

PLANNING YOUR SAFETY



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The following strategies are for you to consider if you feel you may be in danger from an abuser. You may feel that you are in danger from physical abuse, threats to cause harm or death to yourself or loved ones, sexual assault, harassing, stalking, breaking into your home, forcible confinement and/or kidnapping.

- You are the best one to assess your own situation and it is important to always trust **your** own gut, instincts, judgment and experience.
- These are some strategies that might help enhance your physical safety or feelings of safety in addition to what you may already be doing. Remember, no strategy is a guarantee to your safety, but may make you feel or be safer.
- If a strategy feels like it will increase your risk no matter what anyone else might say: **do not do it.**
- These strategies all involve making choices about **what feels safer to you.** It is important for you to choose ones that are possible or practical for you to do in the context of your life.
- These strategies will need to be reassessed as your situation changes. It is also helpful to periodically review your safety plan, even if your situation feels the same.
- It might feel easier to look at these strategies with the support or assistance of a counselor or trusted friend or family member.
- It is important that you keep this safety planning information in a safe place where your abuser can not find it.

ASSESSING YOUR SAFETY

CUES THAT I AM IN DANGER:

Does the abuser change just before becoming violent?

- look in the eyes change?
- posture changes (fists clenched, etc.)?
- voice changes?
- face changes expression or color?
- threatens verbally or non-verbally before striking you?
- what are other indications that your abuser may hurt you?

Does your behavior change before violence?

- Do you have physical responses to fear you may feel before an attack (for example, stomach pains, headache, a tight feeling in your chest)?
- Do you feel anxious?
- Are there other things you feel before you are abused?

What circumstances usually exist before you are abused?

- alcohol/drugs?
- lack of money?
- pay day?
- day of week?
- time of year?
- are certain people around?
- are certain people not around?
- where you are in your home or outside of the house?
- birthdays?
- anniversaries?
- holidays?
- sports events?
- are there other circumstances that happen before you are abused?

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN ASSESSING YOUR SITUATION:

- fantasies or threats of homicide or suicide by the abuser
- pending or actual separation
- pending or actual serving of court orders (divorce papers, restraining orders)
- a new relationship
- other dates or events that remind the abuser of his diminished control
- pregnancy
- children in your home
- threats of, or actual child abuse; child(ren) witnessing of violence
- depression and/or psychiatric history
- drug or alcohol use
- prior use of, access to, or possession of weapons (guns, knives, ropes, etc.)
- military or paramilitary (police) training
- being isolated by where you live, your culture, your race, your religion, your disability, etc.
- isolation of him from others/centrality of you to his life (i.e., "can't live without you")
- obsessiveness about you or family
- possessiveness and control of you
- extent and escalation of prior violence
- threats of violence to you
- previous police interventions
- known violence with others – especially other women
- ignoring or violating of court orders
- pet abuse
- are there other things that make you feel you are in danger?

NOTES:

CREATING A SAFETY PLAN

This safety plan accompanies the visual safety plan. It contains more detailed safety strategies and follows along with the picture safety plan.

CREATING A SAFER ENVIRONMENT

SAFETY AT HOME

If you are living with your abusive partner/spouse:

- Develop an emergency escape plan and review/revise it often.
- Plan your emergency exits. Keep exits clear.
- Plan and rehearse the steps you will take if you have to leave quickly and learn them well.
- 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.
- 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.
- Determine which rooms in the home are the safest and avoid or get out of rooms which are the most dangerous (for example, bathroom basements or rooms where there are weapons such as the kitchen).
- A safe room should have an exit, a lock on the door and a phone to call for help. It may also have a solid wood or metal chair to wedge under the door knob. A solid rubber door stop can also be wedged under the door.
- If possible, keep a phone with you at all times. Pre-program it to 911.
- Create a list of important phone numbers (Police, emergency shelter, assaulted women's helpline, family members, etc.)
- Keep weapons and weapon-like objects locked up and as inaccessible as possible.

