

Strengthen Our Sisters Guidelines for Safety

Safety Planning for Domestic Violence Victims and their Children

Personal Safety when with an Abuser

- 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 where there are always 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 your arms around either side of your head, fingers entwined.
- If possible, have a phone accessible at all times and know the numbers to call for help. Know where the nearest pay phone is located. Know your local battered women's shelter phone number. 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 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 cause the violence, and that when anyone is being violent, it is important to keep 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 up 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 the other doors 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.

Safety During an Explosive Incident

Go to an area that has an exit.

Not a bathroom (near hard surfaces), kitchen (knives), or near weapons.

Stay in a room with a phone.

Call 911, a friend or a neighbor, if possible. Inform them if there are weapons in the home.

Know your escape route.

Practice how to get out of your home safely. Visualize your escape route.

Have a packed bag ready.

Keep it hidden in a handy place in order to leave quickly, or leave the bag elsewhere if the abuser searches your home.

Devise a code word or signal.

Tell your children, grandchildren or neighbors so you can communicate to them that you need the police.

Know where you're going.

Plan where you will go if you have to leave home, even if you don't think you'll need to.

Trust your judgment.

Consider anything that you feel will keep you safe and give you time to figure out what to do next. Sometimes it is best to flee, sometimes to placate the abuser - anything that works to protect yourself and the children.

Getting Ready to Leave

- Keep any evidence of physical abuse, such as photographs of bruises and torn clothing.
- 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 injuries.
- Plan with your children and identify a safe place for them (for example, 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 incidents, noting dates, events, and threats made.
- Acquire job skills as you can, such as learning to type or taking courses at a community college.
- Try to set money aside or ask friends or relatives to hold money for you.
- Store some belongings with a friend or relative. Leave clothing, medications, your Social Security card, a credit card (if possible), citizenship documents, children's school/medical records, children's toys, insurance information, copies of birth certificates, money, and other valued personal possessions with them.
- Study and check your plans as often as possible in order to know the safest way to leave the abuser.

Concerns about immigration status.

You may qualify under a law called the Violence Against Women Act. Talk to an immigration expert or your local domestic violence victim services program for more information.

The Day You Leave

- Leave when it is least expected, for example, during times of agreement and calm.
- Have a safe place to stay. Make sure it is a place that can protect you and your children.
- Create a false trail. Call motels, real estate agencies, 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 those phone numbers on record.

General Guidelines for Leaving an Abusive Relationship

- Make a plan for how you will escape and where you will go.
- Plan for a quick escape.
- Put aside emergency cash as you can.
- Hide an extra set of car keys.
- Take with you important phone numbers (of friends, relatives, doctors, schools, etc.) as well as other important items, including:

When you leave, take with you...

- Marriage and Driver's licenses
- Birth certificates - yours and family's
- Money, checkbooks, credit cards, ATM cards, mortgage payment book, car title
- Social Security card, work permit, green card, passport, visa
- Divorce, custody papers and restraining order
- Insurance papers and medical records
- Lease, rental agreement and/or house deed
- School and health records
- Keys - house, car, office, friend's
- Medications, glasses, hearing aids, etc. needed by you and your family
- Personal items - address book, pictures, toys
- Copies of your spouse's green card or social security card and all immigration related documents
- Benefit card

- Pay stubs
- Titles, Deeds, other property information, and tax returns
- Welfare identification
- Valued pictures, jewelry, or personal possessions.

After Leaving the Abusive Relationship

If you are 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 you take 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.
- Carry a charged cell phone preprogrammed to 911.

If you leave:

- Consider renting a post office box for your mail.
- Be alert at all times for suspicious persons.
- Be aware that addresses are listed 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 about the situation.
- Consider changing your children's schools.
- Reschedule any appointments that the offender is aware of when you leave.
- 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 lighting system that turns on when a person is coming close to the house (motion sensitive lights).
- Trim shrubbery, especially away from doors and windows.
- Keep garage door locked at all times. Use electric garage door opener.
- Any written or telephone threats should be treated as legitimate and the police notified.
- Keep fuse box locked. Have flashlights, candles, lanterns throughout the house.
- If residing in an apartment complex, provide the manager and security with a picture of the suspect.
- 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 which individuals are allowed to pick up your children. Explain the 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 be blocked so that if you call, neither your partner nor anyone else will be able to get your new, unlisted phone number.
- Receive ongoing support from domestic violence and mental health service providers.

Safety and Emotional Health

Get support. Call a domestic violence crisis help-line and/or attend a women's or victims support group for at least two weeks to gain support from others and learn more about yourself and the relationship with the abuser.

Do what is safe for you. If you have to communicate with the abuser, arrange to do so in the way that makes you feel safe whether by phone, mail or in the company of another person.

Safety and Your Children

Tell schools and childcare. Let them know who has permission to pick up the child/ren and give them your code word. Discuss with them other special provisions to protect you and your child/ren. Provide a picture of the abuser if possible.

Exchange child/ren in a safe place. Find a safe place to exchange the child/ren for visitation. Some communities have specific locations just for this purpose. Contact your local domestic violence victim services program for more information.

YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN DESERVE TO BE SAFE!

Safety On The Job

Tell somebody. Decide whom at work you will inform of your situation, especially if you have a order of protection. This may include office security if available. Provide a picture of the abuser if possible. It is your right to request and expect confidentiality from those you disclose to.

Screen your calls. Arrange to have someone screen and log your telephone calls if possible.

Make a safety plan. Create a safety plan for when you enter and leave your work place. Have someone escort you to your vehicle or other transportation.

If you and the abuser work at the same place, discuss with your supervisor your options regarding scheduling, safety precautions, employee/family benefits.

If you have a security guard or agency, inform them of the situation and provide them a photograph and description of the suspect.

- Have secretary or security screen all incoming mail or packages.
- Be aware of people following you to and from work.
- Do not accept any packages unless you personally ordered them.
- Central reception should handle all visitors and packages.
- Office staff should be aware of situation so they are alert to suspicious people, parcels or packages.
- Establish lock and key control. Change locks if keys from terminated employees are not accounted for.
- Park in a secured area if possible.
- Have your name removed from reserved parking spot.

IN AN EMERGENCY CALL 911.