

Domestic Violence Safety Plan

The following steps represent ideas 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 situations and how to best get myself and my children to safety. By no means is this list comprehensive and not all things on this list may apply to me and my unique situation. Having these and other steps done ahead of time can make the decision to leave easier when an opportunity presents itself or my physical safety demands it. In addition, it may give me some peace of mind and a sense of regaining some control over life again.

My local domestic violence program is available to assist me with safety planning, either in person or over the phone. I do not have to give my name or any other identifying information. I can utilize their free services as part of my overall safety plan!

Step 1: Safety during a violent incident

I can't always avoid violent incidents. In order to increase safety, I can use some or all of the following strategies:

A. Practice how to get out safely. What doors, windows, elevators, stairwells or fire escapes would I use?

If I decide to leave, I will:

B. I can keep my purse and car keys ready, always being sure to keep them in a certain place so that I can leave quickly. I can also leave a set of keys with a trusted friend or relative. I will make sure they know WHY so they don't accidentally let it slip if my abuser talks with them. I can put a set in my desk drawer at work or hidden somewhere on the outside of my home. I can get a magnetic key box that attaches under the fender of the car.

I can stash keys at:

C. I can tell certain neighbors about the situation and request they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from my house.

My trusted neighbors and their phone numbers are:

D. I can teach my children how to use the telephone to contact police and medical help by using 911. I can make sure my children know their full names, our address and other important information in case they need to call for help or we get separated because of violence. I can teach my children to run to a neighbor's house or a nearby public place if violence occurs.

I will teach and practice with my children:

E. Because I might be in danger and not able to talk freely, I will devise a code for my children, family, friends or co-workers so they will know that I need them to call for help on my behalf. For example, I might say that "today is my cousin Shirley's birthday" - I don't HAVE a cousin Shirley so my support system will know that if I use this phrase, I might be in danger.

My code for getting help from friends, family, co-workers and my children can be:

F. Since I might have to leave my home quickly, I should be aware of where I might go in an emergency. I need to select public places, preferably places that are open 24 hours a day and close to my home. Hospitals, convenience stores, restaurants and grocery stores are likely to be open, have pay phones where I can dial 911 for help, and room INSIDE for me to wait for police to arrive.

NOTE: As part of your safety plan, you MUST find out in advance if your local police station is manned 24 hours a day! Victims have been gunned down by abusers in front of police stations because they fled to police offices during evening or weekend shifts - only to find out that the doors were locked and they could only speak to a dispatcher on the phone thus leaving them as sitting ducks - waiting around for an officer to show up. Police officers are usually on patrol in their vehicles and many police stations and sub-stations are NOT manned 24 hours a day.

Places I can go in case of violence or crisis are:

G. When I believe that an argument or violence are about to happen, I can minimize the risk of physical injury to myself by trying to get to a room that has access to an outside door, by avoiding rooms that provide easy weapons for my abuser such as knives in the kitchen or fighting in rooms where an abuser keeps a gun, or rooms where I might get trapped such as the bathroom (since bathroom doors are usually not reinforced they are VERY easy to kick in).

The safest places in my home for confrontation include:

Step 2: Making it easier to leave

When I leave the residence I share with an abuser, I must plan carefully to increase safety for myself and my children. If my abuser believes that I am trying to escape, they may strike back or increase the violence to try to get me to stay. I can use some or all the following safety strategies:

A. In order to increase my ability to identify myself and my children, to apply for various types of aid and assistance and to keep me from having to return to the residence and possibly confront an angry abuser, I will keep copies or photocopies of important documents that I can grab quickly if I need to leave:

- * Identification for myself
- * Children's birth certificate
- * My birth certificate
- * Social security cards
- * School and vaccination records
- * Money
- * Checks, ATM card
- * Credit cards

- * Keys - house/car/office
- * Driver's license and registration
- * Welfare identification, work permits, Green card
- * Passport(s), Divorce papers
- * Medical records
- * Lease/rental agreement, deeds, mortgage payment book
- * Bank books, Insurance papers
- * Pet licenses, vet receipts or paperwork establishing your ownership
- * Password to any online accounts

This ardvarc.org website provides a worksheet for tracking important information that I should have with me when leaving. The information will help to protect my identity, continue access to important accounts, and provide crucial information to law enforcement should I decide to press charges, file for a protection order, etc. This worksheet is "disguised" as an "Emergency Preparedness Kit", like the Hurricane Kits provided by agencies like FEMA, to minimize the possibility that my abuser will know the real purpose of the worksheet.