- ❑ Tell a neighbor/co-worker/teacher or other person you trust and who might be around when you are at risk, about your situation and request that they call Police if they hear or see suspicious noises or events.
- ❑ Back your car into the driveway and make sure gas is always in it.
- ❑ Leave keys and your purse in a place where you can get to them quickly.
- ❑ Keep extra keys in a safe accessible place.
- ❑ In case you have to leave your home quickly, think about a safe place to go, such as a neighbor who is usually home, a shelter, a police station or some other busy place where people always are, such as a 24 hour store. Find out where all these places are and the quickest route to get to them.
- ❑ Keep a bag of clothes, emergency money, medications and other things you might need in an emergency at a trusted friend's or neighbor's home, or in some other safely accessible place.
- ❑ If you are attacked, make yourself a small target. Curl up like a ball with your face protected and arms around each side of your head, fingers entwined.

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. It is very important to plan for your safety if you are leaving an abusive relationship.

- You can contact a shelter or 24 hour line for women to talk in more detail about how you can leave safely, where you can go and what other resources are available to you.
- You can not tell the abuser that you are thinking about or planning to leave.
- Think about papers and things you will need. The detailed list is found on page 10 of the visual safety plan. If you can, slowly gather these items together and hide them in a safe place. Another option may be to take a photocopy of the important documents and store them in a safe place away from originals.
- Create a list of personal items you would like to take when/if you get a chance to come back to your home later.
- Set up a bank account in your own name and arrange that no bank correspondence or calls be made to you at home.
- Set up a post office box to get mail in any way related to your plans to leave.
- Use a trusted friend or family member's address for your mail.
- Try to save and set aside money for an emergency fund.
- Hide extra clothing, house, office, and/or car keys, comfort toys, etc., at the house of a trusted family member.

- If you move things out of your home before you leave, have stories to explain their absence to the abuser if he notices, such as “it’s getting repaired, it’s at the cleaner’s, etc.).
- You may request Police stand-by while you leave.
- You can ask that friends or family come to your home when you leave.
- You can leave when the abuser is going to be out of the home for at least the time it will take you to leave safely.
- If you had to leave quickly, you can request that the police come to your home when you pick up your personal things.
- When making phone calls related to your plans to leave, try to use the phone at a trusted friend’s, neighbor’s, at work, at a shelter, etc.
- If you are making a call from home that you do not want the abuser to know about, dial other numbers in after you are finished the call. This prevents the abuser from pressing redial to find out where you have called.
- If you need to leave a return number, use the number of a trusted friend, a shelter, or another safe number where you can pick up messages.
- Plan for a safe place for your pets to stay if you can’t bring them with you to the shelter or where you are staying temporarily.
- Have a SAFE place planned to go when you leave.

ITEMS TO TAKE WHEN YOU LEAVE

- your personal identification (birth certificate, driver's license, health card, passport, immigration papers, etc.)
- your children's passports, birth certificates, health cards, adoption papers and custody orders
- your social insurance card and a copy of the abuser's social insurance card
- keys for your house, car, office, mail box, garage, etc.)
- money
- cheque book, ATM cards, credit cards, bank books
- mortgage payment documents, bank loan and/or line of credit documents
- divorce documentation
- medications, prescriptions & drug benefit cards
- school and vaccination records
- work permits
- lease/rental agreements & property deeds
- investment statements
- photographs
- jewellery
- insurance papers (life, home, car)
- address book
- children's favorite toys and blankets
- vehicle ownership documents
- Government of Ontario Senior's card
- Native Person Status card or documentation
- employment/pension documentation
- income tax documents including receipts
- estate planning documentation (Will, Power of Attorney for Personal Care, and Power of Attorney for the Management of Property), Beneficiary Designation documentation (life insurance and investments)
- items of special sentimental value

Small items that won't be missed can be taken to a trusted family member, friend or neighbor.

