

SAFETY FIRST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SAFETY PLAN

Name: _____

Date: _____

A safety plan is a personalized, practical plan that can help you avoid dangerous situations and know the best way to react when you are in danger. This plan includes ways to remain safe while in the 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. We safety plan with victims, friends and family members – anyone who is concerned about their own safety or the safety of another.

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 as when you are calm. When adrenaline is pumping through your veins it can be hard to think clearly or to make logical decisions about your safety. Having a safety plan laid out in advance can help you to protect yourself in those stressful moments.

Safety planning looks different for different types of abuse. Your safety plan should be tailored to your specific situation.

Physical Violence

If your partner is physically violent, identify the places in your home that are the safest – places where there are no weapons and where there is an easy escape point – and try to get there in the case of an argument. Try to avoid violence if at all possible by leaving. If leaving seems unsafe and violence is unavoidable, make yourself a small target. Go to your safe spot and curl up in a little ball, protecting your face by wrapping your arms around each side of your head and entwining your fingers.

Emotional Abuse

If your partner is emotionally abusive, stay connected to a support network. Friends and family members can be great allies in times of need and can build you up. If you feel comfortable, talking to someone about what is happening can help you stay positive. Try to stay involved in all of the activities that you love or develop new hobbies. Keep a journal of all of the good things in your life and all of the things that you like about yourself. Make a list of things that help you to relax (like taking a warm bath) and do them one by one until you feel calm and relaxed.

If you've left the relationship, emotional safety planning may look different than what it would be if you were still in an abusive situation. Leaving a relationship is one of the most dangerous times for victims emotionally as well — it's normal and expected that you'll be encountering new feelings (ex: loneliness, struggling with being uprooted, difficulty adjusting to a new life).

Safety Planning with Children

If you have children, they need to become part of your safety plan — planning for both their physical and emotional safety. If you're in a physically abusive relationship, don't run to them when your partner becomes violent. This could potentially put them in danger. Teach them how to get help but instruct them not to interfere with any arguments that are happening. You can work with them to come up with a code word that will let them know when they need to leave the house or hide to protect themselves. You can also practice how to safely exit the home with them.

If you trust your friend and/or neighbors, develop a system to let them know when violence is occurring, and you need help. Your kids can go to their house to stay safe, they can call the police and you can stash an overnight bag there for quick getaways. Check back on the blog in the future for more information on comprehensive safety planning with kids.

The following steps represent my plan 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 him/her and how to best get myself and my children to safety.

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.

- The Animal Welfare Institute offers additional tips for safety planning with pets. <https://awionline.org/content/safety-planning-pets-domestic-violence-victims>
- Organizations like Georgia-based Ahimsa House and Littlegrass Ranch in Texas offer advice for safety planning with animals, especially with non-traditional animals like horses that are more difficult to transport.

STEP 1: Safety during a violent incident.

- A. If I decide to leave, I will _____
(What doors, windows, elevators, stairwells, or fire escapes would you use?
Practice how to get out safely.)
- B. I will keep my purse/wallet and car keys ready and put them (location)
_____ in order to leave quickly.
- C. I will tell _____ about the violence and request that he/she
call the police if he/she hears suspicious noises coming from my house.
- D. I will teach my children how to use telephone to contact the police, the fire
department, and 911.
- E. I will use _____ as my code with my
children or my friends so they can call for help.
- F. If I have to leave my home, I will go to _____.
(Decide this even if you don't think there will be a next time.)
- G. I will also teach some of these strategies to some or all of my children.
- H. When I expect we're going to have an argument, I'll try to move to a place that is
low risk, such as _____.
(Try to avoid arguments in the bathroom, garage, kitchen, near weapons, or in
rooms without access to an outside door.)
- I. I will use my judgment and intuition. If the situation is very serious, I can give my
partner what he/she wants to calm him/her down. I have to protect myself until
I/we are out of danger.

STEP 2: Safety when preparing to leave.

Leaving must be done with a careful plan in order to increase safety. Batterers often strike back when they believe the other person is leaving a relationship. I can use some or all of the following strategies:

- A. I will leave money and an extra set of keys with _____ so I can leave quickly.
- B. I will keep copies of important documents or keys at _____.
- C. I will open a savings account by _____ with statements sent to _____ for confidentiality and safekeeping.
- D. Other things I can do to increase my independence include:

- E. I will keep a prepaid "burner phone" on me at all times. I understand that if I use my regular phone, the following month's phone bill will show the numbers I called after I left.
- F. I will have my computer, tablet, smart-phone, and car checked for tracking software or devices. I will change email and social media and credit report passwords.
- G. I will check with _____ and _____ to see who would be able to let me stay with them or lend me some money.
- H. I can leave extra clothes or money with _____.
- I. I will sit down and review my safety plan every _____ in order to plan the safest way to leave the residence. _____ (domestic violence advocate or friend's name) has agreed to help me review this plan.
- J. I will rehearse my escape plan and, as appropriate, practice it with my children.