B. I will be calmer and feel more in control under stress if I am aware of resources waiting to help me, if I know how to contact them, and have an idea of the assistance available to me. I can either ask the police to help me get to safety with friends or family or I can contact my local domestic violence program.

My local domestic violence program is:

C. I can keep change for phone calls on me at all times. I should NOT use a telephone calling card linked to my phone bill, because my abuser will be able to tell what friends, family or other numbers I have called. To keep my communications private, I will use change or prepaid calling cards. (For cheap calls, even international calls, try Pingo.com.)

I can keep change or calling cards:

NOTE: Using a cell phone is NOT safe and can put you in danger! An abuser who knows your cell number, your name and the last four digits of your social security number can probably access your account with your cell phone service provider and report your phone lost or stolen, in which case your phone service will be turned OFF. Abusers with this information may also be able to view your detailed billing via the internet and thus know exactly who you have been calling for help. If using a cell phone, you MUST call your cell company and put a password on your account to prevent access. You must also check to see if online access is activated for your account and either disable it or change the password. Be aware that if your abuser's name is also on the account, they can show photo identification to the cell phone company and gain access again and/or reset the passwords. If your abuser has your cell service suspended, you should be aware that as long as your phone is charged, your phone will still dial two numbers: 611 for customer service and 911 for emergencies. Nextel phones may be an exception.

D. If my abuser is not arrested at the time of a violent incident, I cannot be sure that it will be safe for me to return home to pick up items I might need. In order to be prepared, I can:

Leave an extra set of clothes for myself and my children and several days of any required medications at:

E. If I need to return to my residence, I will call my local police or sheriff and request a "domestic violence standby" to ensure my safety. I will go to a place close to my residence and call to have them meet me there. They will follow me to my residence and wait while I collect some things. I will make sure to ask the officer for a business card or a name and badge number. I might also fill this officer in on the circumstances and ask them to keep an extra eye on my residence.

Phone number of police/sheriff:

I will ask them to meet me at:

Items to take include:

- * Medication
- * Children's favorite toys and/or blankets
- * Small saleable objects
- * Address book
- * Pictures, jewelry
- * Items of special sentimental value

Step 3: Safety in my own residence

Once I am able to return home or obtain alternate housing, there are many things I can do to increase safety in my 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 include:

- A. I can change the locks on my doors and windows as soon as possible.
- 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. I might be able to get a free security system from ADT security. I will ask my local domestic violence program for information.
- D. I can purchase rope ladders to be used for escape from second floor windows.
- E. I can install smoke detectors and purchase fire extinguishers for each floor in my house/apartment.
- F. I can install an outside lighting system that lights up when a person is coming close to my house.
- G. I can use a panic button system from ADT to alert authorities that I am in imminent danger.

Be sure to speak with advocates at your local law enforcement agency and/or domestic violence program about these steps. Often there are programs that can help get these things done for you or cover the costs.

Step 4: Safety with an Order of Protection

It is impossible for me to know if my abuser will obey a protection orders or not. I recognize that I may need to ask the police and the court to enforce my protection order. The following are some steps that I can take to help the enforcement of my protection order:

- A. I will keep my protection order on or near me at all times. I can also keep copies in the car, at the office, etc.
- B. I will give copies of my protection order to police departments in the communities where I usually visit family or friends, and in the community where I live.
- C. For further safety, if I often visit other counties in my area, I might file my protection order with the court in those counties.

I will register my protection order in the following counties:

D. I can check to make sure my order is listed in the registries of counties where I live and work by calling the Clerk of the Court and/or the sheriff's office for each county.

Local county contact numbers:

E. I can call the local domestic violence program if I am not sure about any item above or if I have some problem with my protection order.

