

Safety Planning

Following these suggestions cannot guarantee your safety, but they could help make you safer. It is important to remember to create safety plans that are right for you, in your particular situation, with the particular person who is abusing you. Not all these suggestions will work for you, and some may place you in even more danger. You have to do what is best for you to keep you safe.

How to Keep Yourself Safe during Abuse:

- Be aware of the abuser's patterns of abuse, and signs that abuse may occur. Try and remove yourself from the situation before the abuse begins.
- Know potential escape routes. If you have children make sure they know the escape routes too and practise them.
- Know where the "safe places" are in your house. Move to a safe(r) room.
- Avoid the kitchen and garage due to potential weapons. Also try to avoid rooms with tile or hardwood floors.
- Do not go upstairs if you can help it, as people are often thrown down the stairs
- Go to a room with a telephone and or doors to get outside easily.
- Put children's things away as they may be used as weapons or prevent your route for escaping.
- Have a code word for calling 911 and teach it to your children.
- Try not to wear scarves or long jewellery.
- Park your car (if you have one) by backing it into the driveway and keep it fuelled in a case where you need to leave quickly.
- Use your own knowledge about the abuser and what has worked in the past to keep yourself safe and de-escalate abuse.

Getting Ready To Leave:

- Consider when would be the safest time to leave.
- Have an idea/list of safe places you can go .
- Plan how you will leave, and have a "Plan B".
- Hide/remove all potential weapons.
- Arrange for safety/care of pets.
- If you can, tell a neighbour you trust when you are planning to leave and ask them to call the police if violence begins.
- Clear your phone of the last number you called to avoid the abuser utilizing redial to find you.
- Clear your website history.
- Pack an "escape bag" and keep it somewhere where it would be easy to grab in an emergency exiting. Be mindful of not tipping the person who is abusing you off with where you leave it. One option would be to leave it with someone you trust.

What Items To Take With You When Leaving:

- Important documents such as: Health Cards, Social Insurance Cards, Birth Certificates, passports, immigration papers, last income tax return, cheque book, credit cards, bank books, ATM card, insurance card, life insurance papers, marriage license, car title and/or registration, citizenship card, aboriginal status card, driver's license, divorce papers, custody papers, mortgage or loan papers, lease/rental agreement, house/property deeds, wills, business or partnership agreements, rent or mortgage payment receipts, any papers that show jointly owned assets, restraining orders/peace bonds, other court orders, children's school records and immunization records.
- You and your children's medication(s) and prescription(s).
- Change of clothes for you and your children (diapers, bottles etc.).
- Item(s) of comfort for you and your children (blanket, stuffed animals).
- Infant or car seat.
- Keys to house, car, safety deposit box, storage units (extra copies of each). Also if there is a copy of a car key and you drive that car and are taking that car when leaving, take all copies of the key.
- Any valuables: jewellery.
- Address book/phone book of family, friends, local women's abuse shelter, taxi services, doctors, schools.
- Pictures of you, your children and the abusive partner.
- Glasses, dentures, hearing aids, contact lenses, any needed medical equipment.
- A journal that documents all/some of the abuse, photo's of your injuries or of damage done to household objects, household objects that the abuser damaged, torn or bloody clothing or clothing with fluids/hairs from a sexual assault.
- Cell phone/laptop.
- Money.
- A list of other items you can pick up later.

Safety after Leaving:

- If you are fleeing to a confidential location and you fear the abuser will come and look for you, you could create a false trail AFTER you leave by calling motels, schools, or real estate agencies in a town at least 6 hours away from where you plan to go. Ask them questions that require them to call you back. Give them your OLD phone number-the number of the home you shared with abuser. Do NOT make these calls when you are still with the abuser as the abuser may be tipped off which could put you in great danger.
- If you have relocated to a confidential location consider obtaining a P.O. Box, so that your address is confidential.

- Be aware that addresses can be listed on restraining orders, police reports, etc. Before filling out your new address on any forms ask if there is any way to keep it confidential. If not, see if you can use the P.O. Box or a friend's address instead.
- Carry a cell phone at all times, and keep cell phone charged at all times and carry phone charger on you. Do not rely on this completely as batteries die, in some places there isn't good service etc. Program 911 into your speed dial.
- If you need help yell "FIRE!" as people are more likely to respond.
- Keep a certified copy of a restraining order on you at all times.
- Reschedule appointments you made while still with the abuser.
- Get a full check-up with a doctor to see if you need medical treatment. Keep in mind that the abuser may not have been faithful and you may want to get tested for STI's.
- Consider changing any services provider you share with the abuser.

Safety in Your Home:

- If you live in the same home that the person who abused you lived in or has been in, change the locks on doors and windows.
- If you can, install security mechanisms such as security cameras, outdoor motion sensitive lights, dead bolts, replace wood doors with steel or metal doors, window locks, better lighting, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers.
- Put items on doors in your home (ex.) basement doors and close the doors before you go to sleep so that if the person who abused you breaks in and opens any door you will have a warning.
- In rural areas, put a brightly coloured paper or paint on your mailbox so that your home is easy to find by the police/ambulance etc.
- Obtain a restraining order and call the police if the abuser breaks the order
- Inform neighbours or landlord that they should call the police if they see the abuser near your home.
- Keep bushes, trees and plants around your house well-trimmed so that the abuser cannot hide in them and so you can see who is approaching your home.
- Change your phone number (home and cell). Ask for an unlisted number, caller ID and to block unlisted calls, ask for your number to be blocked so that if you call someone else no one will learn your new unlisted number.

Safety at work:

- If you can, change the hours that you work.
- Decide who at work you will tell, including security persons. Provide a photo and a copy of the restraining order.
- When you leave work have someone escort you to your car or if you take public transit try to take it with a co-worker. In both cases try and vary the times you leave and routes you take wherever possible.
- Have someone screen your calls if possible.

Safety When Children Are Involved:

- If you are considering leaving without your children, consult with a lawyer as this could negatively affect your chances of getting custody of them in court later on
- Take different routes when taking children to school. Avoid the route you took when you and the abuser were together.
- Talk to school and child care providers about who has permission to pick up the children. If you have a restraining order, provide the school with a copy and inform them of what is going on.
- Teach your child a code word to use with whoever is picking them up. For example use the word 'snack'. Have your child ask the person who is picking them up what the code word is. If the person doesn't answer 'snack', the child is not to leave with that person. Vary the code word over time.
- Find a lawyer who is knowledgeable about family violence to explore custody, visitation, and divorce provisions.