partner takes the children.

- Ensure that the children know their full name and address. Rural children need to know their Concession and Lot #.

- Rehearse what your child/children will say when they call for help.

For example:

Dial 911.

An operator will answer: *“Police, Fire, Ambulance.”*

Your child says: *Police.*

Then your child says:

My name is _____.

I am ___ years old.

I need help. Someone is hurting my mom.

The address here is _____.

The phone number here is _____.

- It is important for children to leave the phone off the hook after they are done talking. The police may call the number back if they hang up, which could create a dangerous situation for yourself and your child/children.
- Pick a safe place to meet your children, out of the home, after the situation is safe for you and for them so you can easily find each other.
- Teach your children the safest route to the planned place of safety for them.

V. DURING A VIOLENT INCIDENT

Women cannot always avoid violent incidents. However, in order to increase your safety, here are some things **you can do**:

- Remind yourself that you have an Emergency Escape Plan, and go over it in your mind.
- Start to position yourself to get out quickly or near a phone so you can call 911, if necessary.
- Try to move to a space where the risk is the lowest. Try to avoid arguments in the bathroom, garage, kitchen, near weapons, or in rooms without access to an outside door.
- Avoid running to where your children are as your (ex) partner may hurt them as well. However, do not leave children behind if you are able to leave the premises and you suspect violence to occur.
- Use your code word with your children so they can call for help.
- Use your judgement and intuition - if the situation is very serious, you can agree with your (ex) partner or give him/her what he/she wants to calm him/her down. You have to protect yourself until you are out of danger.
- Make as much noise as possible (set off the fire alarm, break things, turn up the stereo or TV) – so that neighbours may call the police for you.
- If you are being assaulted, drop to the floor. Curl yourself into a ball with your knees up and your head covered with your arms, fingers entwined.
- When, or after, you have been assaulted, call the police at 911 if you can. Tell them you have been assaulted by a man/woman, (don't say your [ex] husband/partner), and leave the phone off the hook after your call.
- Document the abuse. Copies can be given to police and also kept in emergency bag(s).
 - Include types of abuse, dates and any witnesses.
 - Take pictures of any physical injuries.
 - Go to the doctor for treatment of physical injuries and documentation of the incidents.
 - Save any threatening messages, voicemails, texts or emails.
 - Include any suspicious / inappropriate / harassing behaviours in your documentation as well – e.g. prank calls, repeatedly driving by your house.