

PERSONALIZED SAFETY PLAN

Safety plans help victims anticipate the dangers they still face. Before you attempt to leave or take any legal or financial steps to separate from your abuser, you should be aware that the danger of violence escalates when a woman attempts to leave.

▶ WHEN TO USE A SAFETY PLAN

Safety plans can be made for a variety of situations: for dealing with an emergency, such as when you are threatened with a physical assault or an assault has occurred; for continuing to live with or to date a partner who has been abusive; or for protecting yourself after you have ended a relationship with an abusive partner.

▶ USE WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW

If you are a battered woman, you probably know more about safety planning and risk assessment than you might realize. Being in a relationship with an abusive partner — and surviving — requires considerable skill and resourcefulness. Any time you do or say something as a way to protect yourself or your children, you are assessing risk and enacting a safety plan. You do it all the time. It's just not always a conscious process.

▶ THINK IT THROUGH

It can be a helpful safety strategy to evaluate risks and make safety plans in a more intentional way. Whether you are currently with your partner or have ended the relationship, and whether you choose to use the available services system or to involve the police, there are certain things that are helpful to consider in planning for your future safety.

▶ BE AWARE OF DANGERS

If you are planning to leave your partner or already have left, be aware that batterers often escalate their violence during times of separation, increasing your risk for harm, including serious and life-threatening injury. Making a separation safety plan can help reduce the risks to you and your children.

▶ EVALUATE YOUR OPTIONS

Only you can judge who it's safe to tell about your situation and who to ask for help. Sometimes, people who don't have good information about domestic violence respond to battered women in ways that aren't helpful, even when they mean well. On the other hand, you might feel comfortable asking for help from someone you know. It's your decision. The important thing is for you to identify all the people who might be willing and able to help you. Make a list of their phone numbers and attach it to your safety plan for easy reference.

▶ PLAN AHEAD

You don't have to wait for an emergency to ask for help. In fact, it's a good idea to talk to people who can help before there's a crisis. Find out what they are willing and able to do for you. That way, you'll know in advance if you have a place to stay, a source of financial assistance, or a safe person to keep copies of important papers.

▶ REDUCE YOUR RISK

No battered woman has control over her partner's violence, but women can and do find ways to reduce their risk of harm. This safety plan is a tool to assist you in identifying options, evaluating those options, and committing to a plan to reduce your risk when confronted with the threat of harm or with actual harm. There's no right or wrong way to develop a safety plan. Use what applies or change it to reflect your particular situation. Make it your own, then review it regularly and make changes as needed.

PERSONALIZED SAFETY PLAN (CONTINUED)**► BEING READY FOR A CRISIS****I can leave**

- If I decide to leave, I will _____
_____.
(Practice how to get out safely. What doors, windows, elevators, stairwells or fire escapes would you use?)
- I can keep my purse and car keys ready and put them _____
so I can leave quickly.
- I will leave money and an extra set of keys with _____
so I can leave quickly.
- I will keep copies of important documents or keys at _____.

I can get help

- I can tell _____
about the violence and request they call the police if they hear noises coming from my home.
- I can teach my children how to use the telephone to contact the police and fire department. I will make sure they know our address.
- If I have a programmable phone, I can program emergency numbers and teach my children how to use the auto dial.
- I will use _____
as my code word with my children or my friends so they will call for help if needed.
- If I have to leave my home, I will go to _____.
- If I cannot go to the above location, I can go to _____.
- The domestic violence program hotline number is _____.
I can call it if I need shelter.
- If it's not safe to talk openly, I will use _____
as the code word or signal to my children that we are going to go, or to my family or friends that we are coming.

I can use my judgment

- When I expect my partner and I are going to argue, I will try to move to a space that is lowest risk, such as _____.
(Try to avoid arguments in the bathroom, garage, kitchen, near weapons or in rooms without an outside exit.)
- I will use my judgment and intuition. If the situation is serious, I can give my partner what he wants to try to calm him down. I have to protect myself until I/we are out of danger.
- I also can teach age-appropriate strategies to my children.

► PLANNING TO LEAVE

- I will call a domestic violence program and get help making my plans. The hotline number for the nearest program is _____.
- I will leave money and an extra set of keys with _____
so I can leave quickly.
- I will keep copies of important documents or keys at _____.
- I will leave extra clothes with _____.
- I will keep important numbers and change for phone calls with me at all times. I know that my partner can learn who I've been talking to by looking at phone bills, so I can see if friends will let me use their phones and/or their phone cards.
- I will ask _____ and _____
to see who would be able to let me stay with them or lend me some money.
- I can increase my independence by opening a bank account and getting credit cards in my own name; by taking classes or getting job skills; by getting copies of all the important papers and documents I might need and keeping them with _____.
- I can rehearse my escape plan and, if appropriate, practice it with my children.