STEP 4: Safety with an Order of Protection.

Many batterers obey protection orders, but one can never be sure which violent partner will obey and which will violate protective orders.

I recognize that I may need to ask the police and the courts to enforce my protective order. The following are some steps I can take to help the enforcement of my protection order:

- A. I will keep my protection order _____ (location). Always keep it on or near your person. If you change purses, that's the first thing that should go in the new purse.
- B. I will give my protection order to police departments in the community where I work, in those communities where I visit friends or family, and in the community where I live.
- C. There should be county and state registries of protection orders that all police departments can call to confirm a protection order. I can check to make sure that my order is on the registry. The telephone numbers for the county and state registries of protection orders are: _____ (county) and _____ (state).
- D. I will inform my employer; my minister, rabbi, etc.; my closest friend; and _____ that I have a protection order in effect.
- E. If my partner destroys my protection order, I can get another copy from the clerk's office.
- F. If the police do not help, I can contact an advocate or an attorney and file a complaint with the chief of the police department or the sheriff.
- G. If my partner violates the protection order, I can call the police and report the violation, contact

STEP 5: Safety on the job and in public.

Each battered woman must decide if and when he/she will tell others that her partner has battered her and that he/she may be at continued risk. Friends, family, and co-workers can help to protect you. You should carefully consider which people to invite to help secure her safety.

I might do any or all of the following:

- A. I can inform my boss, the security supervisor, and _____ at work.
- B. I can ask _____ to help me screen my telephone calls at work.
- C. When leaving work, I can _____.
- D. If I have a problem while driving home, I can _____.
- E. If I use public transit, I can _____.
- F. I will go to different grocery stores and shopping malls to conduct my business and shop at hours that are different from those I kept when residing with my battering partner.
- G. I can use a different bank and go at hours that are different from those kept when residing with my battering partner.

STEP 6: Safety and drug or alcohol use.

Most people in this culture use alcohol. Many use mood-altering drugs. Much of this is legal, although some is not. The legal outcomes of using illegal drugs can be very hard on you, may hurt your relationship with your children, and can put you at a disadvantage in other legal actions with your battering partner. Therefore, you should carefully consider the potential cost of the use of illegal drugs. Beyond this, the use of alcohol or other drugs can reduce your awareness and ability to act quickly to protect yourself from her battering partner. Furthermore, the use of alcohol or other drugs by the batterer may give them an excuse to use violence. Specific safety plans must be made concerning drugs or alcohol use.

If drug or alcohol use has occurred in my relationship with my battering partner, I can enhance my safety by some or all of the following:

- A. If I am going to use, I can do so in a safe place and with people who understand the risk of violence and are committed to my safety.
- B. If my partner is using, I can _____
and/or _____.
- C. To safeguard my children I might _____.

STEP 7: Safety and my emotional health.

The experience of being battered and verbally degraded by partners 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. If I feel down and am returning to a potentially abusive situation, I can _____
- B. When I have to communicate with my partner in person or by telephone, I can _____.
- C. I will try to use "I can ..." statements with myself and be assertive with others.
- D. I can tell myself, " _____ " whenever I feel others are trying to control or abuse me.
- E. I can read _____ to help me feel stronger.
- F. I can call _____ and _____ for support.
- G. I can attend workshops and support groups at the domestic violence program or _____ to gain support and strengthen relationships.

STEP 8: Items to take when leaving.

When we leave partners, it is important to take certain items. Beyond this, you can give an extra copy of papers and an extra set of clothing to a friend just in case they have to leave quickly.

Money: Even if I never worked, I can take money from jointly held savings and checking accounts. If I do not take this money, my partner can legally take the money and close the accounts.

Items on the following lists with asterisks by them are the most important to take with you. If there is time, the other items might be taken, or stored outside the home. These items might best be placed in one location, so that if we have to leave in a hurry, I can grab them quickly. When I leave, I should take:

- *Identification for myself
- *Children's birth certificate
- *My birth certificate
- *Social Security cards
- *School and vaccination records
- *Money
- *Checkbook, ATM card
- *Credit cards
- *Key - house, car, office
- *Driver's license and registration
- *Medications
- *Copy of protection order
- *Welfare identification, work permits, green cards

Passport(s), divorce papers

Medical records - for all family members

Lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage payment book

Bank books, insurance papers

Address book

Pictures, jewelry

Children's favorite toys and/or blankets

Items of special sentimental value

Telephone numbers I need to know:

Police/sheriff's department (local) - 911 or _____

Police/sheriff's department (work) _____

Police/sheriff's department (school) _____

Prosecutor's office _____

Battered women's program (local) _____

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-SAFE (7233)

800-787-3224 (TTY)

www.ndvh.org

County registry of protection orders _____

State registry of protection orders _____

Work number _____

Supervisor's home number _____

I will keep this document in a safe place and out of the reach of my potential attacker.