F. I can inform my employer, my minister, my closest friend and others that I have a protection order in effect.

G. If my protection order gets lost or stolen, I can get another copy.

The closest Court Clerk's Office is located at:

H. If my protection order is violated, I can call the police and report a violation, contact my attorney, call my advocate, and/or advise the court of the violation.

I. If the police do not help, I can contact my advocate or attorney and will file a complaint with the chief of the police department or the county sheriff's office.

J. I can also file a private criminal complaint with the district justice in the jurisdiction where the violation occurred or with the district attorney. I can charge my abuser with a violation of the Order of Protection and all the crimes that he or she commits in violating the order. I can call my local domestic violence advocate to help me with this.

Step 5: Safety on the job and in public

Relationship violence is the number one cause of death of women in the workplace! While it might be important for me to try to continue to work during this situation, I might be at continued risk from violence from my abuser. My employer and co-workers can help to protect me if I inform them of the situation. I might do any or all of the following:

A. I can inform my boss, my secretary, the security supervisor and the police department near my office of my situation.

B. I can ask co-workers to help screen my telephone calls at work.

C. When leaving work, I can try to leave with other people or I can ask security to walk me out. If I know I will be leaving after dark or working late, I can move my car closer to the entrance while at lunch or on my break.

D. If problems occur when driving around, I can flag down a law enforcement officer or other public safety official, drive to a local hospital or get to some other public place.

E. If I use public transit, I can get off at a different stop than my abuser might expect, inform the driver that someone might be stalking me, or wait to exit until I see that other people will be exiting also.

F. I might go to different grocery stores and shopping malls to conduct my business and shop at hours that are different than those when residing with my abuser.

G. I can use a different bank and take care of my banking at hours different from those I used when residing with my abuser, arrange for direct deposit, or ask a trusted co-worker to take my deposit for me.

Other things I might do include:

Step 6: Safety when using drugs or alcohol

The legal consequences of using or possessing illegal drugs can hurt my relationship with my children and put me at a disadvantage in other legal actions concerning my abuser and/or the custody of my children. The use of any alcohol or other drug can reduce my ability to act quickly to protect myself and my children from an abuser. I can enhance safety for myself and my children by:

- A. If I am going to use drugs or alcohol, I can do so in a safe place and with people who understand the risk of violence against me and are committed to my safety.
- B. If I am going to use drugs or alcohol, I need to do so apart from my children, after I have arranged for them to be in the care of a competent adult.
- C. If I am going to use drugs or alcohol, I need to ensure that I have a safe way to return home, such as a designated driver.
- D. If I am using drugs or alcohol to cope with anxiety, depression or stress, I can help to ensure my ability to care for myself and my children by finding better coping mechanisms and replacing destructive behaviors with more positive activities such as joining a support group, increasing my exercise, and finding activities that I can do with my children.

Step 7: Safety and my children

A. In the event that my partner takes my children, I will teach my children how to use the telephone to call to me (including how to call collect) and how to use 911. I can make sure that if my child has a cellphone, that there are multiple numbers my child can use to contact me. I can "disguise" some of these numbers in case my partner erases my numbers (like listing my numbers under "School Bus" or other name my partner isn't likely to consider).

I will teach and practice with my children:

B. I will tell people who take care of my children what persons have permission to pick up my children and that my partner is not permitted to do so.

The people I will inform about pick-up permission include:

School:

Day Care staff:

Babysitter:

Sunday school teacher:

Teacher/Principal:

And:

C. I can inform neighbors, pastor and friends that my partner no longer resides with me and they should call the police if observed near my residence.

D. If immigration issues exist, or if I believe my partner may try to leave the country with my child(ren), I can contact the US Department of State, Office of Children's Issues at 1-888-407-4747 to ensure that a visa or passport cannot be obtained for the child(ren). I can also ask their help in contacting the embassy for the country my partner might try to flee to for the same reason.

Step 8: Financial safety and independence

I realize that financial control is one of the biggest factors that could keep me tied to an abusive relationship.

