

Making a safety plan

A personal safety plan is a way of helping you to protect yourself and/or your children. It helps you plan in advance for the possibility of future violence and abuse. It also helps you to think about how you can increase your safety either within the relationship, or if you decide to leave.

You can't stop your partner's violence and abuse – only they can do that. But there are things you can do to increase your own and your children's safety. You're probably already doing some things to protect yourself and your children – for example, there may be a pattern to the violence which may enable you to plan ahead to increase your safety.

- Plan in advance how you might respond in different situations, including crises.
- Think about the different options that may be available to you.
- Keep with you any important and emergency telephone numbers (for example, your local shelter organisations or other GBV services; the police; your GP; your children's school; your attorney if you have one).
- Teach your children to call 10111 in an emergency, and what they would need to say (for example, their full name, address and telephone number).
- Are there neighbours you could trust, and where you could go in an emergency? If so, tell them what is going on, and ask them to call the police if they hear sounds of a violent attack.
- Rehearse an escape plan, so in an emergency, you and the children can get away safely.
- Pack an emergency bag for yourself and your children, and hide it somewhere safe (for example, at a neighbour's/friend's house). Try to avoid mutual friends or family.
- Try to keep a small amount of money on you at all times – including change for transport.
- Try and keep your cell with you.
- If you suspect that your partner is about to attack you, try to go to a lower risk area of the house – for example where there is a way out and access to a telephone.
- Be prepared to leave the house in an emergency.

Preparing to leave

Whatever coping strategies you have used – with more or less success – there may come a time when you feel the only option is to leave your partner. If you do decide to leave your partner, it is best if you can plan this carefully. Sometimes abusers will increase their abuse if they suspect you are thinking of leaving and will continue to do so after you have left, so this can be a particularly dangerous time for you. It's important to remember that ending the relationship will not necessarily end the abuse.

- Plan to leave at a time you know your partner will not be around. Try to take everything you will need with you, including any important documents relating to yourself and your children, as you may not be able to return later.
- Take your children with you, otherwise, it may be difficult to have them living with you in future. If they are at school, make sure that the head and all your children's teachers know what the situation is, and who will be collecting the children in future. (See below, Protecting yourself after you have left).
- Thinking about leaving and making the decision to leave can be a long process.
- Planning it doesn't mean you have to carry it through immediately – or at all. But it may help to be able to consider all the options and think about how you could overcome the difficulties involved.
- If at all possible, try to set aside a small amount of money each week, or even open a separate bank account.

What to pack if you are planning to leave your partner

Ideally, you need to take all the following items with you if you leave. Some of these items you can try to keep with you at all times; others you may be able to pack in your “emergency bag”.

- Some form of identification
- Birth certificates for you and your children.
Passports (including passports for all your children), visas and work permits.
- Money, bankbooks, credit and debit cards.
- Keys for house, car, and place of work. (You could get an extra set of keys cut, and put them in your emergency bag.)
- Driving licence (if you have one) and car registration documents, if applicable.
- Prescribed medication.
- Copies of documents relating to your housing tenure (for example, mortgage details or lease and rental agreements).
- Insurance documents.
- Address book.
- Family photographs, your diary, jewellery, small items of sentimental value.
- Clothing and toiletries for you and your children.
- Your children’s favourite small toys.
- You should also take any documentation relating to the abuse – e.g. police reports, court orders such as restraining orders, and copies of medical records if you have them.

Protecting yourself after you have left

If you leave your partner because of abuse, you may not want people to know the reason you left.

It is your decision whether or not you tell people that you have suffered domestic abuse; but if you believe you may still be at risk, it might increase your safety if you tell your family and friends, your children's school, and your employer what is happening, so that they do not inadvertently give out any information to your ex-partner. They will also be more prepared and better able to help you in an emergency.

If you have left home, but are staying in the same town or area, these are some of how you might be able to increase your safety:

- Try not to place yourself in a vulnerable position or isolate yourself.
- Try to avoid any places, such as shops, banks, cafes, that you used to use when you were together.
- Try to alter your routines as much as you can.
- If you have any regular appointments that your partner knows about (for example, with a counsellor) try to change your appointment time and/or the location of the appointment.
- Try to choose a safe route, or alter the route you take or the form of transport you use, when approaching or leaving places you cannot avoid – such as your place of work, the children's school, or your GP's surgery.
- Tell your children's school, nursery or childminder what has happened, and let them know who will pick them up. Make sure they do not release the children to anyone else or give your new address or telephone number to anyone. (You may want to establish a password with them, and give them copies of any court orders, if you have them.)
- Consider telling your employer or others at your place of work – particularly if you think your partner may try to contact you there.

If you have moved away from your area, and don't want your abuser to know where you are, then you need to take particular care with anything that may indicate your location; for example:

- Your cell phone could be 'tracked'; this is only supposed to happen if you have given your permission, but if your partner has had access to your mobile phone, they could have sent a consenting message purporting to come from you. If you think this could be the case, you should contact the company providing the tracking facility and withdraw your permission; or if you are in any doubt, change your phone.
- Try to avoid using shared credit or debit cards or joint bank accounts: if the statement is sent to your ex-partner, they will see the transactions you have made.
- Make sure that your address does not appear on any court papers. (If you are staying in a refuge, they will advise you on this.)
- If you need to phone your abuser (or anyone with whom he is in contact), make sure your telephone number is withheld.
- Talk to your children about the need to keep your address and location confidential.