

What Is a Safety Plan?

A safety plan is a personalized, practical plan that includes ways to remain safe while in a relationship, planning to leave, or after you leave. Safety planning involves how to cope with emotions, tell friends and family about the abuse, take legal action and more.

A good safety plan will have all of the vital information you need and be tailored to your unique situation, and will help walk you through different scenarios.

Although some of the things that you outline in your safety plan may seem obvious, it's important to remember that in moments of crisis your brain doesn't function the same way as when you are calm. When adrenaline is pumping through your veins it can be hard to think clearly or make logical decisions about your safety. Having a safety plan laid out in advance can help you to protect yourself in those stressful moments.

TYPES OF SAFETY PLANNING

Safety Planning While Living With An Abuser

- Identify your partner's use and level of force so that you can assess the risk of physical danger to you and your children before it occurs.
- Identify safe areas of the house where there are no weapons and there are 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 arms around each side of your head, fingers entwined.
- If possible, have a phone accessible at all times and know what numbers to call for help. Know where the nearest public phone is located. Know the phone number to your local shelter. If your life is in danger, 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 to them 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 are the cause of the violence, and that when anyone is being violent, it is important to stay safe.
- Practice how to get out safely. Practice with your children.
- Plan for what you will do if your children tells your partner of your plan or if your partner otherwise finds out about your plan.
- Keep weapons like guns and knives locked away 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 others 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.

Safety Planning With Children

If you are in an abusive relationship, a safety plan should include ways that your children can stay safe when violence is happening in your home.

It's key to remember that if the violence is escalating, you should avoid running to the children because your partner may hurt them as well.

Planning for violence while still in the home

- Teach your children when and how to call 911.
- Instruct them to leave the home if possible when things begin to escalate, and where they can go.
- Come up with a code word that you can say when they need to leave the home in case of an emergency — make sure that they know not to tell others what the secret word means.
- In the house: identify a room they can go to when they're afraid and something they can think about when they're scared.
- Instruct them to stay out of the kitchen, bathroom and other areas where there are items that could be used as weapons.
- Teach them that although they want to protect their parent, they should never intervene.
- Help them make a list of people that they are comfortable talking with and expressing themselves to.
- Enroll them in a counseling program. Local service providers often have children's programs.

Planning for Unsupervised Visits

If you have separated from an abusive partner and are concerned for your children's safety when they visit your ex, developing a safety plan for them while they are visiting can be beneficial.

- Brainstorm with your children (if they are old enough) to come up with ways that they can stay safe using the same model as you would for your own home. Have them identify where they can get to a phone, how they can leave the house, and who they can go to.
- If it's safe to do, send a cell phone with the children to be used in emergency situations — this can be used to call 911, a neighbor or you if they need aid.

Planning for Safe Custody Exchanges

- Avoid exchanging custody at your home or your partner's home.
- Meet in a safe, public place such as a restaurant, a bank/other area with lots of cameras, or even near a police station.
- Bring a friend or relative with you to the exchanges, or have them make the exchange.
- Perhaps plan to have your partner pick the children up from school at the end of the day after you drop them off in the morning – this eliminates the chances of seeing each other.
- Emotional safety plan as well – figure out something to do *before* the exchange to calm any nerves you're feeling, and something *after* to focus on yourself or the kids, such as going to a park or doing a fun activity.

How to Have These Conversations

Let your child know that what's happening is not their fault and that they didn't cause it. Let them know how much you love them and that you support them no matter what. Tell them that you want to protect them and that you want everyone to be safe, so you have to come up with a plan to use *in case of emergencies*. It's important to remember that when your safety planning with a child, they might tell this information to the abusive partner, which could make the situation more dangerous (ex. "Mom said to do this if you get angry.") When talking about these plans with your child, use phrases such as "We're practicing what to do in an emergency," instead of "We're planning what you can do when dad/mom becomes violent."

Safety Planning with Pets

Statistics show that up to 65% of domestic violence victims are unable to escape their abusive partners because they are concerned about what will happen to their pets when they leave. Fortunately, there are more and more resources in place to assist with this difficult situation.

If you're creating a safety plan of your own to leave an abusive relationship, safety planning for your pets is important as well. Bring extra provisions for them, copies of their medical records and important phone numbers.

If possible, don't leave pets alone with an abusive partner. If you are planning to leave, talk to friends, family or your veterinarian about temporary care for your pet. If that is not an option, search by state or zip code for [services that assist domestic violence survivors with safekeeping for their pets](#). Try zip code first, and if there are no results, try a search by state. If the none of the results are feasible for your situation, try contacting your local domestic violence or animal shelter directly. For help finding an animal shelter, visit the [Humane Society website](#).

If you've had to leave your pet behind with your abusive partner, try to ask for assistance from law enforcement officials or animal control to see if they can intervene.

Take steps to prove ownership of your pet: have them vaccinated and license them with your town, ensuring that these registrations are made in your name (change them if they aren't).

If you're thinking about getting a protective order, know that [some states](#) allow pets to be a part of these.

If you've left your partner, ensure the safety of your pet by changing veterinarians and avoid leaving pets outside alone.

Safety Planning When Pregnant

Pregnancy is a time of change. Pregnancy can be full of excitement but also comes with an added need for support. It's natural to need emotional support from a partner, as well as perhaps financial assistance, help to prepare for the baby and more.

If your partner is emotionally or physically abusive toward you, it can make these months of transition especially difficult. Thankfully, there are resources available to help expecting women get the support needed for a safe, healthy pregnancy.