IF YOU ARE NOT LIVING WITH YOUR ABUSER (IF YOU ARE LIVING ALONE)

- Be aware of all the entrances and exits to your home and building.
- Change the locks on your door and install dead bolts and peep holes.
- Keep your doors locked even when you are at home. Always check who is at the door before you open it.
- Change the locks on your garage and mail box.
- Make sure that windows are locked and that sliding glass doors are blocked with dowels or security bars.
- Consider purchasing rope ladders to use for escape from second story windows.
- Keep a phone near you as much as possible even when you are outside on the step or in the yard.
- Install outdoor motion sensitive lights and trim trees and bushes to allow a clear view from all windows.
- Ensure that your street address is clearly visible and well lit for emergency calls.
- Create a safe room in your home to assist if the abuser gains access to your home. While the safe room may not keep you completely safe, it will buy you time, while you make use of an alternative, safe escape route or until assistance arrives.
- The safe room should have a secure lock, a phone, an exit and a chair to prop under the door handle. It could also have a rubber door stop to wedge under the door, an extra set of car keys, etc.
- Inform landlord, superintendent and neighbors that the abuser no longer lives with you and request that they inform you and/or call the police if they see him/her near your home. Ask friends and family to report to you any suspicious calls including hang ups, wrong numbers and others asking for information about you.
- Tell Police if the abuser will not leave you alone.
- Keep a log and document each time the abuser contacts you by phone, email, letters, sending you unwanted gifts, following you, showing up at work or school, etc.

- Have home and car keys ready for opening doors before arriving at the door.
- Get an unlisted phone number, get call display and/or call answer.
- Block your number when calling out (*67).
- Don't have identifying information on your message machine, such as your name or phone number.
- Give your phone number or address only to people you trust and who the abuser would not be able to intimidate.
- Caution anyone who may need your real phone number (friends, family, employer, schools, doctor, lawyer, minister, etc.) not to give out your number to anyone without your authorization.
- Change email address and that of your children.
- Change bank accounts and banking passwords.
- If you live in an apartment building or some other place that lists tenants, consider not putting your name on the list.
- If you live in an apartment building, 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 when traveling within the building.
- If you come home and discover that something is out of the ordinary, consider not entering the home but instead go to a safe place and call police.
- If possible, have a phone before moving into a new place.

SAFETY OUTSIDE THE HOME

IN THE COMMUNITY:

- Try to stay where there are people near by.
- If walking, take a route that is populated and well lit.
- Avoid secluded areas.
- Use different stores and frequent different social spots – don't be too routine or predictable.
- Re-schedule personal & children's appointments that the abuser is likely to know about.
- Always be alert and aware of your environment.
- Keep copies of court orders with you at all times.
- When out and about walking or driving, always notice potential avenues for help, such as open stores, offices, etc.
- Obtain a cell phone and keep it charged and available at all times.
- Know where you are – name of street, major intersections & landmarks.
- If calling 911 from a cell phone, always give your location immediately. In the event the call is lost, Police will know where you are.
- Carry your keys in your hand and scan parking lots for signs of your abuser or unusual circumstances.
- 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 police station or public place, and do not exit the vehicle until you draw attention to yourself (i.e. use your horn, speak to someone, etc.).
- Keep a "call police" sign in your car.
- Always keep your car locked even when you are in it.
- If taking public transit, sit close to the driver.

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.
- ❑ If possible provide your work place with a picture of the abuser and a description of vehicles he may have access to.
- ❑ 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.
- ❑ When arriving or leaving work, let someone know when you'll be home.

