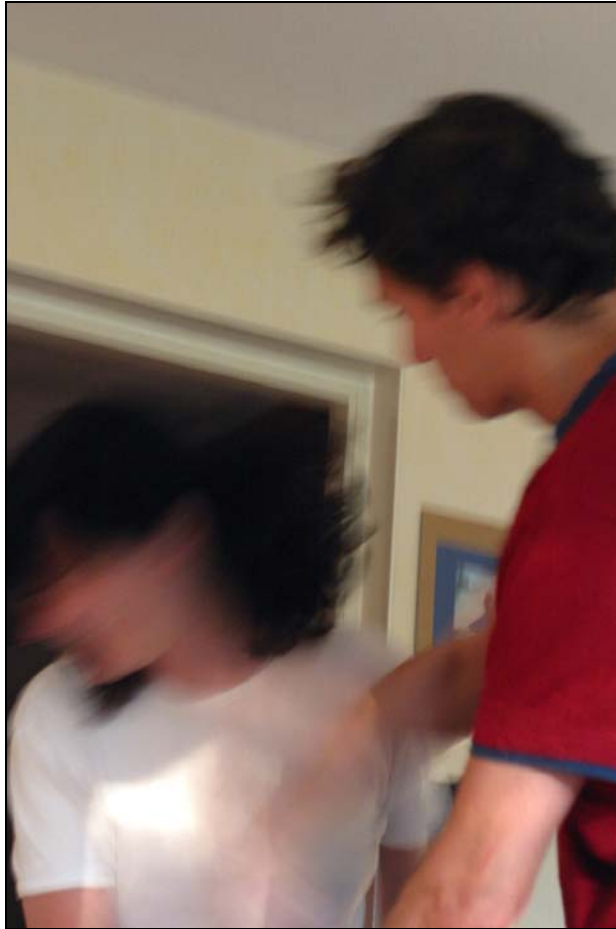


A SAFETY GUIDE FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



The safety suggestions in this guide have been compiled from various safety plans. Following these suggestions could help you improve your safety situation but they are **not a guarantee** of safety.

Safety planning is an **active** process and every plan requires ongoing review and revision as situations and risks influencing your safety can change at any time.

VCARS encourages victims of domestic violence to contact the local VCARS program in your area for support, assistance and resource information.

I. Creating a Safer Environment

1. At Home

If you **ARE** living with your abusive partner/spouse:



- Try and identify patterns in your partner's use and level of force so you can attempt to predict danger to you and others before it occurs.
- Try to avoid an abusive situation by leaving.
- Develop an Emergency Escape Plan and review/revise it often.
- Teach your children their own safety plan including not to intervene in the violence between you and your partner, how to call for help, how to get out of the house safely and where to go - then practice it often.
- Teach your children how to use the telephone and a cell phone if you have one,
- Think about safe areas of the house where there are no weapons and there are at least two ways to escape. If the situation escalates, try to move to those areas.
- Keep weapons and [weapon-like objects](#) locked up and as inaccessible as possible.
- Let trusted friends and neighbours know of your situation and develop a code or a visual signal so they know to call for help.
- Identify friends and family where you could stay and where your partner would not immediately look should you need to leave quickly.
- Create a phone list with numbers of local police, emergency shelter, assaulted women's help line, family members and children's friends and keep it accessible at all times.
- If possible, have a phone or cell phone with you at all time. Pre-program it to 911.

If you **ARE NOT** living with your abusive partner/spouse:

- Change the locks on your doors and windows. Install a peephole in the door and security bars on sliding doors.
- Change the locks on your garage and mailbox.
- Consider getting a dog and/or a security system, which would alert you to intruders.
- Install smoke detectors and fire extinguishers on each floor
- Consider purchasing rope ladders for escape from upper floors.
- Install outdoor motion sensitive lights and trim trees and bushes to allow a clear view from all windows.
- Teach your children to tell you if someone is at the door and not to open it themselves.
- Consider having your telephone number unlisted and use *67 to block your number when calling out.
- If you have call display be careful who can access your stored numbers.
- Document or keep a copy of any harassing phone messages, faxes, emails or letters you receive. Consider speaking to police regarding charges of harassment.
- If you live in an apartment or condominium, check the hallways and floor before getting off the elevator or stairs. Look in mirrors and be aware of doorways. Never leave your apartment unlocked, even if travelling within the building.
- Keep a copy of your restraining order with you at all times.
- Inform friends and neighbours that you have a restraining order in effect and ask them to call the police if they feel you may be in danger. If possible provide a picture of your abusive partner, and information about the type of vehicle he/she may be driving.



2. At Work

- Consider telling your employer, the main receptionist, the security supervisor, and other friends or key people at work of your situation and ask about measures they may have to help assist with your safety.
- Ask to have your calls screened at work and document harassing calls.
- Inquire about secure parking and/or accompaniment to your car at night.
- Change the patterns of when you arrive and leave work and inquire about flexible hours where possible.
- Ask about changing your workstation.
- Provide an emergency contact person in case you cannot be reached.
- If you need to leave your community, ask if your company has a relocation program and if you are eligible.



3. While Travelling

- Consider purchasing a cell phone and keep it charged and available at all times while travelling.
- Always keep your car locked even when you are in the vehicle.
- Let someone know when you are travelling, when you anticipate arriving and check in when you are there. Check the tires.
- Carry your keys with you in your hands and scan the parking lot for signs of your abuser or unusual circumstances.
- Consider getting a remote or keyless entry car door opener.
- Before entering your car, walk around the outside and check for signs your vehicle has been tampered with. Check the back seat of the car before getting in and test your brakes before starting out.
- Change your routes to familiar places and the time at which you attend wherever possible.
- Be aware of where you are--including the street names and local landmarks.
- Check your mirrors frequently and be aware of the cars/trucks around you.
- Whenever possible back into a parking spot and park in a well lit area close to the building or parking security.
- If your partner is following you, go directly to a drive-thru or to a public place and do not exit the car until you draw attention to yourself (i.e. use your horn, speak to someone, etc.)
- Keep a “call police” sign in your car.
- If walking, take a well-lit route and walk with others whenever possible.
- If taking public transit – wait in designated areas or well back from train/subway platforms, sit close to the driver or in an area of surveillance and scan the area for those around you.