According to the [CDC](#), intimate partner violence affects approximately 1.5 million women each year and affects as many as 324,000 pregnant women each year. Pregnancy can be an especially dangerous time for women in abusive relationships, and abuse can often begin or escalate during the pregnancy.

How can you get help?

- If you're pregnant, there is always a heightened risk during violent situations. If you're in a home with stairs, try to stay on the first floor. Getting into the fetal position around your stomach if you're being attacked is another tactic that can be instrumental in staying safe.
- Doctor's visits can be an opportunity to discuss what is going on in your relationship.
- If your partner goes to these appointments with you, try to find a moment when they're out of the room to ask your care provider (or even the front desk receptionist) about coming up with an excuse to talk to them one-on-one.
- If you've decided to leave your relationship, a health care provider can become an active participant in your plan to leave.
- If possible, see if you can take a women-only prenatal class. This could be a comfortable atmosphere for discussing pregnancy concerns or could allow you to speak to the class instructor one-on-one.

Emotional Safety Planning

Often, emphasis is placed on planning around physical safety, but it's important to consider your emotional safety as well. Emotional safety can look different for different people, but ultimately it's about developing a personalized plan that helps you feel accepting of your emotions and decisions when dealing with abuse. Below are some ideas for how to create and maintain an emotional safety plan that works for you.

Seek Out Supportive People: A caring presence such as a trusted friend or family member can help create a calm atmosphere to think through difficult situations and allow for you to discuss potential options.

Identify and Work Towards Achievable Goals: An achievable goal might be calling a local resource and seeing what services are available in your area, or talking to one of our advocates at The Hotline. Remember that you don't have to do anything you aren't comfortable with right now, but taking small steps can help options feel more possible when you are ready.

Create a Peaceful Space for Yourself: Designating a physical place where your mind can relax and feel safe can be good option when working through difficult emotions that can arise when dealing with abuse. This can be a room in your house, a spot under your favorite tree, a comfy chair by a window or in a room with low lights.

Remind Yourself of Your Great Value: You are important and special, and recognizing and reminding yourself of this reality is so beneficial for your emotional health. It is never your fault when someone chooses to be abusive to you, and it has no reflection on the great value you have as a person.

Remember That You Deserve to Be Kind to Yourself: Taking time to [practice self-care](#) every day, even if it is only for a few minutes, really creates space for peace and emotional safety. It's healthy to give yourself emotional breaks and step back from your situation sometimes. In the end, this can help you make the decisions that are best for you.

Safety Planning When Leaving A Relationship

Preparing to Leave:

**Because violence could escalate when someone tries to leave, here are some things to keep in mind before you leave:*

- Keep any evidence of physical abuse, such as pictures of injuries.
- Keep a journal of all violent incidences, noting dates, events and threats made, if possible. Keep your journal in a safe place.
- 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 visit.
- Plan with your children and identify a safe place for them, like 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 shelter and find out about laws and other resources available to you before you have to use them during a crisis. WomensLaw.org has state by state legal information.
- Acquire job skills or take courses at a community college as you can.
- Try to set money aside or ask friends or family members to hold money for you.

When You Leave:

Make a plan for how and where you will escape quickly. You may request a police escort or stand-by when you leave. If you have to leave in a hurry, use the following list of items as a guide to what you need to bring with you. Our advocates can help you come up with a personalized safety plan for leaving.

1) Identification

- Driver's license
- Birth certificate and children's birth certificates
- Social security cards
- Financial information
- Money and/or credit cards (in your name)
- Checking and/or savings account books

2) Legal Papers

- Protective order
- Copies of any lease or rental agreements, or the deed to your home
- Car registration and insurance papers
- Health and life insurance papers
- Medical records for you and your children
- School records
- Work permits/green Card/visa
- Passport
- Divorce and custody papers
- Marriage license

3) Emergency Numbers

- Your local police and/or sheriff's department
- Your local domestic violence program or shelter
- Friends, relatives and family members
- Your local doctor's office and hospital
- County and/or District Attorney's Office

4) Other

- Medications
- Extra set of house and car keys
- Valuable jewelry
- Pay-as-you-go cell phone
- Address book
- Pictures and sentimental items
- Several changes of clothes for you and your children
- Emergency money

After You Leave:

***Your safety plan should include ways to ensure your continued safety after leaving an abusive relationship. Here are some safety precautions to consider:**

- Change your locks and phone number.
- Call the telephone company to request caller ID. Ask that your phone number be blocked so that if you call anyone, neither your partner nor anyone else will be able to get your new, unlisted phone number.
- Change your work hours and the route you take to work.
- Change the route taken to transport children to school or consider changing your children's schools.
- Alert school authorities of the situation.
- If you have a restraining order, keep a certified copy of it with you at all times, and inform friends, neighbors and employers that you have a restraining order in effect.
- Call law enforcement to enforce the order and give copies of the restraining order to employers, neighbors and schools along with a picture of the offender.
- Consider renting a post office box or using the address of a friend for your mail (be aware that addresses are on restraining orders and police reports, and be careful to whom you give your new address and phone number).
- Reschedule appointments that the offender is aware of.
- 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.
- Replace wooden doors with steel or metal doors. Install security systems if possible.
- Install a motion sensitive lighting system.
- 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 or drive them/pick them up from school and activities. Explain your situation to them and provide them with a copy of the restraining order.