SAFETY PLAN WITH YOUR CHILDREN

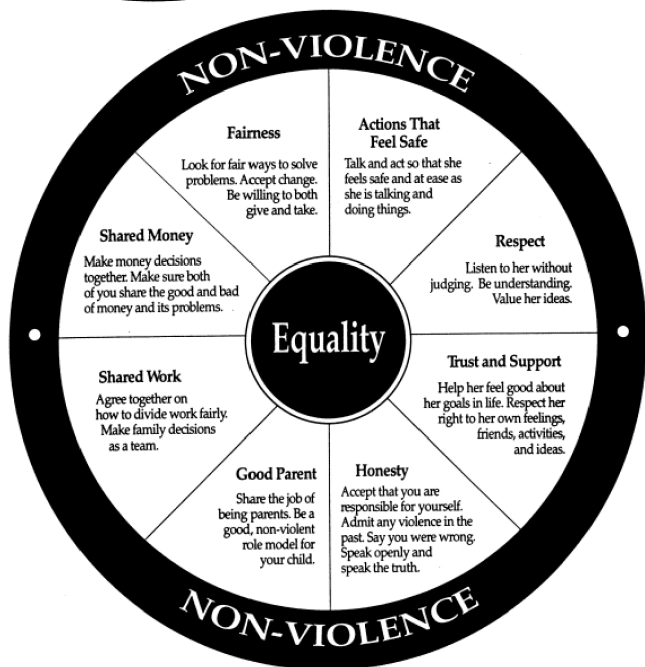
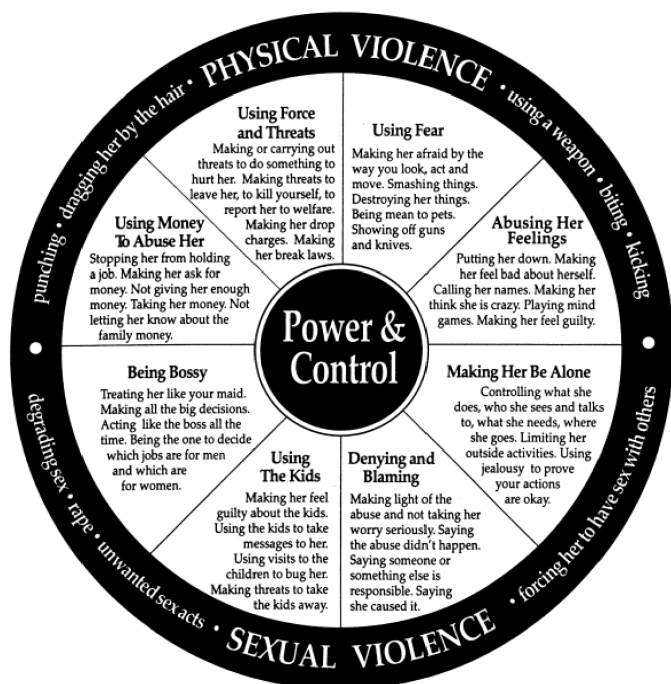
- Tell your children that violence is never right, even when someone they love is being violent. Tell them that nothing they did or did not do has caused the violence.
- Teach them that their only job is to stay safe themselves. They must never try to protect you. They must always run to safety, even without you. It is the very best way they can help.
- Teach them to leave the room or not to come in the room where the danger is.
- Help them identify a safe room in the house, preferably where they can access a phone and lock the door. A ground floor room is best so they can leave through a 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 & address, and encourage them to leave the phone off the hook after they are done talking.
- Teach them to call from a phone that is out of sight from the abuser if possible.
- Rehearse what they will say when they call for help. For example, an operator will answer "Police, Fire or Ambulance", your child says "Police, I need help, send the Police, someone is hurting my mom. The address is...".
- If your child would be calling 911 from a cell phone, teach them to quickly tell where they are.

- ❑ 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 neighbor/friend is not home.
- ❑ Have a code word with your children so they know when it is not safe and they should go to a safe room or neighbor, and call 911.
- ❑ You can teach the children to let you know if someone is at the door and not to open it themselves. If children are older, encourage them to check who is at the door before opening it.
- ❑ Make sure the schools, daycare or anyone who cares for your children have a copy of all court orders, as well as a picture of the abuser. Make sure they know who can pick up your children.
- ❑ Teach your children how to make collect calls to you and to a trusted friend in case your partner takes the children.
- ❑ Talk to your children about safe people they can talk to.

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.

EQUALITY & POWER WHEELS



STALKING LOG BOOK

Stalking Behaviors Key:

A=Assault

G=Gift

NV=Non-Violent Threats

SL=Defamation/Slander

E=Email

K=Kidnaping

PD=Property Damage

SV=Surveillance

F=Following

L=Letters

PH=Phone Calling

T=Threats

Stalking Behavior(s): _____

Date: _____ Time(s): _____

Place: _____

Witnesses: _____

Description of event(s): _____
