

If you print a copy of this material, KEEP IT IN A SAFE PLACE and away from your abusive partner.

Safety Issue 1:

Things to consider BEFORE a violent incident

- Call a domestic violence agency and speak to an advocate for information, support, and help with your Safety Plan.
- Tell someone that you can trust about what is going on (a friend, relative, or coworker).
- Teach your children how to call 911 or to make a collect call to an emergency contact.
- Make up a code word or signal to use with your children, family, friends, and or neighbors when you need them to call the police.
- Plan and practice an escape route out of the home for yourself and/or children.
- Also plan and practice an escape plan specifically for your children in case you're not able to help them.
- Remove sharp objects and weapons from sight.
- Keep a telephone in a room that locks from the inside. If possible, keep a cell phone in your pocket or in an accessible hiding place; pre-program 911 or the number of a safe friend or relative into the directory.
- Arrange in advance for a safe place to go (somewhere that your partner does not know about) even if you don't think you'll have to leave.
- Pack an emergency bag for yourself and your children to use if you need to leave quickly (the bag should be hidden or kept safe by a person you trust and can get to in a hurry).
- Review this **list of items to pack in your emergency bag**. (They are given in Safety Issue 10, below.)
- Make copies of your important documents (keep one copy in the bag and give other copies to trusted friends and relatives).
- Make an extra set of important keys (car, house, mailbox, etc.).
- If an argument seems unavoidable, try to have it in a room or area that has access to an exit and not in a bathroom, kitchen, or anywhere near weapons.
- Use your instincts and judgment. You have the right to protect yourself until you are out of danger.
- Always remember: You do not deserve to be hit, threatened or controlled!

Safety Issue 2:

If you have a Protective/ Restraining Order

- Keep your protection order on you at all times.
- Call the police if your partner breaks the protection order in any way.

- Make sure to follow the order because you can be charged for violating a court order.
- Think of alternative ways to keep safe if the police do not respond to your call quickly enough.
- Inform family, friends, neighbors, teachers, daycare providers, etc. that you have a protection order in effect, and give them relevant details (who has custody, when and where visitation takes place, etc.).
- Document any contact you have with the batterer in case you need evidence of harassment in court (dates, times, and involved persons).

Safety Issue 3: When Preparing to Leave

- Seek a protection or restraining order in court. Make extra copies of the order and keep them in safe places.
- Open a checking and/or savings account in your own name so you can start to establish or increase your independence.
- Rent a Post Office box to receive mail that may not be safe to receive at home (court or other legal correspondence, housing applications, etc.)
- Think of other ways in which you can increase your independence, such as having your own car.
- Keep a cell phone that has 911 pre-programmed as well as your local domestic violence agency's telephone number.
- If you do not have a cell phone, carry important telephone numbers with you at all times (24-Hour crisis hotline, friends, or relatives). Also carry change or a calling card with you for emergency phone calls.
- Review your Safety Plan as often as possible. Remember: Leaving may be the most dangerous time

Safety Issue 4: Safety at HOME

(This deals both with safety at your present home after the batterer leaves, or at your new place if you have moved.)

- Seek a protection or restraining order in court. Make extra copies of the order and keep them in safe places.
- Establish a "neighborhood watch" by informing neighbors and landlord that your partner no longer lives with you and that they should call the police if they see the perpetrator near your home.
- Show neighbors a picture of the batterer and/or the batterer's vehicle.
- If possible, arrange to have a relative or friend call your house every day at an appointed time just to check in with you.

- If possible, trade cars with a friend or relative so a batterer cannot locate your vehicle.
- You should know that motor vehicle records, including addresses, may be available to the public.
- Switch to a private or unlisted telephone number.
- Be very cautious about giving out a new address. Use a Post Office box whenever possible. Batterers have located victims through friends, relatives, co-workers, court or social services documents, the post office, and private investigators.
- Block your outgoing telephone calls (*67).
- Use an answering machine or caller ID for incoming calls from the batterer for evidence of harassment or protection order violations.
- Alter routines - change transportation routes or timing (including picking up children from school) so that the batterer cannot locate you.
- Discuss your Safety Plan with your children for when you are not with them.
- Inform your children's school, day care, etc., about who has permission to pick up your children.
- Change the locks on your doors.
- Replace wooden doors with metal doors.
- Install a security system.
- Add additional locks, window bars, and use a strong wooden rod or dowel to secure doors and windows.
- Purchase rope ladders to be used for escape from second floor windows or access points.
- Install outdoor lighting and motion sensors.
- Keep Safety Planning materials well hidden and secret from your abuser.

Safety Issue 5: Staying Safe at WORK

- Carefully choose who to trust with information about your situation.
- You may want to inform your boss or supervisor. Your office may set up a safety policy.
- You can post your protection order.
- Tell your co-workers and office security to call the police if they see your batterer at the workplace. You can show a picture of the batterer.
- You can ask a co-worker to screen your incoming phone calls at work.
- Ask co-workers not to tell where you are if your batterer comes to the workplace or calls.
- When possible, travel to or from work with another person and vary your route and the times you go to work.
- Work when other people are there, never work alone.
- If possible, move to an alternate worksite, avoid sitting with back to doors, lobbies, or street level windows.

- Keep your office door locked if you can.
- Plan an escape route in case your partner shows up at your work.
- Have someone escort you to your car and park close to the building.
- Try to always carry a cell phone for emergencies

Safety Issue 6: Staying Safe in COURT

- Wait in a safe place if your batterer is nearby (next to a security guard or a bailiff in court).
- Sit as far as possible from the batterer. Always make sure other people are around and preferably between you and the batterer.
- Avoid speaking to the batterer or the batterer's family members. Be careful in allowing the batterer or family members to visit with the children.
- Make sure that you are safe when you leave a courthouse or any public place. Batterers often stalk victims to find out where they live, or to punish them for taking legal action.