4. In the Community

- Use different stores and frequent different social spots – don't be too routine or predictable.
- Use a different bank or branch, and take care of your banking at different hours from those you used with your abusive partner.
- Hide an emergency suitcase with a neighbour or friend as well as an extra set of your important numbers and keys.
- Do not frequent places the abuser is known to be.
- Reschedule personal and children's appointments that the abusive partner is likely to know of.
- Scan your environment and make mental note of where you are and landmarks around you.
- Whenever possible, carry a cell phone with you for emergencies.



5. For Children

- Tell your children that violence is never right, even when someone they love is being violent. Tell them that nothing they did or failed to do has caused the violence and that when violence of any sort is taking place, their only job is to try and keep safe.
- Teach your children their own safety plan including not intervening in the violence between you and your partner. Help your children identify a safe room in the house preferably where they can access a phone and lock the door. A ground floor room with a window is preferable so they can leave through the window if it becomes necessary.
- Practice with the children how to phone for help and what they will say. Ensure they know their full name, phone number and address, and encourage them to leave the phone off the hook after they are done talking.
- If you want them to leave the home during a violent incident – plan with them where they will go, and the safest way of getting there. Also plan what to do if the designated neighbour/friend is not home.
- Make sure that the schools, day care, after school program and police have a copy of all court orders including restraining orders, custody and access orders, as well as a picture of the abusive partner.
- Teach your children how to make a collect call to you and to a trusted friend, in case your partner takes the children.
- Teach your children how to use a cell phone.



II. Emotional Safety Planning

- Decide whom you can talk to freely and openly to give you the support you need.
- Read articles, books and poetry to help you feel stronger.
- Take time for yourself, meditate, play music, etc.
- Spend time with people who make you feel good and help rejuvenate your energy.
- If you are thinking of returning to an abusive relationship, discuss your plan with someone you trust.
- Plan to attend a support group to gain support from others and learn more about yourself and relationships.
- Enroll in a course or take a part time job to reduce your isolation and increase your skills.
- Remember to eat nutritional food and to sleep regularly.
- Avoid excessive alcohol in an attempt to self-sooth.
- Try to take time for some sort of regular exercise or activity.
- Keep a personal journal to write about your thoughts, feelings and your hopes but ensure it remains in a safe place.
- Take time to prepare emotionally for stressful situations or meetings.
- All emotions have a place and a time, it is important to find positive and constructive ways to express your feelings.
- Remember that you are important and that you need to take care of yourself in order to be able to care for others.

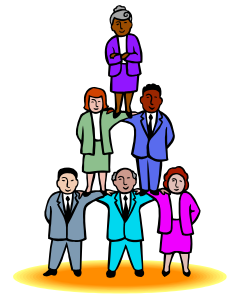


III. Preparing To Leave an Abusive Relationship

- Remember that women are often most at risk for violence immediately before and immediately after they leave an abusive relationship.
- You may request a police stand-by or escort while you leave.
- Contact your local women's shelter and find out about your rights under family/criminal law and other resources available to you before you have to access them during a time of crisis.
- Keep a journal of all violent incidences, noting dates, witnesses present, events and threats made if possible. Keep any evidence of physical abuse, such as pictures.
- Set up a bank account in your own name and arrange that no bank correspondence or calls be made to you at home.
- Save and set aside money as you are able to provide an emergency fund from which to draw from.
- Hide extra clothing, house, office and car keys, comfort toys, etc., at the house of a trusted friend or family member.
- Set aside emergency cab fare and quarters or a phone card.
- Make a plan of how you will respond if your abuser learns of your intent to leave. Create several plausible reasons for leaving the house at different times of the day or night.



- Alert your supports of your plan to leave and allow yourself to be supported through this process.
- Take a picture of your abuser that you can show to whomever you may need to for safety.
- Take a photocopy of the following items if possible and store in a safe place away from the originals:



- birth certificates, passports, immigration papers for all family members
- school and vaccination records
- driver's license, insurance, and registration information
- legal documents – marriage certificate, separation/divorce papers, custody & access information, court orders, restraining orders etc.
- lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage information, line of credit or bank loan information
- bank books
- address/telephone book
- card information – health card, social insurance, phone, debit, credit cards

- Try to have the following items available for quick collection:

- regularly required medication
- jewelry
- small saleable objects
- items of sentimental value
- a list of other personal items that you would like to take if you get a chance to come back to your home later

IV. During a Violent Incident

- Remind yourself of the safety plan you have devised and go over it in your mind.
- Don't run to where the children are as your partner may hurt them as well.
- Try and move to a low risk area of the house where you can get out if needed and where weapons are not readily available.
- Call (911) if you can do so safely or use your code word/visual signal, so children/others can call from a safe location.
- Use your judgment and intuition – try and de-escalate the situation - you may even agree with your partner or give him/her what he/she wants until you are out of danger.
- Make as much noise as possible to alert others who may call for help on your behalf. Yelling, setting off the fire alarm, breaking things, turning up the television or stereo full blast have all been used to draw the attention of others.
- If physical violence is unavoidable, make yourself a small target – curl up like a ball with your face protected and arms around each side of your head, fingers entwined.