PERSONALIZED SAFETY PLAN (CONTINUED)**▶ AFTER I LEAVE**

- I can change the locks on my doors and windows.
- I can replace wooden doors with metal ones.
- I can install security systems, including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, etc.
- I can buy rope ladders to be used for escape from second-floor windows.
- I can install smoke detectors and put fire extinguishers on each floor in my home.
- I will teach my children how to use the phone to make a collect call to me if they are concerned about their safety.
- I can tell people who take care of my children which people have permission to pick them up and make sure they know how to recognize those people.
- I will give the people who take care of my children copies of custody and protection orders, as well as emergency numbers.

▶ AT WORK AND IN PUBLIC

- I can inform my boss, the security supervisor and the employee assistance program, if available, about my situation. The number of the EAP office is _____.
- I can ask _____ to screen my calls at work.
- When leaving work, I can _____.
- If there's trouble when traveling to and from work, I can _____.
- I can change my patterns – avoid stores, banks, doctor's appointments, self-service laundries and _____, places where my partner might find me.
- I can tell _____ and _____ that I am no longer with my partner and ask them to call the police if they believe my children or I are in danger.

▶ WITH AN ORDER OF PROTECTION

- I will keep my protection order _____. (Always keep it on or near your person.)
- I will give copies of my protection order to the local police or sheriff and to departments in towns where I visit friends and family.
- I will give copies to my employer, my religious advisor, my closet friend, my children's school and day-care center and _____.
- If my partner destroys my order or if I lose it, I can get another copy from the court that issued it.
- If my partner violates the order, I can call the police and report a violation, contact my attorney, call my domestic violence program advocate, and/or advise the court of the violation.
- I can call a domestic violence program if I have questions about how to enforce an order or if I have problems getting it enforced.

▶ MY EMOTIONAL HEALTH

- If I am feeling down, lonely or confused, I can call _____ or the domestic violence hotline _____.
- If I have left my partner and am considering returning, I will call _____ or spend time with _____ before I make a decision.
- I will remind myself daily of my best qualities. They are _____, _____, _____, _____, _____ and _____.
- I can attend support groups, workshops or classes at the local domestic violence program or _____ so I can build a support system, learn skills or get information.
- I will look at how and when I drink alcohol or use other drugs. If I am going to drink or use other drugs, I will do it in a place where people are committed to my safety.

PERSONALIZED SAFETY PLAN (CONTINUED)**► ITEMS TO TAKE WHEN LEAVING**

- Identification for myself
- Children's birth certificates
- My birth certificate
- Social Security cards
- School, vaccination records
- Money, checkbook, bankbooks, ATM cards
- Credit cards
- Medication
- Keys – house, car, work
- Driver's license, car registration
- Insurance papers
- Public assistance ID/Medicaid cards
- Passports, green cards, work permits
- Divorce or separation papers
- Lease, rental agreement or house deed
- Car/mortgage payment book
- Children's toys, security blankets, stuffed animals
- Sentimental items, photos
- Personalized safety plan

► KEEP YOUR PLAN IN A SAFE PLACE

If you are unable to find a safe place to keep a written safety plan where your partner won't find it, maybe you can ask a friend to keep a copy for you. If not, you can ask your local domestic violence program to keep your plan for you. Whether it's safe to write down your plan or not, it's still important to make one.

► WHAT CAN A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM DO FOR ME?

Local domestic violence programs are a vital resource, providing free and confidential assistance to battered women and their children. They provide emergency safety services, such as shelter and 24-hour crisis hotlines. But you don't have to stay in a shelter to get help from a program. Most also provide a full range of non-residential services to battered women.

Domestic violence program advocates have accurate information about domestic violence and are experienced in providing assistance to battered women and their children. They understand the criminal justice, family court and social service systems, and they are familiar with other community resources that might be useful to you.

In addition to giving you good information, advocates often can accompany you to court, to the police station or to social services offices. They can provide you with practical and emotional support. Getting help from someone who has experience working with survivors of domestic violence and who knows how to work with the different systems can make things a lot easier for you.

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE
(800) 799-7233 • (800) 799-SAFE

**Toll-free, 24-hour crisis intervention and referrals
to a domestic violence program in your area**

This personalized safety plan was adapted from ones developed by
AWARE in St. Louis and the Office of the City Attorney, San Diego.