Safety Issue 7: Staying Safe in PUBLIC PLACES

- Vary or change any routine your partner may be familiar with. Change your grocery stores, banks, day care, etc.
- Run errands during the busiest times, and avoid being alone in an isolated place.
- Ask someone you trust walk you to and from your car.
- When possible take someone with you to avoid being alone.
- Carry a safety whistle to alarm others if you are in danger.
- Take a self defense class.
- Program the police, 24-Hour crisis line or a relative or friend on your cell phone. Keep it with you at all times.

Safety Issue 8: If your partner becomes abusive or threatening

- Call the police at 911.
- File criminal charges if the batterer commits a crime or violates a protection order.
- Seek medical treatment if injured by the batterer.
- Photograph all injuries or visible markings left on your body.
- Use your Safety Plan to escape or avoid any harm.
- Create a paper trail, or record, of all contact with the batterer including: phone calls, threats, other persons involved, and any other incidents.

- Determine how dangerous the batterer may be. You have an increased risk of being severely assaulted or killed if your batterer possesses weapons, abuses drugs or alcohol, stalks you, or has threatened homicide or suicide.
- Find a safe place to stay temporarily (a shelter, or with friends or relatives) if you fear that the batterer will assault or try to kill you. Take your children with you or find a safe place for them to stay away from the violence.
- In some cases where you are in extreme danger, it may be necessary to disappear completely and change your name and social security number.
- Screen calls with voice-mail or a machine if possible, or ask someone else to screen your calls.
- Use your safety plan at work and when you're in public places.

Safety Issue 9: Determining your partner's LETHALITY

If you are in an abusive relationship, it is not possible to guarantee that you or your children will remain safe. Therefore, it is extremely important to determine how dangerous a partner is and to have a Safety Plan ready.

It is important to consider the possibility of lethality, or your risk of death, if you are in an abusive relationship. Without effective intervention or strategic planning, domestic violence can become increasingly severe and in some cases result in homicide. It is true that all batterers are dangerous, but some are more likely to kill than others. Furthermore, some are more likely to kill at specific times, such as when the victim flees the relationship or takes legal action against the batterer.

There are some indicators that will help you assess a batterer's potential to kill. It is important to consider the following:

- **Threats of homicide or suicide.** Batterers who make these types of threats must be considered extremely dangerous. They may threaten suicide, but they will want to harm their partners as well.
- **Possession of or access to weapons.** The use of guns is a sure sign of danger, but threats and access to weapons should also be considered life-threatening.
- **Alcohol and/or drug use.**
- **Extreme jealousy and an obsessive need to control or monitor partner's behavior.** Examples: refusal to end the relationship even after divorce; feels entitled; violates protection orders; stalks victim; is jealous of a new partner (you will never belong to another!); often imagines things; has distorted thinking; believes there can be no life without partner. These behaviors are very life endangering.
- **Stalking or surveillance of activities.** A batterer may go to extremes to monitor a victim's behavior. This type of obsession is very dangerous.

- **Separation or divorce from victim.** When abusers believe they are about to lose their partner, they may choose to kill. This is a very dangerous time for the victim. (However, some batterers kill long before they have any idea that the relationship will end.)
- **Depression.** Research shows that many people who are hospitalized for depression have fantasies directed at harming family members.
- **A Batterer's access to victim.** Careful Safety Planning may help limit the contact an abuser has with his partner, and reduce the risk of death.

Safety Issue 10: Items to Pack when Leaving

When you leave an abusive partner it is important to understand that this action may trigger a violent outburst. Being organized and prepared to make a quick break away from the relationship is one key to reducing the risk of violence. If possible, it is recommended that you pre-pack clothing and important documents ahead of time and leave them with a trusted friend or relative.

CHECKLIST: WHAT TO TAKE WHEN YOU LEAVE You should have these items in a safe place where you can access them quickly in case you need to leave in a hurry. You may want to keep copies of important documents at a trusted relative or friend's home.

DOCUMENTS:

- Driver's license, passport, or other form of ID
- Your birth certificate and your children's birth certificates
- Money, bank books, checkbooks, credit cards, ATM cards, mortgage payment book/rental agreement
- Social Security card, work permit, green card, insurance papers
- Welfare information
- Medical records, school vaccine cards, insurance information
- The abuser's social security number, license plate number and photo, if possible
- Divorce papers and custody papers or other court orders
- Copies of your protection order
- Lease, rental agreement, house deed, car registration

OTHER ITEMS:

- Keys to house, car, office
- Medications, glasses/contacts, hearing aids, etc. for you and your children or other dependents
- Personal items like address/phone book, pictures, jewelry, etc.
- Clothing for you and your children
- Toiletries, diapers, and baby formula

- Children's favorite toys

Safety Issue 11: Internet Safety

If the perpetrator or abuser can access your computer, they can find out which Web sites you have visited, as well as the documents you've viewed and emails you have sent. They may even install a program that secretly monitors and records everything that is done on the computer. The safest way to seek help from online resources is to avoid using a computer the batterer has access to (i.e. home, relative's house) and use a computer at work, at the library, or an internet cafe.

If your only recourse is to use a computer your abuser can also access, it is urgent that you learn how to "hide your tracks" as well as you can. Please understand, though: total safety on such a computer is difficult to achieve, especially if your abuser is web savvy.

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence has web sites with helpful information. A good place to begin is with their page on **Internet Safety**.

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