A. Not only does lack of my own personal money cause stress for me and reduce the options for myself and my children, but the lack of privacy around my money can be another way that my partner monitors me or tries to control me. My partner might be able to monitor my spending and gain information about my activities and my location. I can protect my privacy by:

- Using cash and limiting the use of credit cards since my partner might be able to see my transactions online or might have enough information to access my account by phone.
- Talking with my bank or looking online to see if my account can be accessed or monitored via the internet - then changing any passwords or restricting online access. Just as with cell phones, if my partner's name is on the account, they can show photo ID at the bank and gain access again.
- Stashing enough cash to cover several days for a hotel and meals just in case I need it.

B. To increase my independence, I can open a savings account. If I am concerned that my abuser will find out, I will use my work address or a friend's address to keep this account private or I can visit the website of a local bank to open a savings account that operates entirely online so no account statements will arrive in the mail.

C. Credit is another way that my partner might try to cripple me, which might include: keeping my credit accounts maxed out so that I can't use them, canceling accounts that I might use, or opening accounts without my knowledge to drive my credit score down. I can combat these credit controls by:

- Contacting each credit card company and finding out for sure which ones I am personally and legally responsible for. In some cases, I might be seen as an account holder, while in other cases I may only be a user on my partner's account. Knowing which accounts are truly tied to my personal credit will allow me to decide which accounts to rescue and which accounts to bypass.
- For cards that I am liable for, I can ask the credit card company to help my family through our time of crisis. The card company might suspend late fees and interest for up to a year, if I agree not to use the card (it will likely be suspended). This will help to keep my account from getting further and further in the hole and give me an opportunity to salvage the accounts and end up with decent credit if I am able to make small payments each month.
- I can contact my local credit counseling agency - or my local domestic violence program or United Way for a referral in my area - who can help me to begin separating me from joint accounts. They might also be able to help me to negotiate lower payments and pay-off rates with my existing accounts.
- Getting a copy of my credit report to see what accounts show up under my name to get a true picture of my credit situation. Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act I am entitled to one free credit report disclosure in a 12 month period. To request this free annual disclosure I must contact the Central Source. To contact the Central Source on-line, visit www.annualcreditreport.com. I can also contact the Central Source to request this free annual disclosure by calling toll free (877) FACT-ACT or by using the mail request form available at the Central Source website. I can find out how to correct, contest, or question anything on my credit report by visiting www.equifax.com.

- Visiting with a local bankruptcy attorney. Many give free seminars in the evenings or on weekends to answer questions about options related to credit cards and other financial matters. I can check my phone book yellow pages under - Attorneys: Bankruptcy - to find a free seminar near me.
- Asking others to help me. Credit card companies, landlords, utility companies and others may be willing to extend payment due dates, waive late fees or other fines, and make alternate payment arrangements if they are alerted to my situation by a proper authority - which might include law enforcement, the prosecutor or State Attorney's office or my local domestic violence program. If I have sought help from one or more of these agencies, I can ask them to further assist me in this regard.

Step 9: Safety and my emotional health

The experience of being abused and verbally degraded 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:

A. Use "I can . . ." statements with myself and be assertive with others.

If I feel down and ready to return to a potentially abusive situation, I can:

When I have to communicate with my partner in person or by telephone, I can:

Whenever I feel that others are trying to control me, I can:

To help myself feel stronger, I can read:

When I need support or a shoulder to cry on, I can call:

Things that I could do or learn that would help me feel stronger are:

Things that I could do or learn that would help me to become more independent are:

To help gain support and strengthen relationships with other people, I can attend workshops or support groups or:

Step 10: Safety by being prepared

- A. I will sit down and review my safety plan, rehearse my escape plan and, as appropriate, practice it with my children.
- B. I will keep this document in a safe place and out of the reach of my abuser.
- C. I will review this plan each time there is a change in my situation, which might include: moving to a new location, the serving of legal papers on my abuser, the arrest of my abuser, the release of my abuser, or any other significant change or event which could impact the safety of myself and/or my children.

Review date: _____



An Abuse, Rape and Domestic Violence Aid and Resource Collection:

<http://www.aardvarc.org/dv/plan.shtml> .

SAFETY PLAN NOW!! Retrieved April 9, 2010 from: <http://www.aardvarc.org/dv/plan.shtml>.